

Historical Notes for the Film:

“AFGHAN WOMEN: A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE”

Overview of Recent History of Afghanistan

1960's and 70's: This was a time of social and political upheaval against the vast inequalities between a small elite and the majority of Afghanistan's 13 million people. Afghanistan was a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Zahir Shah, the latest member of the Dur-ani family who had been in power for 200 years. (The current president, U.S. puppet Hamid Karzai belongs to the Durrani clan). Seventy percent of the population was landless peasants, locked in a feudal like dependency on wealthy landowners for survival. Estimates are that industrial workers numbered about 1.5 million. Women were particularly oppressed, relegated to the home.

Students at Kabul University formed clandestine political parties of various ideological leanings, joining workers and peasants in their struggles and taking to the streets in the growing movement for change in which women played a major role.

Zahir Shah gave women equal rights under the constitution of 1964. Some women benefitted, attending college and abandoning the veil, but for most women, little changed. Zahir Shah did little to improve the abysmal living conditions of the vast majority of Afghans. Life expectancy was 37 years, 1 in 3 children died in childbirth, and illiteracy was 80 -90. There were few paved roads, only one doctor for every 50,000 Afghans and electricity in just a few major cities. Unemployment was widespread and key government jobs and army positions went to the King's family. Unions and political parties were banned.

The largest of the burgeoning parties was the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which recruited members amongst the strikers, the army, the police force, youth and women, in the cities and rural areas. It was a Marxist party with affiliation to the CPSU, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union- its northern

neighbor.

Religious fundamentalists, although small in number, also began to organize. The most well known was the Hizb-islami Party led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was to be the most infamous warlord in the years to come. His followers attacked women not wearing burkas, throwing acid on their faces and on the legs of those wearing short skirts.

1973-1978: Mohammed Daoud, the King's cousin, seized power through a coup, abolished the monarchy and established a republic with himself as president. With aid from the Soviet Union he began a plan of economic development, building factories and infrastructure. He opened schools and more girls were educated. Political parties now openly organized. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) grew among students and workers in the cities and rural areas. When the fundamentalists opposed his social reforms, especially those helping women, Daoud outlawed Islamic political parties. Their leaders fled to a safe haven in Pakistan under the military dictatorship of U.S. ally, general Mohammed Zia Ul Haq.

The U.S. was vying for influence in Afghanistan. It provided aid - but that fell far short of the aid provided by the USSR. The U.S. also established cultural and educational program, to win hearts and minds. The CIA actively recruited students, sending likely candidates to study in the U.S.

When the PDPA, frustrated that poverty under Daoud continued as before, began to protest his policies, Daoud had many of its leaders imprisoned.

1978-1989: In April 1978 Daoud was overthrown in a coup engineered by one of the leaders of the central committee of the PDPA, Hafizullah Amin, which established the Marxist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan with PDPA leader Nur Muham-

mad Taraki as president. Initially, many people enthusiastically supported the new government. But there were others--especially religious fundamentalists and wealthy families--who opposed its social reform program and joined others in Pakistan to build a jihad - a war against the Afghan communist government. Beginning in July 1979, these jihadists or mujahadin were secretly funded and trained by the CIA through the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) of Pakistan.

Sept. 1979: Corrupt PDPA Vice President Amin, thought by some to be a CIA agent, had Taraki murdered and took over the government, police, and army, imprisoning and killing thousands who opposed him, PDPA members as well as others.

December 1979: A group of PDPA leaders asked the Soviets for help in getting rid of Amin. The Soviets sent in troops. Amin was killed in the fighting and PDPA leader Babrak Karmal took over as President. The PDPA government instituted rapid reforms, giving land to peasants, building factories, opening schools and health clinics

The confrontation between the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the CIA-funded Mujahadin escalated as the U.S. and Saudi Arabia increased their funding to the Mujahadin. China and European countries also provided aid and weapons. Men were recruited to the jihad from around the world - including today's most wanted terrorist, Bin Laden. (Later to lead the terrorist group al Qaeda). Schools, called madrassas, were set up to train the next generation of jihadis, some of whom came to be known as the Taliban. The Soviets sent in more troops, and the conflict turned into a proxy war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. fought on Afghan soil, mostly in the rural areas, which lasted for 10 years.

February 1988: After years of failed peace negotiations the Soviets finally withdrew their troops. Babrak Karmal stepped down. Mohammad Najibullah became president. Najibullah instituted a new policy of national reconciliation reaching out to the Mujahadin.

1989-1992: The Mujahadin, who were

divided into seven groups, rejected Najibullah's peace initiatives and the civil war between the ANA and the fundamentalists continued. It ended three years later when a faction of the ANA went over to the Mujahadin.

1992-1996: The seven groups of the Mujahadin established the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and fought each other for power. Kabul was destroyed in this war, as were schools and hospitals throughout the country. Thousands with connections to the previous leftist government - teachers, office workers - were killed by the Mujahadin.

Thousands more died in the fighting between the different groups. Women were forced out of jobs and schools, losing all the gains they had previously made.

1994: Aided by the ISI of Pakistan and CIA, another group of Mujahadin known as the Taliban grouped in the south of Afghanistan and began a drive for power.

June 1996 - 2001: The Taliban finally forced the seven groups (later to become U.S allies known as the Northern Alliance) to the north and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Restrictions on women were increased and enforced by the Taliban police, including a total ban on women working outside the home, going to school, or seeing male doctors

October 7, 2001: The US invaded Afghanistan, less than a month after the 9/11 attacks, and aided by the Northern Alliance warlords forced the Taliban to retreat into mountainous border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

December 2002: The U.S. installed Hamid Karzai, a member of the former king's tribe, with ties to the Mujahadin, as president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Karzai, a former consultant to the U.S. oil company UNOCAL, had been one of the negotiators between the Clinton and Bush administrations and the Taliban in failed talks to build pipelines from the oil-rich Caspian Sea region through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean before 9/11.

Many Northern Alliance warlords, former Mujahadin became more powerful than Karzai.

September 2003: Women for Afghan Women (WAW) and women from all over Afghanistan met in Kandahar, discussed and drafted the Women's Bill of Rights. They submitted this important document to President Karzai for inclusion in the new constitution that was being drawn up.

January 2004: The Afghan Constitution was revealed. It did not include any of the women's demands. But, in spite of lack of government programs and in the face of opposition from fundamentalists that has led to many attacks and even assassinations, some local government officials and women's groups are struggling to educate women, to find work for them, and to fight for women's rights.

2008: Since the U.S. invasion Afghanistan has become the world's top opium exporter, producing 87% of the world's heroin. The U.S now has 2 large and 20 small permanent military bases in Af-

ghanistan. Large areas of the country are at war. The Taliban have re-emerged, their ranks swelled by Afghans who are angered by the large number of civilian deaths caused by U.S. air bombings and worsening conditions. After 7 years of U.S. occupation, 70 of Afghans live on less than \$2 a day. Life expectancy is 45 years. One out of 5 children die before age 5 and the maternal mortality rate is 1600 per 100,000 live births, the second highest in the world. For women, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

The new administration has pledged to send 20,000 more troops into Afghanistan. With U.S. and other international oil companies planning to build oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan, the U.S. is once again seeking to make a deal with the Taliban, working with Karzai and the Saudis to bring the Taliban into a coalition government.