

Against War: Resisting Empire and the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

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It is now five years since Canadian troops were first deployed to Afghanistan, entering from the outset into a combat position. Canada moved into a war in Afghanistan without any Parliamentary sanction or debate. The Liberal government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien engineered both an endorsement and accommodation to the American 'war on terror' by moving into Afghanistan without directly supporting the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. The policy was a classic case of Canada trying to have it both ways. The Canadian mission in Afghanistan was thus begun with neither wide discussion and even minimal accountability nor strategic thought. It was undertaken to affirm Canada as the American empire's key ally. In this case, Canada would act would support U.S. and western imperialism under the rubric of a NATO mission given legitimacy by a resolution rammed through the UN Security Council in the wake of 9/11, when rational and calm debate and analysis was completely foregone.

Prime Ministers Paul Martin and Stephen Harper both subsequently raised Canada's commitments to the Afghanistan mission in terms of troop levels, arms expenditures, and operational deployments. Notably, Canada moved into a forward combat position in Southern Afghanistan in the winter of 2006 to directly engage Taliban forces. Canada is scheduled to play a larger role in the NATO command structure. Relative to domestic population levels, more Canadians have been killed in Afghanistan than any other of the NATO allies. And more Canadian soldiers, as well as civilian officials, will be killed in the coming months, given the chaos that is continuing to spiral upward in Afghanistan and, indeed, across the Middle East.

There are other disturbing aspects of the Canadian deployment that the government of Canada has been less than forthcoming about. Canada will soon be at war in Afghanistan as long as any war Canada has fought in, notably WW II. The Canadian mission is primarily combat and not development-related, with only about 10 percent of expenditures being related to development work. The Karzai government in Kabul being defended has no real democratic mandate. It is a cesspool of corruption, with aid moneys transferred and taxes collected soon vanishing into any number of pockets. The so-called Afghan parliament is full of ex-Taliban and warlords. The government is making next to no progress on women's and human rights. The Canadian Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence, in its February report, *Canadian Troops in Afghanistan: Taking a Hard Look at A Hard Mission*, came to most of these same conclusions. It all but admitted that the war cannot be 'won' (in the eyes of a foreign military force intervening in another country). But the Senators then illogically concluded that Canada must stick it out because of the need to support NATO allies and for peace and security. Yet, the Senate Report itself had just

observed what is apparent to all but the willfully ignorant: the war and conflict is spreading, as is the range and violence of various terrorist acts. It is the ideological need to support NATO, as one of the foremost institutions of western militarism and imperialism, re-engineered in the post-cold war period to project military power into wayward states in the 'global south', that remains at the heart of the Canadian intervention in Afghanistan. When a mission lacks justification and is faltering, as with the Canadian and NATO mission in Afghanistan, all that is left is for the bankrupt rulers to assert, as they so often have in the past, that 'war is peace'.

The Canadian war in Afghanistan has been barely discussed in Parliament, with only the briefest debate in May 2006 on a motion extending the Canadian mission. A much deeper process of discussion, education, and mobilization needs to ensue across Canada. The Canadian Peace Alliance and other peace groups have called for nation-wide demonstrations across Canada for March 17. We must begin to work toward that now in our workplaces and communities across the country.

We are supporting an anti-war teach-in at York University on February 22 as part of this process. And we are calling on university, college and high school campuses across Canada to engage in similar teach-ins. Anti-war activists, students and professors, workers and all citizens simply concerned with democracy, peace, international restraints on militarism, and democratic sovereignty must work to build a wide opposition against the war. We need to bring Canadian troops home and get them out of Afghanistan, and get NATO and American troops out of Iraq and the Middle East.

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