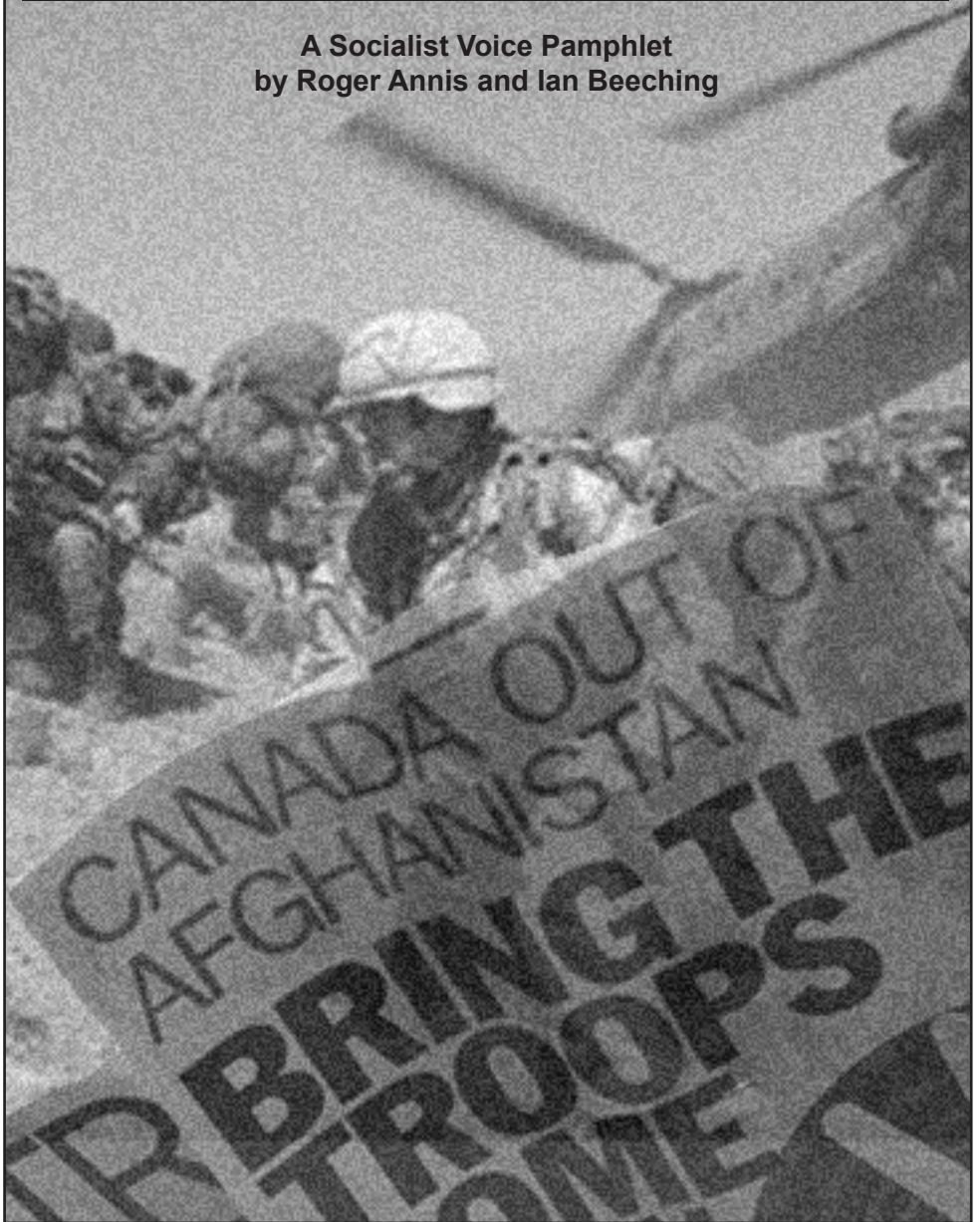


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CANADA'S ASSAULT ON AFGHANISTAN

Behind the Lies and Cover-Ups

A Socialist Voice Pamphlet
by Roger Annis and Ian Beeching



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Socialist Voice

Marxist Perspectives for the 21st Century

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Into the Quagmire: Canadian Military Invades Southern Afghanistan

(Socialist Voice, May 1, 2006)

By Roger Annis

The newly-elected Prime Minister of Canada has committed his Conservative Party government to a long-term military adventure in Afghanistan. So as to make the commitment crystal clear, Stephen Harper made the new, forward Canadian military base in Kandahar his first foreign foray. He made a highly publicized visit on March 12-13.

In a speech to soldiers and assembled journalists, Harper declared, “We recognize—the international community recognizes—that this is a long-term project. And we’re here for the long term.”

The Conservatives are following the trail blazed by their Liberal Party predecessor. Canada joined the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan in 2002. Late last year, it made a significant increase in that commitment when it accepted to head up a “provincial reconstruction team” (PRT) in Kandahar and neighbouring provinces in the south of the country.

“PRTs” are the forward offensive units of the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) occupation forces in Afghanistan. Troops from the U.S., Germany, Britain, Italy, and more recently Canada and the Netherlands, have divided the country into operational zones. Comprising more than 2,000 combat troops, the Canadian military force arrived in Kandahar in February and immediately began offensive military operations.

Canada’s corporate media, most already strongly supportive of the U.S. war in Iraq, quickly fell into step with the Afghanistan adventure. Television screens and print news publications have been filled with reports from embedded journalists, cheering on the Canadian mission. For one week in early April, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation based its main nightly television news broadcast at the Kandahar air base.

War, not peacekeeping

The Canadian mission to Afghanistan is the first foreign mission in a half-century in which the declared aim is warmaking, not “peacekeeping.” Brigadier-General David Fraser described it as follows on February 15, “We’ll be training the Afghan national security forces ... so when they want to go out and do operations against that minority that’s trying to destabilize the good people here, we’ll be out there to support them. And if that means hunting, we’ll be out there hunting.”

