

‘Woke’ imperialism, women’s liberation and Afghanistan

written by Sharon Black
September 5, 2021



Afghanistan’s socialist Vice President Anahita Ratebzad, standing at right, speaks with a group of activists. Ratebzad said, “Privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, health services and free time to rear a

healthy generation.”

There is no greater hypocrisy than the deceitful lies of imperialist propaganda. One of the most damaging, since it rests on 20 years of destructive war and occupation, is that the U.S. war on Afghanistan was about liberating Afghan women.

U.S. imperialist involvement — a euphemism for war and terror — actually began 42 years ago, when the CIA’s Operation Cyclone launched in 1979 under Jimmy Carter’s presidency. It continues today in the form of sanctions and even bombings, as witnessed by the recent drone strike that killed at least 10 people, eight of them children, as young as two years old.

The real fight for women’s rights

U.S. terror and intrigue began following the 1978 Saur Revolution that brought the socialist and progressive People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power, decisively toppling the old Kingdom of Afghanistan.

The April Revolution, led mostly by young women and men of Kabul, ushered in major changes that included women’s rights in education and participation in government. Debts owed to cruel feudal landlords were abolished. Women were trained as teachers and books were published in all of the Indigenous and minority languages.

Brigades of women spread out across the country to teach and provide medical services, similar to the Cuban Revolution’s “literacy brigades” of mostly young women that went into the countryside and mountains to teach the poor.

The marriage age was raised from 8 years to 16. Maternity leave with a three-month’s salary was established. By the end of the 1980s, half of the health and education workers in Afghanistan were women.

The story of Afghanistan's women and their struggle for liberation is remarkable. But it's seldom told in the capitalist West, whose propaganda is filled with distortions and bitter lies.

First woman vice president

Dr. Anahita Ratebzad was an Afghan socialist, a founding member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and a member of the Revolutionary Council. She was also the first woman vice president of Afghanistan from 1980 to 1985 — decades before the United States could boast about the election of Kamala Harris.

In the 1960s, she founded the Democratic Organization of Afghan Women (DOAW), and in 1965, Ratebzad and other Afghan women organized the first International Women's Day March in Kabul. Earlier in 1963, Dr. Ratebzad graduated as a medical doctor.

There is vast documentation that the imperialist bourgeoisie knew full well that the Soviet Union had not planned, let alone carried out, the April Revolution.

It was Afghans led by the PDPA that requested assistance from the Soviet Union, whose borders bounded with Afghanistan, to help in the growing civil war promulgated by reactionary and corrupt warlords bent on overturning the new government.

What is not well understood is that the U.S. was deeply involved in the Afghan civil war, not on the side of the new government, but on the side of the reactionaries who were bent on the destruction of the progressive gains, which foremost included women's rights.

In 1979, the CIA began arming and financing the Afghan mujahideen — murderous warlords — and later conspired with both Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban. The CIA operation, dubbed "Operation Cyclone," was the longest and most expensive in

U.S. history. It continued after the Soviet army withdrew in 1989.

Later, the CIA ran death squads that terrorized Afghan villagers and murdered children.



In 1992, three years after the Soviet army withdrew, the PDPA forces continued to resist. Contrast this with the rapid collapse of the U.S. puppet Karzai-Ghani government in Kabul.

U.S. war and occupation

In 1992 the Afghan warlords, backed by the U.S., finally succeeded in overthrowing the PDPA government. At the time, Western governments celebrated this as a “victory against Soviet tyranny.” In 1996 the Taliban movement, a product of infighting among the warlord factions, seized control of the country. Socialist leaders who had been held under house arrest were executed.

In 2001, the Taliban made a convenient first target for the U.S. “war on terror” after the 9/11 attacks. In two decades of U.S. war and occupation since then, only a tiny percentage of women and girls were able to advance themselves, inadvertently becoming show pieces for Western NGOs and the media. But the vast majority of Afghan women have remained in the worst possible conditions.

Business Insider, certainly not a revolutionary source, documents Afghanistan among the 25 poorest countries. Afghanistan is listed as the 7th poorest, with a gross domestic product of \$499.44 per person, just ahead of war torn Yemen. It was more likely that an Afghan woman or girl would be blown up by a landmine or starve to death than have the opportunity to go to school.

Wherever imperialism goes, it creates misery and backwardness, stunting and distorting the development of the colonized, occupied and even the neocolonial world.

Class roots of women’s oppression

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, advanced a materialist conception of history. Included was the thesis that the development of private property during the period of prehistory led to the first division among humans — the overthrow of matrilineal society and the consequent oppression of women.

While they rested that conclusion on anthropological studies that were available in

the 19th century, their conclusions have now been more fully documented. (See Engels' ["The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State"](#) and Bob McCubbin's ["The Social Evolution of Humanity."](#))

The materialist view of history explained that the development of society was based on changes in the mode of production from slavery (referring to the slavery of antiquity), feudalism and capitalism to socialism and what lies in the future, communism.

It is the struggle of classes that drives this process forward.

Marx and the thinkers that followed him did not view this process as stagnant and linear but rather one that was ruptorous, chaotic and revolutionary. Sometimes different modes of production existed side by side for a period of time before contradictions gave way to change.

The role of religion and culture is a product of the dominant economic system. Ideas do not abstractly exist somewhere in the stratosphere; they are deeply connected to all human society. That includes the ideology of patriarchy.

The modern-day women's liberation movement in the United States is not exempted. It emerged and was influenced by the great struggles against imperialism, including the Vietnamese liberation struggle, and domestically, the Black liberation movement.

Dorothy Ballan explains in the pamphlet ["Feminism and Marxism"](#) how the development of the birth control pill, which gave women some modicum of control over their bodies, buttressed the movement.

Socialist revolutions

The Russian Revolution of 1917, which established the Soviet Union, was the very

first revolution that shook off both the chains of capitalism and feudal relations, and others followed.

In 1949, the Chinese Revolution threw off the shackles of feudalism. Chinese women, who “hold up half the sky,” participated in bringing about a new China that abolished child brothels, concubinage and arranged marriages in the revolutionary Marriage Law of 1950. Foot binding, a cruel process of mutilating girls and a product of feudal China, was banished.

What the revolutionary socialist women and men of Afghanistan were able to accomplish from 1978-1992, prior to their revolution’s destruction and losses, was nothing short of heroic.

The grinding poverty and the existence of feudal conditions mitigated against everything they were trying to accomplish. Yet they fought.

Their struggle took place in the shadows, both literally in proximity and figuratively, of the great Bolshevik Revolution that brought innumerable gains to women and all of the Soviet people. The Soviet revolution could not have helped but raise the expectations of the Afghan people.

Ironically, it was the retreat of the Soviet leadership during this period, leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, that would also figure negatively into the equation.

While today it is the oppressor’s history that dominates our capitalist culture with slanders and self-righteous criticism, none of it can change the heroic character of those women and men who fought for genuine social change.

Reparations needed for Afghan people

At present the Afghan people are suffering from staggering inflation. It’s not just burqas rising in price, as the media snidely reports, but food and many other

necessities. The New York Federal Reserve and other banks are blocking Afghanistan's nearly \$9.5 billion in assets.

U.S. imperialism and its banker rulers owe reparations to the people of Afghanistan who have suffered pillage, death and destruction for the last four decades.

Our role as women in the Western capitalist world is to end imperialist war, occupation and sanctions — the only sure route to the liberation of women worldwide. Regardless of twists and turns, self-determination for the people of Afghanistan will ultimately bring progress.

U.S. out of Afghanistan — reparations now!

