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The Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*]: Finding Trotsky after Stalin and Mao?

Darren Atkinson

Introduction: why examine the Left Radical of Afghanistan?

- ¹ For many analysts of Afghanistan, the importance of leftist political ideology came to an end with the reformulation of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) [*Hezb-e Demokratic-e Khalq-e Afghanistan*], the ostensibly communist party of government, as the Homeland Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Watan-e Afghanistan*] in 1987.¹ This event, along with removal of Soviet troops in 1989, the ouster of President Najibullah's in 1992, and his eventual execution in 1996, has meant that Afghanistan's political development has tended to be analysed in relation to the success and failures of the Mujahedeen, the rise, fall and rise of the Taleban and the implications of US and NATO intervention and occupation. In counterpoint to this focus, this article sets out to examine the question of how left-wing political movements in Afghanistan have adapted and changed in the period after the fall of the PDPA and Soviet Union. This will be achieved through examining the ideological and organisational trajectory of a group of workers and activists operating under the label of the Left Radical of Afghanistan (LRA) [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*].² The LRA is a small, urban political group and workers' association that traces its history to the Afghan Maoist tradition.³ Their activists are predominately based in Kabul and appear to have little engagement with 'tribal' or rural politics outside of the capital city. They are predominately Dari speakers and their activists refuse to identify themselves as anything other than 'Afghan' when requested to discuss their ethnic background.⁴ It is a movement that draws its members from the urban working-

class in Kabul, with activists coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds and, in addition, it does not appear to be connected to groups from the intelligentsia or middle-class.⁵

- 2 Due to its politics and history, the LRA have no connections to groups close to power and influence; they have modest finances and no significant internal or external political support. As a result, the LRA have little chance of creating significant political agitation amongst the Afghan working-class. This all points towards the apparent conclusion that the LRA is a minor movement which offers scholars only limited insight into the trajectory of mainstream Afghan politics. However, this article argues that the very existence of such a grassroots workers' association in Kabul warrants closer inspection for three main reasons. First, it provides evidence that underground leftist activity and agitation can be re-articulated as a radical movement away from power, with political activities focused on international solidarity and organisation of workers. Second, it highlights that not all current political movements in Afghanistan are either grassroots Islamic movements (i.e. the Taliban and its offshoots), elite-led movements built around a leader (whether a technocrat such as President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai or a 'warlord' such as Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum) or entrenched movements that first came to significance in the 1960s (i.e. *Hezb-e Islami*, *Jamiat-e Islami* etc.). Third, the LRA's revision of its revolutionary ideology through renouncing its Maoist past in favour of a Trotsky-influenced, internationalist political ideology is a reformulation that positions the LRA apart from other known Afghan leftist political groups.⁶
- 3 In order to undertake research on the LRA, the author has engaged in activities based around cultivating contacts with members and affiliates of the movement. This included conducting structured and semi-structured interviews with activists, taking part in clandestine meetings and studying the content of their available political writings. In order to use this information, the article utilises a method of analysis that approaches the words, both written and spoken, of LRA activists as being inherently meaningful, with the goal being to use its statements as a reflection of its ideological position. Triangulation of information on the LRA is a relatively difficult task for a number of reasons, including the fact that the LRA operates as an underground movement, does not regularly publish materials in Dari or Pashto, let alone any European languages, and, as a working class political association, has limited educated, middle-class members with the time and/or inclination to publish pamphlets or propaganda. Its very nature as a workers' association and proto-political party makes it difficult to analyse, but this article attempts to make best use of the, admittedly limited, documentary evidence to present an initial sketch of the LRA's origins, ideological development and political activities. The article is not intended to be read as a definitive history of leftist movements in Afghanistan, or even the LRA itself, but aims to provide a biographical sketch analysed against the background of Afghan political history and wider developments of leftist ideology.
- 4 The question of what tribal, regional or ethnic affiliations undergird both leaders and members of political movements is one frequently encountered by researchers of Afghanistan. With regards to the LRA, their stated position is that they repudiate tribalism and ethnicity for the primacy of class struggle and that they have 'the honour of having members from all ethnicities and most of the provinces of Afghanistan.'⁷ When requested during a meeting in 2013, LRA members refused to answer questions on their ethnicity and reiterated, as Loyand most recently stated, that they welcome people 'from all ethnic backgrounds.'⁸ In fact, when the question of ethnicity was posed, the chair of

the meeting asked directly: 'why do foreigners always talk about 'Pashtun' or 'Tajik' or 'Uzbek'? We are Afghan.'⁹ If one accepts the LRA's adherence to class-struggle, and the author's position as a foreign observer, their reticence to provide a clear ethnic categorisation of their members is understandable. In fact, it can be argued that the continued focus on ethnicity as a key marker of Afghan identity is symptomatic of the longstanding (and ongoing) colonial imagining of the inhabitants of the geographical space of 'Afghanistan' initially implemented by the British Government under the guise of the East India Company in the early nineteenth-century (Hopkins 2008, Bayly 2013). However, with regards to categorising the ethnic and sociological makeup of LRA members, it is possible to make the following reflections. The LRA claim that all ethnic groups are accepted and included as a result of their belief in the primacy of promoting class-struggle. Their members are working-class men with manual labour jobs and women do not appear to be included in the group discussion environment.¹⁰ Religion is not discussed as a mode of analysis, but it is accepted that the members are all Muslims, even if this is not a specific requirement.¹¹ Participants appear to have little formal education, bar two student participants and a teacher who were the youngest members of the group. The language of discussion at meetings is Dari and, other than one participant from Nangarhar province and one student living and studying in India, all other participants in the political discussions appear to be based in Kabul.¹²

- 5 The article will explore the formation, development and ideological journey of the LRA as a political movement and will be split into two broad sections. In the first section, it will provide context through presenting an historical overview of left-wing politics in Afghanistan and will provide a brief summary of the status of left-wing political thought and organisation in Afghanistan in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and PDPA. In the second section, the article will go on to explore the historical development of the LRA in order to position it within the framework of left-wing thought in Afghanistan. Subsequently, it will examine the ideology of the LRA as articulated in its own statements and will scrutinise it in reference to Trotskyist thought in order to identify its political lineage. Finally, the article will examine the LRA's current political activities in order to provide evidence of how they utilise direct political action to implement their ideological beliefs before, in the conclusion, arguing for the relevance of researching and studying a movement such as the LRA.