A Canadian commander, Lt.-Col. Tom Doucet, told journalists in Kandahar on March 12 that while the eventual goal of the “PRT” is to rebuild schools, roads and infrastructure, the key issue now is security. “Once we get rid of the bad people,” he said, “we can carry on with full force in terms

of the reconstruction and development.”

The “bad people,” or as the head of Canada’s armed forces put it last summer, “the murderers and scumbags,” are those people in Afghanistan who resist for whatever reasons a foreign occupation of their country or who protest the refusal of foreigners to help solve crying social and economic needs.

The new warmaking strategy ties the projects of non-governmental organizations and other “civil society” groups directly to the military effort. An article in the March 2006 issue of *Walrus* magazine explained:

“One unique aspect of the new strategy is the way that development and humanitarian aid are being used specifically for the purpose of building loyalty toward coalition forces and democratic reforms. The American, British, and Canadian governments all have representatives from their international development and relief agencies stationed in Afghanistan; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) alone plans to spend \$616 million there by 2009....

“The strategic use of aid [sic] may offend some, but this approach is gaining credibility and has been adopted by CIDA and Foreign Affairs.”

Such abuse of foreign aid has prompted some highly reputable aid organizations to leave Afghanistan. Doctors Without Borders pulled out in 2004 after a 26-year presence delivering vital medical services to the civilian population. Marie-Madeleine Lepplomb of the group’s Paris office told Radio Free Europe, “Given the multiplication of actors, how can the [Afghan] community recognize who is a humanitarian worker and who is doing intelligence? We are not credible anymore.”

Government, media rally prowar sentiment

The Kandahar mission received a rude shock from public opinion polls in February and March. In one, a *Globe and Mail*/CTV poll published on February 24, 62 percent of respondents said they were opposed to sending troops to Afghanistan, while 43 percent said they opposed Canadian participation in “the war on terrorism.” In response, an intense government and media campaign in support of the war in Afghanistan went into high gear.

Poll numbers may improve for the government as its pro-war propaganda campaign progresses, but they reflect a major problem for the Canadian intervention. Large sections of the Canadian population are deeply skeptical of the war’s stated aims, if not outright hostile. Demonstrations across Canada on March 18, the day of international opposition to the war in Iraq, drew attention to this. Opposition to the war in Afghanistan was a prominent theme. More than 3,000 people marched in each of Vancouver and Toronto, more than 2,000 in Montreal, and some 750 in Ottawa.

Like the U.S.-led war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan is being waged in the name of helping the people of that country to build a new and progressive society. “The international community is determined to create a democratic, prosperous, modern country that can be a model in this part of the world”, Stephen Harper stated in Kandahar on March 13.

But Canada is there in order to earn its share of the oil, mineral and other resource wealth in the region and to earn its place in the new imperialist world order that its allies in the U.S. and U.K. are determined to create. To cite one example, Canada’s long-serving and former prime minister Jean Chrétien is today a legal representative for several Canadian oil and gas companies seeking production and pipeline investments in central Asia. These projects require a “stable” Afghanistan so that pipeline projects can go ahead.

Common economic interests are drawing Canada closer to U.S. political and military strategy throughout the Middle East and the world. Canada sat out the 2003 Iraq war. But since then, it has undertaken significant political and military moves to back the U.S./U.K. policy in Iraq and the region. These include establishing a military base in Dubai, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, and joining in the international gang-up on the government and people of Iran.

Canada played a lead role in the overthrow of the elected government of Haiti in 2004, a government that Canada and the U.S. deemed to be a threat to their extensive interests in the Caribbean.

The new, Canada-backed imperialist world order has no place for the provision of basic human rights and social services to peoples. Thus, in Iraq today, there is still no reliable supply of electricity, clean water, health care, and economic development to the people of that country, three years after the U.S. and U.K. “liberated” it. Prisons are overflowing, and torture is routinely practiced.

Similarly in Afghanistan and Haiti, the provision of meaningful services to the populations are little more than an afterthought to the Canadian effort. Accusations of brutalizing Afghan civilians have already been levied against Canadian soldiers. The family of Nasrat Ali Hassan, a rickshaw driver in Kandahar, condemned the Canadian military after a Canadian soldier opened fire without warning and killed him on March 14. In Haiti over the past two years, Canada has trained a new police force that stands accused of massive human rights violations.

Prison conditions in Afghanistan are reportedly worse than the horrors that have come to light in Iraq. This poses a delicate dilemma for the Canadian occupiers. On December 18, chief of Canada’s armed forces Richard Hillier signed an agreement that has Canadian soldiers turning people it has imprisoned over to the Afghan government military authorities.

“Hillier is placing rank-and-file Canadian troops, unwittingly, in the position of very likely being accessories to torture and, therefore, war criminals

under international and Canadian law,” commented Amir Attaran, a law professor at the University of Ottawa.

Even the Afghan police and army get rough treatment from their erstwhile foreign allies. They are poorly armed and trained, and suffer very high casualties. Six Afghan police were killed on April 17, apparent victims of “friendly fire” from Canadian soldiers and U.S. helicopter gunners.

Sham ‘debate’ in Canadian Parliament

None of the four political parties in Canada’s Parliament oppose the Afghan adventure. The New Democratic Party voiced the unease of the Canadian population when it called for a debate in the parliament. The government convened a “take notice” discussion in Parliament on April 10 where no vote would be taken. Most members of Parliament did not bother to show up, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe.

New Democratic Party Member of Parliament Peggy Nash said in the discussion, “I question whether the war on terrorism, as originally designed south of the border, was really a struggle for women’s rights and the dignity of Afghan women. I did not hear that in the public debates at the time of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, but it is still a worthy goal.”

The NDP’s unease concerns only the way Canada’s war effort is organized, not the war itself. Nash went on, “Could the government please tell us when our military will finally leave this U.S.-led operation and instead become part of a NATO-led mission with which we could all feel more comfortable?”

