

What Canada Is Doing In Afghanistan?

By Nita Palmer

Saturday, April 22 – The early morning news of the deaths of four more Canadian soldiers in a roadside bomb explosion near Gumbad, Afghanistan was another wake-up call to people across the country: Canada is at war. These deaths were the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th deaths of Canadian troops in Afghanistan since the invasion of the country in 2001. Eight Canadian troops plus one diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan since the Government of Canada stepped up its war drive with the deployment of 2,000 more troops to the Kandahar region of Afghanistan in August 2005.

Life in Afghanistan Under Canadian Guns

“Canadians are assisting in the establishment of legitimate and effective security structures, a police force, a military and a judicial system. As well, they are assisting Afghans who have suffered decades of poverty, tyranny and abuse by supporting and facilitating the humanitarian projects that are needed there.” – Gordon O’Connor, Minister of National Defense

According to Gordon O’Connor and

other Members of Parliament in Ottawa, Canadian Forces are saving Afghans from a life of misery. However, both UN statistics and accounts from Afghan people show that the opposite is the case. A UN report released in 2005 shows that the unemployment rate in Afghanistan is at 78%. 80% of people live below the poverty line. Opium production in Afghanistan has also skyrocketed. In 2001, there were 8,000 hectares of opium-producing land in Afghanistan. As of 2005, that number had risen to 104,000 hectares. Today, Afghanistan produces 90% of the world’s opium – representing 52% of Afghanistan’s meagre gross domestic product. The enormity of this trade in Afghanistan also requires people to work these opium fields, and many men, women, and children have been forced to enter this brutal trade in order to scrape together enough money to survive.

Even while fighting “insurgents”, the government of Canada has also rested the occupation of Afghanistan on the laurels of supposed reconstruction of the country. However, people in Afghanistan are asking: what reconstruction? *“I don’t know of any real reconstruction in Afghanistan. Afghans are living in tents in Kabul, schools in Kabul don’t have*

chairs, tables, or books,” Ramazan Bahsardost, an Afghan member of parliament, was recently quoted as saying.

According to the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), *“There is a high rate of women committing suicide and an ever expanding cultivation and trafficking of narcotics, all while billions of dollars of foreign aid and public resources are squandered away. Unemployment and homelessness is on the rise. Opening of Kabul Serena Hotel [a recently opened 5-star hotel in Kabul] and other hotels of this type in a country with the lowest rate of income per capita in the world doesn’t mean development”* (March 8, 2006). This is the type of “reconstruction” that people in Afghanistan are seeing at the hands of the Government of Canada.

Operation Archer: Protecting the Interests of the Canadian Ruling Class

At first glance, it would seem as though there is a fundamental contradiction between the government of Canada’s claims of “liberating the Afghan people” and fighting for “peace, democracy, and freedom”. However, scratch the surface

a little and you will find the reality of the interests represented in the occupation – and the reason why the quality of life in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate.

Canada's Department of National Defense website headlines its section on "Rebuilding Afghanistan" with the claim that the top two priorities of Canada's role in Afghanistan are to "defend 'our' national interests", and to "ensure Canadian leadership in world affairs". Clearly, these interests have nothing to do with the Afghan people. They also have nothing to do with the interests of working people in Canada, who see no profit from the occupation of Afghanistan. Why then, is the government of Canada increasing its domination in Afghanistan? In small part, it is for the economic benefit that Canada's wealthy elite and Canadian corporations see from building of new businesses in Afghanistan. But overall, these steps are just another piece in the puzzle of establishing economic control for the Canadian ruling class in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has the poor luck of being a country that is an important hub between the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. As such, control of Afghanistan has been fought over for centuries by various imperialist powers – because control of Afghanistan means access to trade markets throughout these three important areas. While the US ruling class focuses on its occupation of Iraq, and other major imperialist powers such as Britain, France, and Germany jockey for control, Canada is attempting to throw off its traditional "middle power status" and secure its economic control in the world. The war drive in Afghanistan is the current centre of the ruling class of Canada's battle for control.

Questions Left Unanswered for Working People

The increasingly obvious fact that the occupation of Afghanistan is not in the interests of people in Canada, combined with more and more frequent deaths of Canadian troops and Afghan civilians, has created a growing voice against the occupation of Afghanistan amongst ordinary working people in Canada. This opposition has left the

government of Canada scrambling to quell this voice. On April 10, a "Take Note" debate was held in Parliament. However, the only thing to "take note" about in this "debate" was the *lack* of any debate. In the words of former Liberal Defence Minister Bill Graham, "We, on our side of the House, do not consider this a debate. We believe this is an opportunity to allow the Canadian public to better understand this mission." The Canadian public *do* understand this mission – we understand that it is not by our choice or in our interest, and that we are not being represented by the government of Canada.

It is not only the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party that do not represent us, however – the NDP, as well, unanimously voiced its support for the mission in Afghanistan during the "debate". NDP leader Jack Layton called only for Parliament to "[commit] to a democratic debate and vote in the House on any further role for our Canadian Forces in Afghanistan *beyond our current commitments.*" [Emphasis added] There was no mention of a real debate on the current deployment of troops, nor on the legality of the occupation, nor on the recent doubling of the military budget to \$25.8 billion in the spring of 2005. This so-called "debate" simply left more questions unanswered for people in Canada.

Canada Out of Afghanistan! Tasks and Perspectives for Working People in Canada

As the April 10 "debate" clearly showed, it is up to us poor, working, and oppressed people in Canada to fight to make our voices heard. While the government of Canada continues to slash funding to education, health care, and other social programs that we rely on, they double the military budget, and push to add 8,000 more young workers to the ranks of the Canadian Forces.

The government of Canada clearly is not representing the interests of working people in Canada in the occupation of Afghanistan. Even more clearly, it is not representing the interests of people in Afghanistan, for whom the occupation has crippled their country, and left them fighting for their basic right to survive every day. For the people of Afghanistan, the fundamental block to

building their own country in their own interests is the imperialist occupation of their country by the guns of Canadian and NATO forces. Therefore, as people in Canada, we must fight for the self-determination of people in Afghanistan, as the occupation of their country does not represent people here or there.

Firstly though, working people in Canada must have a chance to be able to discuss what this occupation means. We must answer the many questions that have been left unanswered. To do this, we must call for an Independent Public Inquiry into Canada's war drive in Afghanistan, and demand to know why Canadian troops have been deployed to Afghanistan to continue this bloody, brutal, and inhuman occupation. In the interests of poor, working, and oppressed people in Canada and in Afghanistan, we must also continue to voice our opposition to this horrific occupation, and to demand:

**CANADA OUT OF AFGHANISTAN!
INDEPENDENT PUBLIC INQUIRY
NOW! BRING TROOPS HOME
NOW!**