Left-wing political thought and organisation in Afghanistan

- 6 This section will present a short overview of the historical development of proto-leftist and leftist organisation and thought in Afghanistan in order to provide context to the founding of the LRA.¹³ Afghanistan was governed by the PDPA, a self-declared revolutionary party that adhered to tenets of Marxist-Leninist thought, from 1978 to 1992. This period of rule came about after a military coup on 27 April 1978 and its immediate replacement by a civilian government led by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin; a series of events dubbed the 'Saur Revolution' by its proponents. The organised leftist movement that led to the Saur Revolution came about through grassroots political organisation that took place on the university campuses in the major cities during the 1960s; however this was not the starting point for leftist agitation and influence in Afghanistan. Involvement of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s during the

subjugation of the Basmachi movement and the annexation of the autonomous Khanates of Khiva, Bokhara and Khokand (Bennigsen & Wimbush 1979), as well as rising political turmoil in British India, were external factors that led to the spread of the ideas of revolution, socialism and communism throughout Afghanistan (Marwat 1997). In addition, the involvement of Afghans in the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920 suggests that left-wing thought in Afghanistan also has a domestic economic and social base and that, since the October Revolution of 1917, there have been Afghans committed to reform and leftist agitation (Dupree 1979: 2).¹⁴

- 7 The exact implications of early communist agitation in Afghanistan have not, as yet, been uncovered and the first indications of proto-left-wing political organisation appear to have originated in the aftermath of World War II. In this volatile period, Afghans began to organise in groups that showed characteristics similar to post-colonial national liberation movements that based their ideas around reform of society. Two significant movements related to the development of left-wing political organisation included the Awakened Youth [*Wesh Dzalmian*] and the Secret Unity Party [*Hezb-e Seri Itehad*], both of which showed characteristics of organisation and ideology that would be seen later in Afghan revolutionary political movements. *Wesh Dzalmian* was a largely Pashtun organisation that evolved into something resembling a proto-political party in the early 1950s and, it has been argued, provided the domestic blueprint of political organisation for other politically minded Afghans (Ruttig 2006). *Hezb-e Seri Itehad* was an underground political movement that, according to Behzan, sought to overthrow the monarchy of Afghanistan in order to establish a republic. It was formed around the ideas of 'Sayyid Ismail Balkhi, a Shiite leader from the north, and Khwaja Muhammad Naim, the powerful Sunni police commissioner of Kabul,' with their objectives being to 'kill the prime minister, arm members of the party, release prisoners, and take the national radio station and the royal palace' (Behzan 2012: 446-449). This political environment was the precursor to the establishment of two important proto-parties of the Left: the Fatherland Party [*Hezb-e Watan*] and the People's Party [*Hezb-e Khalq*]. These parties should perhaps be seen as the forerunners of organised leftist movement with both *Watan* and *Khalq*, as Ruttig notes, offering policies with a leftist hue such as: 'national government, free elections and the establishment of political parties,' although it was *Hezb-e Khalq* that had the 'somewhat more left leaning agenda, adding 'social justice' and the 'fight against exploitation' to the demand for democratic rights' (Ruttig 2006: 5).
- 8 Nonetheless, it was not until the 1960s student movements that left-wing political thought became entrenched in Afghan intellectual circles. At this time it became possible to see discernible left-wing ideology, organisational remit and potential for mass mobilisation coalesce among Afghans seeking radical social, political and economic change. It was from this point that the two main ideological trends of the Afghan Left can be broadly categorised. The first trend were the Marxist-Leninists, some of whom formed the PDPA in 1965, which split into two factions: *Khalq* [the masses] and *Parcham* [the banner] before reuniting in 1977. The second trend were the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM) movement, with the main current being formed around the Progressive Youth Organisation [*Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqi*], known as Eternal Flame [*Shola Jawid*], after the political organ of the party (Emadi 2001: 433-40). At this time, when radical leftist groups outside these two broad traditions were gaining traction in the West (as seen through the development of the 'New Left' ideological tradition and the factionalism within Communist parties after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956), there appears to

have been no organised Afghan movements based on following the teachings of Trotsky or any trend that could be accurately described as ‘anti-Stalinist.’¹⁵ Indeed, Afghanistan’s leftist movement appeared to be tied to the debates that raged between the followers of Stalin and Mao in the 1930s and 40s.

- 9 Once in power the PDPA, under the direction of the Khalqis, drew rhetorical inspiration from the October Revolution and saw their goal as creating a workers’ state based around a centralised Politburo and top-down revolution, whereby reforms were enforced by the political elite at the expense of political and social cohesion (Halliday 1978). After the assassination of Taraki and his replacement by Amin, the Soviet Union invaded, replaced the ruling Khalqis and imposed elites from Parcham, led initially by Babarak Karmal (1979-1986) and, lastly, by Mohammad Najibullah (1986-1992). What took place during the period of PDPA rule can best be described as tumultuous and contested, as the PDPA and the Soviet Union fought a war against the foreign-backed, yet popular, uprising of Mujahedeen. By the mid-80s both the PDPA and the USSR appeared to have accepted that enforced political reform should be shelved in order to promote policies of ‘national reconciliation’ that they believed could lead to peace between the government and their opponents (Najibullah 2011). The revolutionary fervour of 1978 quickly faded amidst the reality of the lack of a revolutionary social base, the existence of radical resistance to PDPA rule, the difficulties involved in achieving social change, factional infighting, overt Soviet control and regular authoritarian and brutal crackdowns on Maoist, Mujahedeen and other ‘counter-revolutionaries’—or simply ‘enemies’ as they were often described (Halliday & Tanin 1998).
- 10 Revolutionaries from a Maoist background had generally rejected the Saur Revolution and called for a revolution based around a peasant-led rural uprising that would draw inspiration from the developments that led to the Chinese Revolution in 1946. *Shola* espoused an oppositionist radical left perspective, which claimed that the PDPA should be seen as a revisionist party of Soviet imperialism that had inaccurately portrayed the status of the Afghan peasantry and working class. For *Shola*, Afghanistan was a feudal country that required revolution to be led by radicalised peasants; all other policies of revolution were doomed to failure (Ibrahimi 2012: 2). Divisions between the Maoists and the PDPA were always apparent, but became deeply entrenched after 1978 when Maoist groups became active members of the anti-government rebellion and fought in the resistance against the PDPA and its Soviet patrons. Opposition to the PDPA was a widely accepted position among Maoists due to their ideological differences and the brutal crackdown their movement faced under PDPA rule. However, there appears to have been deep concern amongst a small portion of Maoists regarding the alliance forged between leftist revolutionaries and radical Islamists during the Mujahedeen years.¹⁶ These debates continued to rage among Maoists in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the PDPA, and provided the backdrop to the decision-making of left-wing revolutionaries in the ‘post-communist’ era.
- 11 In effect, very few of the Saur Revolution’s objectives were implemented, millions of Afghans were killed, and the cause of social and economic justice was set back many years. What took place under PDPA rule was, as Rubin noted, a ‘failure of revolution from above’ (2002: 111-21). This spectacular and disastrous failure has meant that, ever since, the Afghan Left have had to reconcile their normative political beliefs with the reality of history. The governing ideology of the PDPA underwent a process of attempted reform during the period after 1987 when the party, under the leadership of the Parcham

President Najibullah, became known as the Homeland Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Watan-e Afghanistan*], and effectively renounced socialism in favour of proto-nationalism and 'national unity' (Rogh 2001). This led to a further deepening of divisions between the factions of Khalq and Parcham and, in March 1990, a coup led by Minister of Defence and Khalqi Shah Nawaz Tanai was attempted, but defeated (Bodansky & Forrest 1990). Eventually, in March 1992, and as a result of a lack of domestic support and, more importantly, the lack of external support from the newly post-communist Russia, the United States or the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the remnants of the PDPA fell and a transitional Mujahedeen government was proclaimed (Dorronsoro 2007: §4).