(Command of the “PRT” in southern Afghanistan, including Kandahar, is scheduled to shift from U.S. to NATO this summer.)

Several NDP MP’s joined an antiwar rally outside the Parliament while the “debate” took place. They did not voice their views inside.

The more aggressive military posturing by Canada will cost lots more money, and all parties in Parliament voted last June to significantly boost military spending in the coming years. Military spending in 2005 was \$13.4 billion. The new Conservative government is talking of boosting that to \$17 billion annually. It has specifically cited the need for new naval craft and aircraft to boost Canada’s capacity to intervene abroad.

The war is ours to stop

Sixteen Canadian soldiers have died in Afghanistan since 2002, and the pace of casualties is rising. Four soldiers died on April 22 when a convoy of Canadian vehicles was struck by a roadside bomb. It was the largest loss of life by the Canadian military in combat since the war in Korea. The government responded by following the example of its warmaking ally south of the border and banning all future media reporting from military bases when the bodies of dead soldiers are returned.

The refusal and inability of occupation forces to tackle the staggering social and economic problems in Afghanistan will fuel opposition to their presence. So, too will the occupiers' backing of the reactionary and anti-popular governing authority in Kabul.

As the Canadian mission fails in its stated aim of "winning the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people, it will bring more suffering to the Afghan people. The occupiers will resort to the same brutal methods of rule that the U.S. and Britain have already made infamous in Iraq.

Canada's rulers are deeply committed to their war alliance with the U.S. and its disastrous plans for military conquest of the Middle East. With meaningful debate closed off in Parliament and the media, Canadians must increasingly take to the streets in order to voice our opposition.

For news on the Afghanistan conflict and actions demanding Canada's withdrawal, contact the Canadian Peace Alliance, www.acp-cpa.ca.

Canada/NATO Invasion of Afghanistan Sows Destruction and Misery

(Socialist Voice, October 9, 2006)

By Roger Annis and Ian Beeching

A few months following the launch of the Canada-led NATO invasion of southern Afghanistan in late 2005, the newly elected Prime Minister of Canada told assembled Canadian soldiers in Kandahar that the goal of the foreign occupation of Afghanistan was to "create a democratic, prosperous, modern country that can be a model in this part of the world."

An October 6 editorial in the *Globe and Mail* national daily says the military defeat of the "Taliban" is "a superfluous sideshow to the real Canadian mission of painting schools and drilling wells."

The reality in Afghanistan puts the lie to these stated goals. Occupation forces have brought widespread death, misery and destruction to the country. The invasion and occupation of southern Afghanistan is degenerating into a military and political debacle for the four countries engaged — Canada, Britain, the U.S. and Holland.

Senlis Council report

On September 5, 2006, the Senlis Council, a prominent think tank based in Britain, released a comprehensive report on the U.S./NATO occupation of Afghanistan. It says, "Five years of international presence in the country aimed at increasing the living standards of the Afghan population have failed to make any measured improvements in the accessibility and quality of health and educational services in most of Afghanistan, beyond the con-

finances of Kabul.”

The report was compiled by a large number of researchers based in Afghanistan and it reveals a country living in a social and humanitarian disaster.

“Despite promises from the U.S.-led international community guaranteeing to provide the resources and assistance necessary for its reconstruction and development needs, Afghanistan’s people are starving to death. Afghanistan continues to rank at the bottom of most poverty indicators, and the situation of women and children is particularly grave. One in four children born in Afghanistan cannot expect to live beyond the age of five, and certain provinces of the country lay claim to the worst maternal mortality rates ever recorded in the world”

According to Senlis, more than 70% of the Afghan population is chronically malnourished, while less than a quarter has access to safe drinking water.

Human loss, social destruction

The United Nations Development Program reports similar catastrophic conditions. It says the average life expectancy for the people of Afghanistan is 44 years, at least 20 years lower than in neighbouring Central Asian countries.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Commission on Refugees, Afghanistan had 2.9 million refugees in 2005. That number is growing as a result of foreign military operations.

The occupiers like to point to the region surrounding the capital city Kabul as proof of their accomplishments and good will. But progress there is as elusive as in Iraq’s capital city, Baghdad. Open sewers line the streets. Rent for an intact home is too expensive for ordinary Afghans, forcing many to live in dilapidated and structurally unsound buildings. Residents of Kabul receive, at best, four hours of electricity a day.

Prison conditions in Afghanistan are reportedly worse than the horrors that came to light in the prisons of Iraq. According to a May 12 article in the *Globe and Mail*, six thousand prisoners were crowded into Afghanistan’s 34 prisons at that time, a tenfold increase from the numbers incarcerated at the time of the fall of the Taliban-led government in 2001.

“As the Afghan court system expands, the prison population is rising sharply. Yet the jails are falling apart,” the article explains.

A February 2005 story in the UK Guardian reported widespread Abu Ghraib-style abuse by U.S. forces against Afghan prisoners, including torture, taking ‘trophy photographs’ of detainees, and carrying out rape and sexual humiliation.

Earlier this year, Canada announced that it does not apply the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan. It hands prisoners over to the existing prison system, thereby making Canadian soldiers accomplices to war crimes.

Failure to reconstruct

Canada and NATO are failing to rebuild infrastructure with their “Provincial Reconstruction Teams.” According to Senlis, “There is a large and increasing gap between the massive international expenditure on security in Afghanistan, and the limited nation-building achievements.... This security-focused spending indicates that right from 2001, the priorities of the U.S.-led international community for Afghanistan were not in line with those of the Afghan population. Rather ... the international community has prioritized physical, military-focused security over the relief of Afghans’ extreme poverty and economic instability.”

Guillaume Fournier, Afghanistan Country Manager for the Senlis Council, told CBC Radio One in September, “The biggest hindrance to reconstruction is the weekly bombing of civilians.”

