

BIG FLAME NATIONAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN

SOVIET TROOPS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN!

THE STRUGGLE WORLDWIDE



BIG FLAME CONDEMNS THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN AND CALLS FOR THE IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS FROM THAT COUNTRY.

We recognize that the Soviet Union had legitimate reasons to worry about intensive imperialist involvement in Afghanistan. For some time the United States has been supplying arms to the right-wing Moslem rebels. The US was threatening to invade Iran, which borders both Afghanistan and USSR. And the fall of a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan would have threatened to surround the Soviet Union along its southern border with a network of right-wing, militantly anti-communist states allied with US imperialism and China. Nevertheless, this was not the main motivation for Soviet intervention. Nor can it justify a major power imposing its will on a small country.

We say this even though we realize that some of the policies of the Afghani regime (for example, the abolition of the bride price) are progressive. **BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT SOCIALISM CAN BE IMPOSED BY FORCE, FROM ABOVE.**

WHY THE SOVIETS INVADED

The main reason why the USSR invaded Afghanistan had nothing to do with defending the welfare of the Afghani people or defending the Afghani left from right-wing or imperialist attack. Rather it was to prevent the overthrow of a 'satellite' regime and the threat this would have posed to the Soviet bureaucracy's control over its domestic population and over Eastern Europe.

The Soviet Union's first worry was with its own Moslem minorities. Iranian and Turkish-speaking minorities, such as Tadzhiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmenis, inhabit the border regions of both countries and have strong cultural ties with their Soviet or Afghani brothers and sisters. Even though the Moslem peoples of the USSR have a higher standard of living than the Afghanis, the Soviet Union's Moslem minorities have a great deal of discontent against overt economic, political, and cultural discrimination. A militantly Islamic nationalist regime in Afghanistan would have provided a focus for this discontent and threatened the stability of the whole southern region of the USSR.

RESISTANCE

A second worry for the Soviets was Eastern Europe. There is no question but that the overthrow of a Soviet satellite in Afghanistan would have encouraged both right-wing and socialist dissidents in Eastern Europe. It would have shown that the Soviet Union's power could be broken, that resistance could succeed. In this sense, the invasion was similar to the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where the Soviets rushed to put down popular resistance before it spread to other countries that they control.

Thirdly, for the same reasons, the Soviet Union was worried that a defeat in Afghanistan would have encouraged discontent among its own non-Moslem population.

We should keep in mind that the Soviet invasion comes at a time of serious internal crisis for the Soviet regime. Its leadership is engaged in a power struggle. Its economy is failing. Popular discontent over these hardships, including shortages caused by the Olympic Games, is growing. The Soviet regime is using the invasion and the aggressive response by US imperialism to create its own 'war scare' and to whip up chauvinism. The invasion also forms part of a general pattern of increasing repression, which includes the recent crackdown on dissidents and a new, anti-working class law to tighten labour discipline.

WHY THE TROOPS MUST WITHDRAW

We reject the arguments of those on the Left who either defend the Soviet invasion or do not call for a withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Soviet Union did not intervene to defend a progressive, popular movement from being crushed. Nor was it answering a call from a popular regime to help it defend itself against imperialism (as the Cuban troop did when they defended the MPLA in Angola). We admit that a defeat for Soviet troops in Afghanistan (which is unlikely) would be a victory for Western imperialism. But their continued presence in that country is strengthening the Right throughout the Middle East and Asia and has no doubt done very great damage to the Left in countries like Iran and Pakistan.

MYTHICAL

Big Flame, however, also rejects the argument that the Soviets have violated some mythical 'self determination of the Afghani people'. Of course we oppose attempts by big countries to impose their will on little countries. But had there been a popular and progressive movement in Afghanistan which called for assistance from outside to defend itself against imperialist interference, then we very probably would have supported it. Again, we take the example of Angola: Cuban 'intervention' certainly violated the 'self-determination' of the Angolan people, but we defended it because the MPLA was engaged in an important anti-imperialist struggle.

ROLE OF IMPERIALISM

Whilst condemning the Soviet invasion, Big Flame thinks that revolutionaries in Britain and elsewhere must do all they can to point out how Western imperialism is using events in Afghanistan to strengthen its hold over the Middle East and Asia. The United States and its allies are using the invasion to prepare public opinion to accept the renewed use of US troops to put down popular revolts which might threaten Japanese, American, or other Western capitalist interests. At the same time, they are using the invasion to bolster anti-

communism, and particularly hostility to the left inside their own countries. For this reason we will do everything we can to initiate or support campaigns against: the reintroduction of conscription in the United States, the sale of arms and other military equipment to China and right-wing states like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the establishment of US military bases in the Middle East and Asia, and the West's possession, build-up, or use of nuclear weapons.

NO OLYMPIC BOYCOTT

Big Flame also opposes any boycott of the Olympic games in Moscow. We have always stressed the connection between politics and sport. The call for a boycott of the Moscow Olympics is being used by the Right in every country to build an anti-communist crusade. These same forces did not oppose the Mexico Olympics in 1968 nor the World Cup in Argentina in 1978. Nor did they oppose the US's war against the Vietnamese with threats of similar cultural or economic sanctions. Neither is there any evidence that small groups of left-wing oppositionists in the USSR or Eastern Europe have called on socialists and the workers' movement in the West to build a boycott. If the Olympic games go ahead, we will use that opportunity to expose the brutal, anti-socialist character of the Soviet regime.

Big Flame National Committee
16 February 1980



24 members of the Portuguese left-wing organisation PRP (Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat) have been in jail without trial since June 1978. Amongst the prisoners are two of the PRP leaders, Isabel do Carmo and Carlos Antunes, well known for their long history as militants of the resistance against the dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano

programme the seizure of power by the workers by violent means." This is used to justify the charge against Carlos Antunes and Isobel do Carmo of 'moral responsibility' in various crimes, including bank robberies and incitement to break military discipline during the period between April 1974 and November 1975. They are even charged with insulting the Prime Minister, Pinheiro de Azevedo, in the House of

ed by the Assembly by a large majority.

The Law was finally ratified by President Eanes in November 1979, following a 28-day hunger strike by the political prisoners of which this was one of the main demands.

Despite this the PRP members are still in jail, more than one and a half years after their arrest.

Yet all the members of the