- 12 The radical Islamist ideology of the apparently victorious Mujahedeen factions, combined with their belief in the myth that their actions destroyed the Soviet Union, ensured that the rump movements of the Left had to operate in isolation, away from the state and political power during the 1990s. The culmination of these domestic and international political developments created the conditions for the continued splintering of the Left into ever smaller groups with limited power or organisational remit within Afghan society. However, even though the Left was marginalised and occupied a space outside of the structures of power now controlled by the Mujahedeen factions, the ideas of the leftist tradition still held traction amongst small groups who remained committed to upholding the same ideological beliefs. At this point, leftist groups (whether drawing lineage from the ruling PDPA or oppositionist Maoist backgrounds) that did not renounce their beliefs in full either reformed their political ideology (mainly, but not exclusively, along nationalist lines) or reconvened as political discussion circles in Afghanistan or in exile.¹⁷
- 13 The formation of leftist exile groups in Pakistan and Europe was significant for the continuation of leftist thought and organisation after 1992. These groups played a key role in enabling leftist cadres and party members to remain collectivised as well as in providing a base through which they could continue to formulate ideas and policies. After Afghanistan was invaded by the US and its allies in 2001 and the Taleban government was removed, many of these groups felt it was possible to operate in the ostensibly democratic environment. As such a number of these exile groups re-formed, either as official parties or underground movements and, although forced to renounce their socialist views should they wish to become legally registered, continued to call for Afghanistan's social and economic structure to be reformed. Some of the groups that reformulated their views in this period include: the direct successors to Najibullah's Parcham faction of the PDPA, the Democratic Homeland Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Milli-e Watan-e Afghanistan*], which can be said to propose a nationalist-leftist vision of Afghanistan;¹⁸ the Afghanistan Peace Movement [*De Afghanistan De Solay Ghorzang Gond*] led by ex-Khalqi PDPA Defense Minister Shah Nawaz Tanai, which has a somewhat Pashtun nationalist-leftist ideology;¹⁹ the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan (SPA) [*Hezb-e Hambastagi-e Afghanistan*], a radical-leftist oppositionist group,²⁰ and the Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Komunist-e (Ma'uist) Afghanistan*], which is one of the main Maoist oppositional parties with direct lineage to *Shola*. While this is not an exhaustive list of the leftist successor movements in Afghanistan, it goes some way to show that, far from disappearing from the political scene, reformulated movements that adhered to revised political ideals of leftist reform continued to exist and operate after 1992.

- 14 As was the case in other post-communist states throughout Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the solutions adopted to save communist political parties were numerous, with the likelihood of survival dependant on the success of ideological and organisational reformulation (Møller & Skaaning 2010). It seems that a number of the movements in Afghanistan adopted a strategy of what Ziblatt calls 'leftist-retreat' (Ziblatt 1998: 135) whereby communist parties re-evaluate their position in order to create a new vision of their ideology. Parties attempt to renew the concept of what it means to be a socialist or, as Ziblatt wrote regarding the East German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), they seek to 'distance themselves from their Soviet-influenced origins in order to return to an idealised 'authentic' pre-Soviet Marxist past' (Ziblatt 1998: 129). The Afghan Left appears to have undertaken this particular transformation in a modified form, as this vision has been adopted by members of the ruling PDPA as well as by radical leftists who were part of the opposition. Many leftists believe that overt socialism is unsuitable for Afghanistan, but a number of groups have revised their ideologies in search of something more suitable. This has caused movements to accept the history of failure of leftist reform and to argue that its failure was inevitable due to the nature of the entrenched social, political and economic order that characterises Afghanistan.
- 15 Through undertaking a similar process of revising their understanding of Afghan history, the LRA have attempted to fashion themselves a distinctive, more 'authentic' Marxist position within the post-1992 landscape of the Afghan Left. They have attempted this by undertaking a 'leftist-retreat,' whereby their ideology and political activities are rooted to a belief that progress is achieved through a gradual process of workers' organisation and international solidarity, itself built on a return to an idealised form of communism that gives precedence to the thought of Trotsky, and to a lesser extent Marx, at the expense of Stalin and Mao.

History, ideology and political activities of the Left Radical of Afghanistan

- 16 The article will now move on to explore the history, ideology and political activities of the LRA after its formation during the post-PDPA landscape of Afghanistan. During 1996, the LRA came into existence after announcing its split from the Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (ALO) [*Sazman-e Rihay-e Afghanistan*], a Maoist political movement that traces its history back to the 1970s, and which is itself a splinter from *Shola*. Formed in 1973, the ALO is a movement that still declares Maoist thought as 'its guiding theory,' based on which it 'believes that a proletarian party, a people's army and a united national front are the indispensable means by which the masses in semi-colonial semi-feudal countries can bring their anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution to victory.'²¹ The ALO was part of the Maoist opposition to both the PDPA and the Mujahedeen and, according to its own lore, its founder Dr. Faiz Ahmad was murdered in 1986 at the hands of Mujahedeen militants from Hekmatyar's *Hezb-e Islami*.²² Since the fall of the PDPA, the ALO has remained committed to its ideological position as a Maoist party and still believes that '... the services rendered by Comrade Mao Zedong were paramount and his mistakes subordinate.'²³ This belief in the importance of Mao is further expressed through their disdain for the current iteration of China, who according the ALO, have betrayed 'proletarian internationalism' and have fallen 'into the quagmire of revisionism,' and

become ‘an exploiter and a superpower aggressor’ as a result of initiating the Xiaoping reforms.²⁴