According to World Bank estimates, Afghanistan needs \$27.5 billion to rebuild its shattered social and physical infrastructure. But according to Senlis, Afghanistan received only \$7.3 billion between 2002 and 2006, while NATO military spending was \$82.5 billion during that time.

A September 23 *Canwest News Service* article, entitled “Reconstruction in Baby Steps,” described the reality of Canadian reconstruction efforts in Kandahar province. A Canadian military officer said that resources are lacking and reconstruction is still a “work in progress.” “I don’t have a squadron’s worth of engineers here. I don’t have troops that go out with equipment and build things and build bridges.”

The September 26 *Globe and Mail* reports that an ambulance donated by Canada for use by the medical center in the Panjwaii agricultural district west of Kandahar city four months ago is instead being used by local police and government administrators. Two doctors in the medical center told the reporter they are not keen to work with NATO-organized medical clinics because of the deep resentment of the population towards the occupiers.

Similar failure surrounds the British presence, according to the September 9 *Economist* magazine. Citing one example, it wrote, “British troops in Helmand (a neighbouring province to Kandahar), who have \$36 million to spend this year, have built the odd bridge and market stall...”

If the failure of “reconstruction” in Afghanistan is little known in Canada, one reason is the concerted efforts by authorities to hide it. An article by Geoffrey York in the June 3 *Globe and Mail* described the rules for journalists working in Afghanistan who choose to “embed” with Canadian forces.

“The restrictions warned sternly that I could be ejected from the military base if I spent ‘an inordinate amount of time’ covering non-military activity. The Department of National Defence doesn’t want the embedded reporters to write much about refugees, schools, health care or electricity – all the basic realities of life for Afghans.”

Warmaking trumps 'reconstruction'

In early September, the 2,300 Canadian troops in Kandahar launched a massive ground assault in Panjwahi district, code-named "Operation Medusa" and backed by U.S. troops and airpower. Residents were warned in advance of the offensive to leave their homes and villages.

The assault was declared a huge success several weeks later. "More than one thousand" enemy fighters were said to be killed. But reporters saw few bodies of resistance fighters.

Canadian and NATO authorities admitted that fighters had staged an orderly retreat and appealed for more troops into the area. Canada quickly dispatched several hundred more soldiers, and for the first time it will be deploying tanks. Deadly attacks on Canadian and other NATO forces resumed within days of the "victory."

Meanwhile, some 20,000 residents were made homeless after their homes, villages and crops were destroyed in the fighting. Winter is approaching and they face an uncertain future.

The September 11 *Globe and Mail* reported on the use of the chemical weapon white phosphorous during "Operation Medusa." The banned weapon is now routinely used against Afghan fighters and to destroy agricultural plantings. The chemical severely burns human flesh upon contact.

Deepening resistance

U.S./NATO officials say they are surprised by the scope and success of the resistance to their latest offensives. "The fighting is extraordinarily intense," said the commander of British forces in Afghanistan. "The intensity and ferocity of the fighting is far greater than in Iraq."

But the reasons for deepening resistance are not difficult to understand. The Senlis report states:

"During the past five years, there have been some limited achievements in Afghanistan.... Yet these visible achievements, frequently lauded in the West, mask the [Afghan government's] lack of independence and the growing irrelevance of the Afghan government to the Afghan people."

The Afghan puppet government and its police and army forces are deeply resented by much of the population for their corruption and abuse. Looting and wanton destruction by foreign and puppet forces routinely follow in the wake of their military operations.

On May 29, a popular uprising occurred in the streets of Kabul following yet another in a long line of civilian deaths caused by reckless driving of a U.S. military convoy. Protesters marched on the presidential palace chanting "Death to America." The protest was brutally suppressed, with *Agence France-Presse* reporting at least 14 protesters killed.

Canadian soldiers have killed civilians, including children, during patrols in Kandahar. Scores of civilians were killed during the recent "Operation Medusa" bloodletting.

“For 30 years, we’ve had this problem,” Abdul Zahir told a *Globe and Mail* reporter in June while caring for three injured relatives in a crowded hospital in Kandahar. “Foreign troops come here and start fights.”

The death toll of Afghans is so bad that even the puppet president Hamid Karzai has spoken out. In late June, during an earlier U.S./Canada/NATO offensive in southern Afghanistan, he declared, “It is not acceptable that in all this fighting, Afghans are dying. In the last three to four weeks, 500 to 600 Afghans were killed.”

The poppy eradication program pursued by occupation forces is another major reason for growing disaffection and is sharply criticized by the Senlis Council. Farmers receive no alternative support when their poppy plantings are destroyed.

Support for occupation eroding at home

The Canadian government is losing support at home for its warmaking abroad, according to recent polls. An EKOS Research/*Toronto Star* poll in mid-September shows 48 percent opposed to Canada’s part in the war in Afghanistan and only 38 percent in favour.

Candidates for the leadership of the opposition Liberal Party are feeling the heat of shifting public opinion. Most now say they oppose the Canadian offensive operations in Kandahar. (The party initiated the Kandahar offensive last year while still in government.)

A major foreign policy report by the Canadian Senate that was issued on October 5 decries the absence of “reconstruction” projects in Afghanistan. “If we don’t get aid in there, then we won’t win militarily,” said the chairman of the committee that produced the report.

NDP convention delegates vote for ‘troops out’

Another sign of growing antiwar opinion was the vote by delegates at the national convention of the New Democratic Party in early September to demand a withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. The resolution calls for “the safe and immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan.”

The vote was a striking victory for antiwar forces and will help broaden support for antiwar protests.

Unfortunately, the resolution also provides justification for continuing Canadian military intervention in poor and underdeveloped countries, including Afghanistan, by advocating what it calls “peace building.” It says the party should “support the continuation of development assistance to Afghanistan and democratic peace building in that country so that reconstruction efforts and good governance are achieved.”

“Democratic peace building” is code language for continued violations of the sovereignty of the Afghan people. The same language served as justification for the invasion of Haiti in 2004 and overthrow of its popular govern-

ment by Canada, the U.S. and France.

