

To End the War and Defend Women, Build a Radical, Independent Movement!

This October marks the ninth anniversary of U.S. war and occupation in Afghanistan and over seven years in Iraq. Politicians and the corporate media would have us believe that this enduring horror is necessary to defeat terrorism, protect democracy, and promote human rights. But after tens of thousands of deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq and thousands of U.S. military casualties, the continued American presence in these countries is getting harder to sell. Conditions in Afghanistan, including the treatment of women, have only gotten worse. And Obama's proclamation of "peace" in Iraq is an illusion timed for the fall elections.

A war for resources, not rights

Behind the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq is a grab for oil and natural gas and strategic positioning in the pivotal region of central Asia.

U.S. and European governments and

oil companies are working out deals for Iraq's vast oil reserves. So 13 permanent bases are being built and 50,000 U.S. troops remain whose purpose will be to protect foreign investments.

Bombings and privation have devastated the Afghan people. In Kabul, 500,000 are homeless. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans are displaced and have become refugees in Pakistan, living in camps with little or no access to food, drinking water, or health services. Infant mortality is the second worst in the world and life expectancy is the world's lowest, just 44.5 years. One-third of the population depends on food assistance and less than six percent of the population has electricity.

From Kabul to Main Street: women's misery on the rise

One pretense for staying in Afghanistan is to protect the women, but their conditions have worsened under the U.S.-installed government of warlords and fundamentalists. Afghanistan remains a patriarchal theocracy where forced marriage is common—60% involving girls younger than 16. Last year, 47 women set themselves on fire to escape abusive husbands. Many Afghan girls have been raped.



April 2009 protest against a restrictive family law.

Shah Marai/AFP/Getty Images

But Afghan women are resisting their oppression with great courage. In April 2009, 300 women marched with large banners in the capital city, Kabul, to protest a law forbidding a wife to refuse sex to her husband, to leave the house alone or without his permission, and without a

head-to-toe burqa. They shouted their demands for secular laws and human rights guarantees against 1,000 counter-demonstrators who attacked them with stones.

The law was later repealed due to international pressure. But misogyny is still rampant at all levels of Afghan society. Even in parliament, a female legislator was denounced as a prostitute and a traitor to her religion when she argued for an end to anti-woman violence.

Nine years of war have also acutely affected women in the United States. As federal money flows to the military machine, social services are bled dry. Strapped because of federal budget reductions, at least 46 states have cut health care, services to the disabled or elderly, or education, including K-12 and higher education. Working moms are stretched thin filling the gap. The economic collapse is also fueling a growing right wing that is on the offensive against abortion, Muslims, immigrants, and queers.

Beware of false allies

The Democrats are commonly portrayed as friends of the antiwar movement. There is pressure to withhold protest during election seasons. But why vote for Democrats when they keep passing war spending and when the Obama administration presides over an FBI that is witch hunting antiwar activists in Minneapolis and Chicago? In directing these attacks, the Obama administration is continuing the COINTELPRO-type operations the FBI used in the '60s and '70s to divide the movements and smash dissent. (Read more about your rights at www.RadicalWomen.org.)

Allowing capitalist parties to call the shots will not change anything. A recent Gallup poll showed that 58% of the U.S. population wants a third-party alternative

to the business-as-usual system. But not every "outsider" phenomenon is a friend.

Some antiwar activists have proposed making common cause with the conservative Tea Party movement, which is rallying a deeply embittered segment of the population. But the Tea Party is no ally of workers, women or peace. It is heavily funded by billionaires. It scapegoats unions, immigrants, people of color, queers, and socialists. Its antagonism to "big government" translates into a push for privatization and elimination of survival services.

Real solidarity can come from mobilizing to stop the pilfering of tax dollars for war and corporate subsidies. Public funds must be generated by ending handouts to rich individuals and businesses, and be redirected from warfare toward health care, education, housing, welfare and jobs for all.

The time is now for a radical, independent antiwar movement that speaks to the issues of women, working people, communities of color, and other oppressed groups. It must be un beholden to free marketers of all stripes, from libertarians to corporate bosses. To end a war for profits that falsely claims to "defend women," the antiwar movement must put feminism front and center and challenge war's source in capitalist greed. This is how we can truly end the war at home and abroad.



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