- 17 Mainly comprised of ex-ALO members, the LRA also claims to have welcomed members and affiliates from other leftist groups, including the Afghanistan People’s Liberation Organisation [*Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardom-e Afghanistan—SAMA*].²⁵ The split took place as a result of three main differences between the LRA faction and the leadership of the ALO. First, there were disagreements surrounding revolutionary ideology, with the ALO apparently content to work within the existing structures of Afghan society and make alliances with members of Islamic groups and the population of educated, urban middle-classes (what the ALO has termed the Afghan ‘national bourgeoisie’).²⁶ Second, there was a lack of democracy within the central committee of the ALO that prevented the LRA faction from expressing its opinions about ideological reform and adaptations to political organisation.²⁷ And third, in what appears to be one of the most interesting differences, the LRA’s apparent weariness with the ideology of Maoism and, in particular, with the continued focus on peasants over workers, with the description of Afghanistan as a ‘semi-feudal’ society and with the ALO’s acceptance of the Iranian revolution as progressive. For the LRA, the ALO ‘ignored the class struggle and wanted to make a united front with the enemies of workers and peasants.’²⁸
- 18 This break can be seen as a fundamental shift in political ideology, as it moves the LRA away from Maoism, which sees Afghanistan as a society rooted in the traditional landowner/peasant dichotomy, and re-positions it within the sphere of classical Marxist argumentation that calls for the importance of the state and the working class as the vanguard of revolution. For the LRA, Afghanistan should not be seen as comparable to pre-communist China, but congruent with modern underdeveloped states that participate in the global economic system. Indeed, Afghanistan’s domestic economic system, built on the accumulation of surplus capital by an indigenous capitalist elite class, is definitively capitalist in nature.²⁹ On the domestic political scene, and as former ALO members, the LRA work with numerous other small proto-parties or groups, including: the Afghanistan Socialist Association (ASA) [*Jamiat-e Sosialisthai-e Afghanistan*], the Afghan Revolutionary Organisation (ARO) [*Sazman-e Inqilabi-e Afghanistan*], the Afghanistan Socialist Workers’ Organisation (ASWO) [*Sazman-e Sosialisthaie Kargri-e Afghanistan*], and the Afghanistan Workers’ Organisation (AWO) [*Sazman-e Kargran-e Afghanistan*]. All of these groups appear to share the LRA’s belief in anti-war politics and anti-imperialist rejection of the NATO occupation, although they do not necessarily share the LRA’s desire for developing international solidarity and organisation of workers.³⁰ In addition, the groups come from a Maoist ideological background, but since the collapse of the PDPA and the accession to power of the Mujahedeen, only the LRA and the ASWO have attempted to reposition themselves in the international radical left outside of the MLM tradition.³¹
- 19 While it is clear that the LRA comes from a Maoist-influenced background, and still draws many of its contacts and connections from its previous incarnation as a faction of the ALO, it has stated that it ‘prefers to work with leftists who have clearly rejected their past program and ideological positions.’³² However, through their own admission, they have yet to develop connections with other radical groups such as the SPA, and still tend to draw their support from their traditional base of ex-ALO members.³³ The key requirements for individuals wishing to join the LRA are that they repudiate Maoist revolutionary ideas, and their conceptualisation of the social structure of Afghanistan,

and be open to the ideas of the radical left as understood by the LRA. The development of the LRA can thus begin to be seen as an attempt, even though it was imposed upon them through the necessity of history, to re-articulate what it means to be a leftist group in Afghanistan. They appear to be attempting to shift the focus from the seemingly impossible task of overthrowing the established capitalist state, or establishing Leninist control over fragmented peasants and workers, to one of supporting small-scale workers' dissent and building links within the international radical left.

- 20 The LRA declares that it is 'not a typical Trotskyist party but it learns from him and accepts his thoughts.'³⁴ This is an interesting development among the Afghan Left, as Trotskyist movements do not appear to have any history in Afghanistan. The LRA declare themselves to be a 'radical left organisation' working to build an 'independent workers' party' in Afghanistan, based on commitment to 'class struggle and workers' internationalism.'³⁵ Afghanistan's class structure has been defined by Maoists as semi-feudal in nature, structured by a series of contractual obligations between rich landowners and peasants with similarities to pre-industrial, medieval Europe. The LRA have declared this position to be obsolete and have attempted to re-categorise how they understand Afghan capitalist development. Semi-feudal modes of production suggest that Afghanistan is pre-capitalist, with a labour force made up of peasants who work for landlords in mainly agricultural pursuits, but, unlike in traditional feudal relations, the peasants retain some form of control over their working lives (Thornor 1982). There is little doubt that Afghanistan still retains these modes of production, especially in the more rural areas of the country; however, the question of whether peasants have diminished importance or remain viable as the potential vanguard of revolution has long caused division among Afghan revolutionaries. Even though this debate seems somewhat archaic to the outsider, in Afghanistan its importance should not be understated. Revolutionaries believe that it is imperative that they understand the nature of the economic system that they and their potential comrades live under.³⁶ As a result, if Afghan radicals reject the concept of Afghanistan retaining conditions similar to those of medieval Europe, then their programme of political activity is likely to undergo significant revision.
- 21 The LRA support the view that Afghanistan's wage labourers exist under false consciousness, i.e. rather than being peasants, they are in fact workers subject to capitalist relations.³⁷ The ongoing war that has beset Afghanistan since the arrival to power of the PDPA has, according to the LRA, led to significant changes to the social structure of the Afghan working-class and means that it was vital to undertake a revision of previously-sacrosanct ideas in order to adjust to the changes that history had presented. For example, the LRA are correct to argue that many Afghans now regularly sell their labour as daily wage labourers and are paid by 'capitalists in farms, buildings, mines, road construction, brick-kiln, weaving-loom, fabrics, transportation, hotels and restaurants, stores and harbours' (*New World* 2001: §32).³⁸ This belief is consistent with the urbanising culture that has seen the populations of the cities rapidly increase since the US invasion of 2001. As a result of these changes, the economic reality for a large percentage of Afghans is that they are now subject to the daily grind of obtaining work in the informal employment sector controlled by capitalists who made or increased their fortunes during the US-led occupation, rather than operating as farmers in the fields of landowning elites. This belief in the changed social, economic and political order means the LRA's position puts them in opposition to that of Afghan Maoists and has led them to

seek alternatives through engaging with Trotskyist thought and with foreign groups from the wider radical left.