Leaders of the NDP have taken their distance from the “troops out” section of the resolution. Party leader Jack Layton told CBC Radio news on September 24 that he favours a continued military presence by Canada in Afghanistan. He said he wants an end to the current combat operations in Kandahar but a continuation of “peace-building.”

The party’s foreign affairs critic in Parliament, Alexa McDonough, wrote a newspaper column on September 17 that criticized the Canadian-led offensive in Kandahar but made no reference to a withdrawal of Canadian troops, from either Kandahar or anywhere else in Afghanistan.

Canada out of Afghanistan

The Canadian government and its NATO allies have accomplished nothing for Afghans. They are propping up a reactionary and illegitimate government that has little popular support, have killed thousands of Afghans, and have destroyed crucial infrastructure and food production.

A column in the October 3 *Globe and Mail* by U.S. journalist Sarah Chayes underscored the dilemma of the occupation forces. She described the Afghanistan government of Harmid Karzai as, “a government devoured by corruption.” It “seems just as hostile to [the people’s] legitimate interests as the Taliban are.”

Chayes has no solution to this problem because she staunchly defends a continued presence of Canada and NATO in Afghanistan, and those forces in turn support and defend the very government that she so harshly condemns.

The occupation forces are deeply hostile to the social and economic aspirations of Afghanistan’s poor majority. They are in Afghanistan to foster pipeline deals that will deliver oil from Central Asia to seaports and earn billions of dollars in profits for Canadian and other foreign oil companies. They are transforming Afghanistan into a military base to attack patriotic forces throughout Asia and the Middle East and to pressure and threaten China and Iran.

October 28 day of antiwar action

A cross-Canada day of protest against the war has been called by the Canadian Peace Alliance on October 28. The call is supported by growing numbers of political, social, student and religious organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, many local and regional trade unions, and the Canadian Islamic Congress.

People from across Canada will come into the streets on that day to demand the unconditional withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan.

In so doing, we will be joining with those in Afghanistan who are resisting the pillage and destruction of their country and who want democratic government and meaningful programs to improve living standards and rebuild the shattered country.

These protests will strengthen the struggle for justice and peace at home, including the fight to reverse the vast cuts to social programs recently announced by the Conservative Party government and the campaigns to end the abuses of democratic rights that led to the torture ordeal of Maher Arar and the indefinite detentions of political prisoners.

The Senlis Council report quoted in this article is available online at http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/014_publication/

Canadian Government Continues Lies and Cover-up on Afghanistan

(Socialist Voice, November 12, 2007)

By Roger Annis

The Canadian government continues to rely on denial and lies to cover up the criminal war in Afghanistan in which it is an enthusiastic partner.

A damning exposé of the war and Canada's role was published in the Montréal French-language daily newspaper *La Presse* during the week of October 29. The paper published a series of articles by its correspondent in Kabul, Michèle Ouimet, entitled, "Afghanistan: The Failings of the Canadian Mission." It is a withering portrait of the lies and deception that define Canadian government policy in Afghanistan. (See: www.cyberpresse.ca/section/CPRESSE)

Torture policy continues

In the first article of the series, on October 29, Ouimet reported that Canada continues to turn over captured Afghans to torture at the hands of the local police and military with which it is allied. Last April, similar torture allegations surfaced. They put the war's advocates on the defensive. After weeks of denial failed to quell a domestic outcry, the government said an agreement had been signed with Afghan authorities to prohibit future torture of captives turned over by Canada.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded immediately to the latest *La Presse* report, saying "not true," and "Taliban propaganda." Presumably, the government feels that such bald denials are not very costly politically. All parties in the Canadian Parliament agree on a continued Canadian military presence in the country. The New Democratic Party distinguishes itself by calling for an end to Canada's "counterinsurgency" role in Afghanistan.

But the latest allegations, like others before them, are wearing down the benefit of the doubt that a narrow majority of Canadians are willing to give

to the government and military.

The rendition policy is being challenged in Canada's federal court by Amnesty International and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association. They are seeking a court injunction to oblige Canada to assume full care and treatment of Afghans who it seizes. The federal government lost a round in this fight on November 5 when the court refused a government request to halt the case.

Health care tragedy

Ouimet reported on October 30 that Canadian officials cannot account for \$3 million that Canada says it has contributed to the main public hospital in Kandahar, Mirwais Hospital.

The Red Cross administers the hospital and does not provide accounts of expenditure. It also prohibits foreign journalists from entering. Ouimet entered incognito. She reported horrific conditions inside, similar to those reported by the Senlis Council and other journalists earlier this year—no sanitation, lack of basic medications, no available blood products, few medical personnel, and suffering patients.

On May 28, 2007, Norine MacDonald, president of the Senlis Council, an international think tank and aid agency, testified before a committee of the Canadian Parliament and commented on the Council's examination of the Mirwais Hospital. The hospital, located just a few kilometres away from a lavish Canadian military base and supposedly funded by millions of Canadian dollars, was so poorly equipped, she said, that, "it does not deserve the name hospital."

Aid fiasco

On October 31, Ouimet looked at a couple of projects in Kabul that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) says it is funding. One was an \$85,000 project to clean up garbage and debris in the city. The project was contracted to a local Afghan businessman. CIDA says he hired 200 people and successfully completed it. CIDA also says it funded a project to install 340 pre-fabricated cement roadside drainage surfaces.

"Not true," says the mayor of Kabul, Ghulam Hadidi. He says no one told him of the projects.

"I have never seen anyone picking up garbage, and the city is as dirty as ever," he told Ouimet. "So I ask the question, what happened to the money?"

His officials looked into the cement claim and found the number installed was less than claimed, only 138. The mayor says the city needs 3,800. It found that the cement used did meet the minimum structural standard. But it cost \$20 per piece. The mayor says it could have purchased them for \$4 each.

"It's not easy to work with the Canadians," the mayor told Ouimet. "Their personnel changes all the time."

The mayor's daughter, Rangina, was blunter. "Where are they [the Canadians]? What do they do? We never see them; they sit in their fortified camp."

Ouimet talked to the governor of Kandahar province, and he added his views on foreign aid programs. "Their bureaucracy is so heavy," he said. "The international community does not listen to us. We never succeed in resolving problems."

Widespread corruption

On November 1, Ouimet reported from Kabul in an article entitled, "An Administration Corrupt to the Bone." Her reporting of the UN role is revealing, and particularly relevant to the situation in Haiti where Canada also leads a foreign occupation force.

An aide to President Hamid Karzai told Ouimet, "The international community has injected \$19 billion into Afghanistan. About 95% of that leaves the country. Non-governmental organizations employ 540 foreigners who earn from \$5,000 to \$35,000 per month.

"The last elections cost \$395 million. It was the foreigners who organized them, and kept the money for themselves."

The editor of *Kabul Weekly*, Mohammed Dashty, is harsher. "The UN is a government within a government... Look at their expenditures, the salaries they pay to their employees, their 4 x 4 vehicles that cross the city, their travel abroad. I call that legal corruption."

Ouimet's report sketched a vast scale of corruption within the foreign-imposed Afghan regime.

Humanitarian refugee crisis

The final article in Ouimet's series, on November 3, sketched the profound humanitarian crisis of Afghan refugees. There are two million of them, living in camps along the country's borders or in internal camps. They are the second-largest refugee population in the world, after Palestinians.

Ouimet reported something that would come as a surprise to most Canadians. Most of the 100,000 refugees in Kandahar province, where the Canadian military contingent in Afghanistan is based, receive no food aid. In March, 2006, the governor of Kandahar province and United Nations authorities decided to cut it off. The reason was to force refugees to return to wherever they had come from.

This barbaric decision did not have the intended effect of forcibly relocating refugees. But it did cause more starvation and suffering than was already present. Stung by revelations from the Senlis Council and journalists of widespread starvation in Kandahar province earlier this year, Canada has quietly moved to reduce the political damage. International Cooperation Minister Beverley Oda visited Kandahar city in early October and announced "\$25 million in food aid." The announcement contained no details

of where, how and to whom the food would be distributed.

War effort faltering

Amidst all these policy failings, Canada and NATO's war effort itself is faltering. The city of Kandahar, the second largest in the country and the location of a major Canada/NATO base, is slowly being encircled by patriotic fighters, according to the November 1 *Globe and Mail*. On November 6, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Peter Mackay, narrowly escaped injury from a rocket attack while visiting a forward Canadian military base in Kandahar province.

The Canada/NATO war in the countryside in Kandahar province is also worsening the refugee crisis in the province as thousands come into Kandahar city to escape the fighting.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani military dictatorship, a staunch friend and ally of Canada and NATO, is poised to fall to a popular uprising. Dictator Pervez Musharaf declared martial law on November 3 in an effort to suppress a growing mass movement demanding democratic rule.

Antiwar protests decline in size, but not in influence

Paradoxically, antiwar protests in Canada are growing smaller as the failure of the U.S./NATO war and occupation becomes more apparent. A national day of protest against the war in Afghanistan was held across Canada on October 27. Rallies and marches were smaller than other recent protests. In Vancouver and Toronto, 750 or so protested. Rallies in Montreal and Ottawa drew 200 and 150 respectively, while 100 marched in Edmonton.

But the declining numbers are deceptive. Public opinion polls show a slim but firm majority want an end to the war in Afghanistan. The recent speaking tour to Canada of Afghan parliamentary representative Malalai Joya drew large and interested crowds. Joya condemns the foreign occupation of Afghanistan and calls for an end to the war it is waging. (See appendix)

Long war foreseen in Afghanistan

In its speech opening a new session of the Canadian Parliament on October 16, the Canadian government said it would end the military mission in Afghanistan by 2011. This extends by two years a 2009 date set by the preceding Liberal Party government. The Liberals' original date for ending the combat mission was 2007. The Liberals tacitly supported the new 2011 date by abstaining on an October 24 vote on the speech.

The head of Canada's military, General Rick Hillier, complicated the political farce when he declared that he considers 2017 as the earliest possible date for a withdrawal. Military officials from Britain, which has the second-largest foreign presence in Afghanistan, stated several months ago that they were committed to a decades-long war in Afghanistan.

Canada's rulers have tied the country's future to a brutal and endless war

in Afghanistan — a war, moreover, that is but a leading front of a U.S.-led war of conquest in the entire Middle East.

Manley Report: Ottawa Gets Advice on Prolonging the Afghanistan War

(Socialist Voice, February 6, 2008)

By Roger Annis

Troubled by the failures of the U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan, the Canadian government commissioned a review last October of the war and Canada's participation. A panel of five corporate and political figures was cobbled together in an effort to reach broader consensus among the war's proponents.

Canada is an enthusiastic partner in the war, but there are growing concerns among the country's elite over the failure to defeat the patriotic resistance in Afghanistan, and a slim but stubborn majority of the Canadian population remains opposed to what increasingly appears to be a futile and criminal war. The review panel's report, delivered January 22, has sparked an intense and ongoing political debate.

What the report says

The governing Conservative Party chose a prominent figure in the opposition Liberal Party, John Manley, to head the review panel. The Liberals took Canada into a more aggressive combat role in Afghanistan in May 2005, in the southern province of Kandahar, but some Liberals are getting cold feet and others are tempted to use the failure of the mission for short-term political gain at home.

The mandate of the mission is due for renewal in 2009. The Conservatives hold only a minority of seats in the federal parliament and would require Liberal support to get parliament to vote an extension.

The government gave the review panel four options for the future of Canada's role, all of which involved some variant of a continued intervention. Manley was already on the record in support of the war and a continued Canadian participation. Two other panel members—Derrick Burney and Paul Tellier—have served on the boards of directors of two of Canada's arms manufacturers, the aerospace companies CAE and Bombardier. So it was no surprise that the panel recommends that participation in the war continue.