- 22 The LRA's ideology in relation to revolution is a consequence of this revised view of Afghanistan's economic structure. One of the key aspects of Trotskyist thinking in relation to post-World War II revolutions is the belief that the East European and Chinese revolutions that led to Communist governments were 'Stalinist,' regardless of whether the USSR was directly involved, as in Europe, or peripheral, as in China (Callinicos 1990: §7). This view is echoed by the LRA. For them, the distinction made between the Maoists and PDPA is a false one. They view the disputes between the Maoists and the PDPA as a function of their unwillingness to understand the true nature of Afghanistan's social structure. They believe that the enmity between the PDPA and Maoists was not based on a disagreement over ideology, and that both sides believed in top-down revolution. The disagreements were merely over which social class should be the vanguard of the revolution according to each group: the intelligentsia and the armed forces as understood by the PDPA, or the peasantry as espoused by their Maoist opponents.³⁹ For the LRA both of these views were historically inaccurate and constituted a rejection of Marxist thought, and are, in essence and effect, Stalinist in character (*New World* 2001: §31-36). For the LRA, the Afghan peasants, who exist under false consciousness, and the military and intellectual elites, in thrall to a foreign power, are both likely to be 'reactionary' in nature and, as such, they should not and could not be the starting point for revolutionary activity in Afghanistan.⁴⁰
- 23 On the subject of the aims of the Trotskyist revolutionary party, Callinicos notes that they should aim to break up the '...old state apparatus' and replace it with one '...under workers' direct and democratic control' (1990: §10). Achieving a '...complete overthrow of the existing state' and its institutions of bureaucratic control is indeed a stated aim of the LRA, although they fully accept this is more of an overarching revolutionary ideal than a realistic possibility.⁴¹ The LRA is an organisation that is comparable to other non-Afghan radical parties in that they appear to have two goals: raising class consciousness and establishing a new political apparatus. Their activities are predicated on their ideological belief that they need to dismantle the structures of the existing state. However, they appear to understand that the only realistic goal is to organise workers and activists in order to seek social change that will have a direct impact on the lives of workers and peasants. These two positions sometimes come into direct tension, but due to the LRA's small size, limited finances, and understanding of the political environment in which they operate, they are fully aware that the goal of class solidarity takes precedence over any desire for a mass-mobilised revolution.⁴²
- 24 Underpinning the LRA's political concerns is their stated adherence to three main principles: '...class struggle, mass revolution and workers' internationalism.'⁴³ These statements provide further evidence that the LRA's ideology draws on orthodox Trotskyism and classical Marxism.⁴⁴ Class struggle is achieved through the constant need to educate and 'enhance the class consciousness of the working class and liberate workers from their attachment to religion and Jihad.'⁴⁵ Mass revolution, as discussed above, is understood to be an overarching goal even if it is not a realistic objective. However, they believe that when working towards social change, it is not sufficient to support or call for a revolution from above, as undertaken by the PDPA, or to support the establishment of a government headed by a militant peasantry as requested by the Maoists. For the LRA, only a mass-participation revolution led by workers will have any chance of changing the

structure of Afghanistan and its ruling class.⁴⁶ In addition, and to provide further evidence of their debt to Trotsky, it is never enough to seek national liberation without a similar concern for international liberation. For the LRA, Afghanistan is not an island, it is a component of the global system, and the problems suffered by Afghan workers are ‘tied with the interest of all world workers’ (*New World* 2001: §45).

- 25 Examining the views of the LRA on the future of Afghanistan also provides clues regarding their ideological beliefs. They believe that the Left should unite and create direct opposition to what it sees as the forces of reaction: ex-Mujahedeen, Western political domination and the Taleban. In this regard, the LRA exists on a political spectrum that places it in opposition to most currents of leftist successor ideology in Afghanistan. Many leftist successor parties have registered as legal entities and have positioned themselves within the existing political framework as conceived by the US and its allies. For the LRA, one of the most important current objectives is supporting the removal of the US and NATO from Afghanistan, as they feel that until the occupation has ended, no real progress can be made.⁴⁷ Whilst they accept that areas of the country will fall to the Taleban, they believe that only when Afghanistan is free from ‘imperialism’ of any kind will conditions be suited for the establishment of an indigenous workers’ movements that could act as the vanguard of revolution. For the LRA, the only path that can be successful is an Afghan solution supported by external solidarity; any quasi-colonial state structure is designed to fail the people of Afghanistan.⁴⁸ The LRA also stands in opposition to the Taleban, and other forces that stand against NATO, as it calls for the creation of a state of complete equality between the various ethnic groups and the liberation of women through the end of ‘chauvinism.’⁴⁹
- 26 Clearly, and repeatedly, the LRA outline ideological similarities with Trotskyist thought. They have based their ideological development on views that challenge the orthodoxies of Afghan leftists and appear to explain the many failures and disasters of the experiment with left-wing politics that took place in Afghanistan after 1978 through a radical reinterpretation of recent history. It is clear that, ideologically, the LRA has made an attempt to move away from its Maoist past—the question is why? There are numerous structural reasons behind this shift away from past positions, both internal and external. The internal reasons are based around the fact that left-wing political thought, and anything seen as remotely ‘atheist’ by a majority of Afghans, had been fatally damaged by the wreckage of the PDPA-era. For Afghan leftists, there has been a legitimate case to review the failures of the PDPA government and its counterpoint Maoist insurrection. In addition, ostensibly leftist individuals and groups have been forced to undertake ideological reform to shift their views for pragmatic reasons of survival in the challenging environment of the Mujahedeen victory, Taleban takeover and US-led occupation. During this period there were also external forces at work that have played a significant part in the development of leftist political thought in Afghanistan. In the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the ascension of China into the capitalist order, ex-communist parties, whether in government or opposition, have had to attend to the changed political structure of a ‘post-communist’ political system.
- 27 This appears to be the fundamental truth behind the LRA’s change of ideology: without any external support and the political reality of a failed revolution from above, it was imperative that they formulate a new ideological position. For the LRA, the Saur Revolution led to a situation where alliances were fostered between leftist Maoist and religious Mujahedeen factions, in opposition to the ‘Stalinist’ PDPA government. These

alliances, made for strategic purposes, served to undermine any possibility of a leftist replacement for the PDPA. This meant that once the PDPA was ousted from power, the Maoists realised they had not aligned with 'freedom fighters' searching for a just and progressive Afghanistan, but merely allied themselves with opposing forces with a radical, yet, reactionary political ideology. In a world without a functioning left-wing state capable of providing material support, alongside the almost universal Afghan rejection of any political movement resembling leftist ideology, there were only three choices available to a political movement such as the LRA: retreat to their view of Maoism, revise their view of Maoism and move towards another leftist tradition, or discard their ideological position completely, as many ex-PDPA individuals and groups did after 1992. As stated in the previous section, it appears that the LRA have attempted a reformed 'leftist-retreat' and are still committed to the ideals and ideas of the leftist tradition.

- 28 Examining the importance placed by the LRA on political activities linked to Trotskyist thought will allow us to understand their political evolution into a radical leftist front with limited connection to Maoist concerns. However, before undertaking this review, the article will first address the issue of the LRA's membership level as this has direct implications on their political activities. Unfortunately, and despite numerous requests, it has not been possible to ascertain the membership level of the LRA.⁵⁰ This presents a number of problems, not least by preventing the article from being able to establish with any certainty the LRA's importance with regards to its level of support within the current Afghan political system. In line with previous scholarship on leftist party membership, and through understanding the traditional lack of attachment to political parties in Afghanistan, it can be assumed that LRA membership is very low (Giustozzi 2000: 253). This low number of members, while suggesting that the LRA will not be able to instigate any form of mass mobilisation, highlights the LRA's own stated position as a rejectionist group, tied to its working-class roots. It understands that it operates in an environment of radical opposition, with its main objectives being to build solidarity amongst workers as opposed to focusing on breaking down the capitalist order.
- 29 The LRA believe that the current *comprador-bourgeois* make-up of the Afghan state structure prevents any socialist, secular or atheist organisations from being able to operate as viable political concerns.⁵¹ As a result they do not see involvement in the existing US-sponsored 'democratic' system as being beneficial to their campaign for rights and equality for workers, and have limited their engagement to oppositionist tactics such as taking part in demonstrations and organising clandestine political discussion circles.⁵² However, the LRA admit to working within legal processes such as external workers' solidarity campaigns, which suggests that they believe it can be of some benefit to work within the current political structure when their political objectives can be promoted.⁵³ Participation in demonstrations against NATO occupation have also been a hallmark of the LRA's engagement in Afghan politics and in 2005 three members were arrested by the Afghan National Police, which led to solidarity messages being sent from international parties and trade unions in the US and Europe.⁵⁴ All of these activities are comparable to the activities of radical leftist groups in other countries—an attitude of rejection, resistance and underground political organisation as opposed to taking part in the processes of democracy as decided upon by elites.
- 30 Leftist parties in America and Japan have demonstrated some connections with the LRA. For example, the LRA's English theoretical publication *New World* [*Dunia-e Naw*] is

published on the website of the Japanese leftist group known as 'Internationalism.' In addition, the Freedom Socialist Party, a US-based socialist party, with roots in Trotskyism, that split from the Socialist Workers Party of the United States, has published a letter from the LRA that calls for the immediate removal of NATO troops as a result of the widely reported Panjwai massacre in Kandahar Province, where a US soldier killed 16 civilians.⁵⁵ Commitment to solidarity with like-minded socialist groups outside of Afghanistan has also been a hallmark of recent LRA activity and they have shared 'documents, newsletters, and declarations' and participated in events with political groups based in Pakistan, Iran and India.⁵⁶ In addition, the chair of the LRA meetings undertook a visit to Mumbai, India, as the LRA were invited to take part in a regional solidarity conference involving political parties and trade unions, including members of the All Pakistan Trade Unions Federation.⁵⁷ This trip was undertaken to enable the LRA organising committee to raise awareness of Afghan leftist politics, as well as to gain insight into the formation of a legitimate workers-led union. It is clear that for LRA members the formation of an active general trade union led by and for workers is the foundational bedrock of their revolutionary political activities.⁵⁸ However due to a lack of funds, a stated focus on national issues, and despite numerous requests from regional and international organisations, it has not been possible for the LRA to join a socialist international in an active or observer capacity.⁵⁹ The general lack of engagement in international conferences and inability to join a socialist international has clearly limited the exposure of the LRA and may be one of the reasons why they have failed to develop a more widely-known political program.

- 31 Another key political activity highlighted by the LRA is its use of 'entryist' tactics within existing organisations such as local NGOs and civil society groups. Entryism is the process of operating within an existing organisation to enable the LRA to gain access to potential recruits through promoting its ideology without the need to operate as a political movement.⁶⁰ One of the most recent examples of the use of entryism took place in the aftermath of the Abkhorak mine explosion in Samangan Province, northern Afghanistan. This disaster led to the deaths of 27 Afghan miners, all of whom were working without adequate safety protection, insurance or equipment (*TOLONews.com* 2013). In the aftermath, the LRA claim to have operated in the region through a civil society group and helped distribute solidarity aid to the families of the victims. They did not conduct open political activities, but helped the families of the victims question the lack of protection provided by the mine owners and the lack of support that they were offered by the Government of Afghanistan.⁶¹ In addition to these activities, the LRA as a political movement openly submitted calls for an inquiry and a solidarity fund to be provided by the mine owners and the Afghan Government, and published articles in support of the victims and their families.⁶²
- 32 Perhaps the most important example of the LRA's commitment to small-scale political action over large-scale utopian projects is their demonstrated commitment to workers' solidarity. The LRA conducts regular bi-monthly meetings at the houses of LRA members in Kabul. These meetings are held with up to ten members (plus non-member guests) and are led and convened by the organising committee of the group.⁶³ The LRA generally splits these regular meetings into three separate parts. The first acts as a general discussion of politics in Afghanistan, with a detailed focus on the situation of workers in Kabul. During the second, workers discuss their issues with the organising committee and are offered advice and support on how to solve their work-related problems through

organising collective responses. For example, during the first LRA meeting, one of the workers talked at length of the safety risks they are exposed to in the telecommunications sector, and how the management of these organisations often pay little attention to the lives of their employees, some of whom had died on the job.⁶⁴ The third section is conducted by the chair of the meeting, and its purpose is to discuss the development of their key objective: the formation of what is best described as ‘one big union’—the formation of a workers-led and operated general trade union that will unite disparate Kabuli wage labourers and enable them to speak with one voice to both the government and their employers.⁶⁵

- 33 In order to promote the cause of trade unionism in Afghanistan, the chair of the meeting on 6 December 2012 presented a document outlining some of the key needs for a trade union representing workers across all industrial sectors in Kabul. This document was from the ‘The Coordination Committee and Dispute Resolution to Create the Labour Union,’ and presented an outline of the objectives with regards to the formation of a Kabul-based manual workers general trade union. For example, the document states that the ‘...committee’s goal is to create a bylaw for the formation of the labour union, not a specific group or organization.’⁶⁶ This is important because ‘...to end the dire situation of both the ideal and the movement we need to come together as one, we cannot achieve anything by being in groups, dispersed and disunited.’⁶⁷ Perhaps this statement should be seen as utopian, bearing in mind the history of enmity and division among the Afghan Left; however, at its core is a message that should be seen as compatible with the LRA’s current understanding of the political environment in which they function and their belief in small-scale workers’ organisations. The production of the document, and the creation of a coordination committee focused on this issue, shows that the LRA is taking its responsibilities towards its members and associates seriously. By calling for unity among the Afghan Left, as expressed through the establishment of a workers-led general trade union, the LRA appear to be continuing with a political activity that complements their revised political ideology, whereby they understand their group as a post-Maoist organisation with more than a passing resemblance to other Trotsky-influenced, radical leftist political movements.