Among the proposals contained in the report are:

- Continued commitment to the combat role in Kandahar until at least 2009.
- Insistence on more support from other NATO countries as a pre-condition for Canada to extend its combat mission beyond 2009. The report

says at least 1,000 more troops are needed. With such increased support, Manley says the war can be won “in less than ten years.”

- Acquisition of helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles at an additional cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Currently, Canada relies on NATO allies for air support to its ground troops.

Gloomy outlook

The report has been welcomed enthusiastically by the war’s proponents. An editorial in the January 23 *National Post* urged Harper to use the report as a basis to launch a “reinvigorated mission” in Afghanistan.

But many supporters are less than enthusiastic about the war’s accomplishments to date.

Paraphrasing the report, *National Post* columnist Don Martin says Canada’s “too-few-by-half combat troops” are, “ill-equipped, poorly coordinated and losing the battle to the enemy while failing to deliver adequate humanitarian aid or reconstruction help to average Afghans.” Martin, who has travelled extensively in Afghanistan, says the failure of the U.S./NATO war is a “sad reality.”

The most vocal critic among backers of the war has been the Senlis Council, a European-based think tank that conducts extensive surveying as well as charitable work in Afghanistan. In a series of detailed studies of the Canadian role in Afghanistan issued in 2006 and 2007, it flatly states that the war will be lost unless new approaches are made to win friends among ordinary Afghans.

“The fact stands that Canada is losing its war in Afghanistan,” writes Martin. “It’s high time other nations measured up as worthy allies against global terrorism—without being blackmailed by our bluff.”

Focus on NATO

The “other nations” referred to by Martin are Canada’s European allies in NATO. Their role in Afghanistan is a central focus of Manley’s recommendations, and a controversial one. The report says Canada should vigorously pressure and shame its allies in Europe into committing more troops to Afghanistan and engaging more actively in combat.

In a January 23 editorial entitled, “Demand the help of NATO partners,” the *Globe and Mail* writes, “What Mr. Manley proposes is a game of diplomatic chicken, but it is one that Mr. Harper cannot avoid.”

The editorial continues, “...it is a pitiful abdication of responsibility for larger countries such as France and Germany to refuse to assign another 1,000 (soldiers)...”

But what if the “allies” are not persuaded, or if they don’t take kindly to being blamed for the war’s failings? It’s a dilemma that Manley and the government are acutely aware of. They are careful to avoid describing their demands on NATO as blackmail or threats. The preferred term is “applying leverage.”

Canadian aid

Two issues particularly troubled the review panel—the failure of Canadian “aid” in Afghanistan, and the failure of the government to effectively “communicate” the good news of the war to the Canadian population. The report makes some frank criticism on these two fronts.

“Talk to CIDA [The Canadian International Development Agency] and you will hear all manner of good things about the work it is contributing to in Afghanistan,” wrote the *Globe and Mail* on January 24. But those seeking specifics on what Canada’s “aid” has accomplished “are left exasperated.”

The newspaper echoes what the Senlis Council has reported for several years, which is that Canada has nothing to show for the more than one billion dollars in “aid” money it has spent in Afghanistan since 2002. Ordinary Afghans remained mired in a terrible poverty, and they are frequent victims of indiscriminate bombings and military offensives by Canada and other NATO forces.

By all accounts, humanitarian conditions are deteriorating. Malalai Joya, the suspended member of the Afghan parliament, recently gave a grim picture of ordinary life in her country to the British newspaper *The Independent*. “The economic situation is also terrible – official figures put unemployment at around 60 percent but in reality it is much closer to 90 percent. Hundreds died in the winter from hypothermia, and women were so poor that they tried to sell their babies because they could not feed them.”

Senator Colin Kenny, chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, says getting explanations from CIDA is like grasping at air. He told CBC Radio’s *The Current* on January 22, “We haven’t been able to find out what they (CIDA) are doing,” despite extensive research by his committee. When members of his committee went to Afghanistan to examine aid projects firsthand, they were prevented from doing so by the Canadian military, who said it was “too dangerous” to venture outside the barbed wire military compound where they were housed.

Kenny said that when his committee met the government minister for CIDA, Beverley Oda, last year, they heard nothing but “gobbledegook.” They “didn’t get a straight answer from her in an hour and half.”

Manley’s report proposes that CIDA create a “signature project” such as a school or hospital that could be used to showcase Canadian “aid” to the Afghan people.

The report comes down hard on the government’s mishandling of the information and propaganda side of the war effort. As criticism of the war has mounted, including from its supporters, the government has reacted by closing down access to information. Panel member Derek Burney, a highly placed official of the governing Conservative Party, said, “I’m not opposed to a more controlled message.” But he and the commission are concerned that a total clampdown on information does more harm than good.

Torture

By far the most serious political damage to the war effort has been done by non-stop revelations of the use of torture by Canada and NATO as a weapon of war. A damning editorial by the *Globe and Mail* on January 30 listed no less than seven occasions in 2006 and 2007 when the Conservative government lied about or misrepresented the Canadian military's collusion with torture agencies of the Afghan government, police and armed forces.

The government's latest subterfuge was an announcement on January 23 that as of November 2007, the Canadian military is no longer turning over prisoners to Afghan authorities because of the latter's record of applying torture to its prisoners. The announcement baffled observers who wondered why it was not announced when it supposedly came into effect. The government answered by saying that it was not told of the change by the military. But this story had to change because military leaders reacted angrily to the implication that they are operating outside of the control and direction of the government.

The announcement begged a series of questions. If it was true, what is the military now doing with those it detains? Releasing them? Has it created its own detention facilities in Afghanistan? Is it turning prisoners over to the U.S.? The answer to these questions may lie in a February 4 report in *La Presse*. The Montreal daily reported that the Canadian military is secretly opening its own detention facility in a wing of the notorious central prison in Kabul.