Conclusion: the relevance of the Left Radical of Afghanistan

- 34 After breaking away from their parent organisation, the Afghan Liberation Organisation, in 1996 the cadres of the Left Radical of Afghanistan created a political movement and workers’ association that aimed to move away from its Maoist past. This study attempts to position the LRA within the spectrum of what is understood about left-wing thought in Afghanistan and shows that their adoption of an ideology influenced by Trotsky appears to be a novel development. It shows that the LRA established itself as radical leftist in orientation, with ideological similarities to international socialist and Trotskyist groups, although its working-class origins ensure it remains a grassroots rather than intellectual movement. This development is important because there has been a lack of research into the way that Afghan political groups from the leftist tradition have attempted to revise their ideological and organisational positions after 1992.

- 35 Because of its limited size, and the illegality of its operations, the LRA should be understood as a minor group with little chance of penetrating the Afghan working class and, as such, its importance within the political and ideological landscape of Afghanistan is limited. However, as suggested throughout this article, the LRA is interesting as a subject of analysis because its very existence provides evidence that underground leftist activity and agitation can be re-articulated around workers' solidarity and opposition to the status quo without being connected to the political programmes of grassroots Islamic movements, elite-dominated groups built around entrenched leaders or unreconstructed political movements with roots in the 1960s. The LRA have rejected the ideological constraints that they believe have limited the Afghan Left, and at the same time remain in opposition to the US-led occupation and existing capitalist order. They have achieved this both by design and through circumstance, and have positioned themselves as a radical left-wing political movement committed to class-struggle and the rejection of divisions based on ethnicity, tribalism or nationalism. They draw their membership from members of Kabul's working-class and attempt to connect their domestic concerns to a wider understanding of workers' internationalism. Due to their limited funds and small size, they are well aware that their objectives must be small-scale and long-term. Their essential desire is to use their distinctive ideological position to develop a base of support among urban workers through the establishment of a successful workers-led trade union. They hope to build on this base by taking part in solidarity efforts with likeminded leftist groups domestically, regionally and internationally and by promoting their agenda more widely.
- 36 It is clear that there is much work to be done to gain a full and detailed understanding of the trajectory of left-wing political groups in Afghanistan as each movement is defined by its own particular history, ideologies and organisational structure. However, the existence of a group such as the LRA shows that, through a process of ideological reform and a re-articulation of the goals a left-wing group should work towards, it is still possible within the complex political, economic and social geography of Afghanistan for movements of the Left to maintain a form of political organisation and ideological cohesion.

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NOTES

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2. The author first became aware of the existence of the LRA after being provided with an anonymous email address by an Afghan contact. Next, a series of email exchanges with the LRA's self-declared 'Foreign Affairs Representative' Nasir Loyand was undertaken. Through this engagement, Loyand agreed to take part in a number of email interviews and eventually provided the text of the LRA's *New World (Dunia-e Naw)*. Following this, a research trip to Kabul, Afghanistan was arranged in 2013-14 and the author cultivated communication with members of the LRA. Subsequently, interviews with the pseudonymous 'Ahmad Noor' were secured and he provided oral testimony regarding the LRA's ideology and organisation. This led to invitations to spend time with LRA activists during two bi-monthly meetings that took place at private residences of members in two separate working-class districts of Kabul in December 2013 and February 2014. This article relies on two key informants from the LRA, Nasir Loyand (activist living in Peshawar, Pakistan) and Ahmad Noor (teacher from Nangarhar, Afghanistan). Both of these names are pseudonyms and are used in order to protect their status as activists in an underground movement.

3. The term 'association' or 'group' or 'movement' is used interchangeably in order to avoid usage of the term 'party' as the available evidence on the LRA suggests that there is no 'collection of communities' built around variants of the 'caucus,' 'branch,' 'cell' or 'militia,' but simply a loose association of left-wing workers with similar political ideologies (Duverger 1967: 17-36). Similarly, the term 'faction' has been avoided, except when referring to the LRA as unit within the ALO, in order to prevent any negative connotations (Sartori 1976: 3-13).

4. It is understood that the nature of the term 'Afghan' is highly contested and is usually synonymous with 'Pashtun,' 'Pakhtun,' or 'Pathan' identity. There was no attempt to press the LRA on this concept as they appear to use the legalised term as a catch-all to allow for the universalisation of all ethnic groups that live within the geographical space known as 'Afghanistan' (Allan 2001).

5. The chair of the LRA meetings worked as a labourer for a telecommunications company and the oldest member of the group was employed as a road sweeper, with his salary paid by the government (Field notes, 20 February 2014).

6. For example, the by-laws of the Democratic Homeland Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Milli-e Watan-e Afghanistan*], one of the main successor parties of the PDPA, repeatedly underline their nationalist credentials at the expense of their socialist past. The Solidarity Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Hambastagi-e Afghanistan*] appears to be one leftist organisation with a similar political agenda to the LRA and, while important for future work, it is outside the scope of this paper to undertake a direct comparison of their ideological similarities and differences.

7. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, Foreign Affairs Representative of the LRA, 28 December 2012. There is, at this moment in time, no way of accurately testing this claim.

8. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 25 October 2014.

9. Field notes, 6 December 2013. See note 4 for further elaboration on the concept of being 'Afghan.'

10. This is despite their purported belief in female emancipation. Essentially the cultural reality of Afghanistan takes precedence over ideological purity.

11. Prayers are held by the group during their meetings, although these appear to take the form of a collective prayer before lunch and not individual or collective prayers as would be expected in a highly religious group.

12. Field notes from LRA activist meetings, 6 December 2013 and 20 February 2014, Kabul. The LRA claim to hold meetings in other parts of Afghanistan, although this has not been confirmed.

13. For more insights into proto-left-wing, radical political party development and leftist agitation in Afghanistan see, for example, Castagné (1935), Marwat (1997), Emadi (2001), Ruttig (2006), Behzan (2012), Ibrahim (2012), Giustozzi (2013) and Ruttig (2013). Halliday's work

published in the *New Left Review* and *The Nation* (1978-81) and Louis Dupree's series 'Red Flag Over the Hindu Kush' (1979-80) both provide detailed and illuminating accounts of the early PDPA-era.