Canada is already deeply implicated in the torture center operated in Guantánamo, Cuba, because of its refusal to seek the release of a Canadian citizen, Omar Khadr, an inmate since he was imprisoned there five years ago at the age of 15.

In December, army officials argued publicly that any relaxation of the detainment policy would gravely compromise the safety and security of the Canadian mission. Speaking to a committee of the Canadian Parliament on December 14, Brigadier-General André Deschamps, army chief of staff to Canada's mission in Afghanistan, declared, "The insurgents could attack us with impunity knowing that if they fail to win an engagement they would simply have to surrender...."

But controversy over the torture policy will not go away. On February 1, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the governor of Kandahar province, Asadullah Khalid, has personally tortured prisoners; that the Canadian government knew of this since at least the spring of 2007; and that it has kept the information hidden. The following day, the newspaper reported that the head of Canada's armed forces, Richard Hillier, praised Khalid as a good friend and ally of Canada and that it was up to the government of Afghanistan to investigate any allegations against him.

Government faces severe dilemma

The January 23 announcement of a supposed change in torture policy stems from the government's growing concern about a legal challenge in Canada's federal court brought by the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) and Amnesty International that would oblige the military to treat prisoners according to the post-World War Two Geneva conventions. Like the U.S., Canada says its operations in Afghanistan are not bound by the conventions.

The government is trying to negotiate an end to legal challenge. The sticking point is the insistence by Amnesty and the BCCLA that any change to detention policy must be publicly announced seven days in advance.

The Manley report recommends strongly against any vote in the Canadian parliament on the future of the war. The Liberals say they want a withdrawal from the combat mission in Kandahar by 2009, but the review panel wants the Liberals and the governing Conservatives to reach an agreement to continue selling the war by "leveraging" more commitment from Canada's imperialist allies in Europe.

Manley believes that the best outcome to hope for is a shattered Afghanistan where imperialist interests are nonetheless preserved. "We're not going to have a VE day here with parades in the streets," he cautioned journalists on January 23.

The furore over the Manley report can only increase the number of Canadians who question the war's aims and rationale. Many more can be won to the view that the only principled and humanitarian end to the carnage is withdrawal of foreign occupation forces and recognition of the right of the Afghan people to freely determine their political future.

Appendix:

Afghan MP Says Canada Should Change Its Policy on Afghanistan

(Rabble News, March 3, 2008)

Afghan MP Malalai Joya is currently appealing her suspension from the country's parliament. She spoke to rabble.ca editor Derrick O'Keefe.

After 9/11, unfortunately the United States and its allies like Canada pushed us from the frying pan into the fire, by putting in power the Northern Alliance criminals and warlords. As long as they follow this wrong policy, the situation in Afghanistan will become more disastrous.

Canada should not continue its current policy until 2011. Canada should act independently of the United States and find an alternative policy if they really want to be an honest friend of the Afghan people and improve this catastrophic situation.

Today, in the name of bringing human rights, women's rights and democracy, our country has been occupied. Under the nose of NATO troops and Canadian troops, the situation of women is getting worse day by day. More women than ever are committing suicide by self-immolation. Recently, in Laghman province, a woman burned herself in front of the courthouse because she could not get justice. The case of Parwez Kambakhsh, who remains in prison, shows that there is no freedom of speech in my country, even though it is guaranteed in our constitution.

Just this winter, more than 1,000 people died from the cold, because of poverty. Some women have been forced to sell their babies for only ten dollars just to get enough money to survive. And today Afghanistan is once again the world's biggest producer of opium, 93 percent of the world supply. President Karzai's brother, for instance, is a famous druglord in Kandahar province.

This situation continues because, of the billions of dollars that Afghanistan has received from the international community, most of the money has gone into the pockets of the warlords and druglords that the U.S. and its allies have imposed on our country. Just like in Iraq, because of corruption, ordinary people have not benefited from this money. The Congressional Budget Office says that the U.S. will spend \$2.4 trillion over the next ten years on the "war on terror." If they instead spent this money properly and honestly, not only would Iraq and Afghanistan be made into heaven but, also, world poverty would be eliminated.

The great people of Canada should know that today our people in Afghanistan are not looking at their soldiers as any different from U.S. or other NATO troops. For our people, all of them are the same because, unfortunately, for seven years they have followed the footpath of the U.S. You can-

not bring values like democracy and human rights by supporting the sworn enemies of these values.

These troops are supposedly bombing the Taliban, but instead of killing Taliban, ordinary people are the victims. And the Taliban is only becoming more powerful again. People right now do not trust these foreign troops and they do not support this government. If they continue their policy they will face the resistance of the Afghan people and more blood of innocent people will be shed.

Because of our history – we were attacked by both the British and the Soviets – our people do not trust foreign troops. But this time, after Soviet occupation, civil war and the Taliban, people – even though they were suspicious of U.S. motives – had some hopes that maybe B-52s would change the situation, or give us a helping hand. Unfortunately, we now see that the U.S. only attacked Afghanistan because of its own strategic policy and its regional and economic interests. It is the policy of the U.S. to keep the situation in Afghanistan unstable, to have a reason to stay longer militarily.

Today, the people of Afghanistan are faced with two enemies: internal enemies in the form of fundamentalists like the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, and foreign enemies who do not think about the interests of the Afghan people for a moment.

There is no question that Afghanistan needs a helping hand. But our people are now saying, if you do not support or help us, it would be better that you leave Afghanistan so that people here can fight against their enemies who are in power themselves.

But we don't only want the withdrawal of these foreign troops. We also want the withdrawal of the warlords and the Taliban. We want disarmament of these criminals and we want support for democratic parties.

On behalf of my people, I send my condolences and share the pain of those Canadian families who have lost their loved ones in Afghanistan. By raising our voices together against the wrong policy of the U.S. and its allies like Canada, we can prevent the loss of more innocent life.

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