14. The Baku Congress was held in September 1920, during the early years of Afghanistan's King Amanullah-led attempts at social reform, and was attended by a wide variety of political revolutionaries from across Asia. According to the delegate list, an Afghan communist known as 'Aga-Zade' and a non-party member known as 'Azim' were both in attendance with another, 'Kara-Tadzhiyev,' also noted to have attended (Congress of the Peoples of the East, 1920, First Session: §2; Seventh Session: §11). The stenographic report does not collate any figures for 'Afghans.' This anomaly can perhaps be explained by their collation into ethnicities such as 'Hazaras' and 'Tadzhiks' and 'Uzbeks' amongst others, although no 'Pashtun,' or variants thereof, are listed. This information is available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/delegates.htm>. For those wishing to read in more detail about the discussions at Baku, the proceedings are available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/index.htm>.

15. Interview with Abdur Rashid Arian, ex-PDPA Politburo Member, Kabul, 28 October 2013.

16. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.

17. Interview with Abdur Rashid Arian, ex-PDPA Politburo Member, Kabul, 28 October 2013.

18. Democratic Homeland Party of Afghanistan [*Hezb-e Milli-e Watan-e Afghanistan*] (2014) 'By-Laws of the Democratic Homeland Party of Afghanistan', translated from Dari by Mohammad Zafar Salehi [unpublished].

19. Interview with Shah Nawaz Tanai, PDPA Defence Minister, Kabul, 26 March 2014. Tanai did not admit his movement was Pashtun nationalist in orientation, but his background as a *Khaqi* radical, his purported (although denied) links with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the fact his movement is named in Pashto suggests it takes this stance.

20. Although it is outside the scope of this article to undertake a comparison of their respective ideologies, it appears that Solidarity is perhaps one of the closest movements to the LRA. For example, the SPA are committed to secularism, women's rights, democracy and opposition to the US/NATO occupation (Osservatorio Afghanistan, 2014).

21. <http://a-l-o.maoism.ru/spoints.htm> §7.

22. <http://a-l-o.maoism.ru/ahmad-e.htm> §7.

23. <http://a-l-o.maoism.ru/spoints.htm#party> §30.

24. <http://a-l-o.maoism.ru/spoints.htm#party> §35.

25. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28th December 2012.

26. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.

27. The LRA claim that no congress or conference has ever been held by the ALO leadership to discuss ideology and leadership. I have not been able to confirm or repudiate this point.

28. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 16 January 2014.

29. Interview with Ahmad Noor, LRA Activist and Nangarhar Representative, Kabul, 19 November 2013.

30. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 16 January 2014.

31. This has not yet been confirmed by the ASWO. As mentioned above, the SPA also appear to be in the same bracket as self-declared radical leftists.

32. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 16 January 2014.

33. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 16 January 2014.

34. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.

35. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.

36. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, Afghanistan, 19 November 2013.

37. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, Afghanistan, 19 November 2013.

38. *New World (Dunia-e Naw)*—‘A political-theoretical publication of the Left Radical of Afghanistan (LRA)’ is the only organ of the LRA that has been published internationally and in English.
39. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, 19 November 2013.
40. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, 19 November 2013.
41. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
42. The specific focus on workers’ solidarity and on addressing concerns of individual workers was especially apparent at the December 2013 LRA meeting (Field notes, 6 December 2013).
43. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
44. In *New World* the LRA use the Marxist slogan ‘Workers of the world, unite!’ on more than one occasion and it seems to be a key refrain of their political outlook.
45. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 16 January 2014.
46. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
47. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.
48. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, 19 November 2013.
49. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, 19 November 2013.
50. The LRA’s position on this topic is that, for political reasons, it cannot provide any information on membership numbers. Without any verified information on this topic, it will continue to be difficult to assess the LRA’s importance with regards to membership numbers.
51. A *comprador* is ‘a person who acts as an agent for foreign organisations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation’ (*Oxford Dictionaries* 2014). The term ‘comprador bourgeois’ in this sense should be seen to mean the alliance of the Afghan elite and middle classes with foreign economic, social and political institutions and governments.
52. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
53. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
54. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
55. Freedom Socialist Party, <http://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/1869>.
56. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 4 January 2013.
57. Field notes, 20 February 2014.
58. Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*] (2014) The Coordination Committee and Dispute Resolution to Create the Labour Union [Draft] (‘Aqrab 1392), translated from Dari by Mohammad Jawad [unpublished].
59. Personal email communication with Nasir Loyand, 28 December 2012.
60. This is a key requirement of political organisation because, as the LRA are a group that promotes secularism, they are an illegal organisation under the current Afghan constitution.
61. Interview with Ahmad Noor, Kabul, 19 November 2013.
62. Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*] (2013) ‘The families of died mine workers, need your support’, Supporting Committee of the Victims of Samangan Coal Mine, translated from Dari by Nasir Loyand [unpublished].
63. Field notes, 6 December 2013.
64. Field notes, 6 December 2013.
65. As Ruttig (2014) shows, there is a limited yet ongoing history of labour movements in Afghanistan and one national organisation, the National Union of Afghanistan Workers and Employees [*Ittehadia-ye Melli-ye Kargaran wa Karmandan-e Afghanistan*], is currently in operation. There was no suggestion that the LRA wanted to work with this existing union due to its reported ex-PDPA connections and the LRA commitment to grassroots organisation.
66. Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*] (2014) The Coordination Committee and Dispute Resolution to Create the Labour Union [Draft] (‘Aqrab 1392), translated from Dari by Mohammad Jawad, §6 [unpublished].

67. Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*] (2014) The Coordination Committee and Dispute Resolution to Create the Labour Union [Draft] ('Aqrab 1392), translated from Dari by Mohammad Jawad, \$5 [unpublished].

ABSTRACTS

Leftist political thought and organisation in Afghanistan is generally thought to be represented by two broad ideological trends: Marxist-Leninist and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM). These disparate and factionalised groups sought ideological, political and economic support from the USSR and China and, during the fractious period of rule by the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) [*Hezb-e-Democratic-e-Khalq-e Afghanistan*], they became entrenched in political enmity and violence. This period came to an elongated end with the removal of Soviet troops in 1989, the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the removal of Najibullah as President in 1992 and the ensuing civil-war. It was from this milieu that, in 1996, the Left Radical of Afghanistan (LRA) [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*] was formed by a group of ex-Maoist Afghan political refugees living in Peshawar, Pakistan. The LRA is a small, urban, Kabul-based political and workers' association that traces its history to the MLM tradition. It has little domestic, regional or international support and its existence does not point towards a radical shift in political organisation and ideology in Afghanistan. Yet, the LRA provides evidence of how left-wing political thought in Afghanistan functions, in this case as a re-articulated ideology of resistance influenced by Trotsky. The article traces the history, ideology and activities of the LRA and attempts to place them in context. However, the main purpose is to provide a space through which to understand, on its own terms and in its own words, the nature of the LRA as a working-class, left-wing, Afghan political and workers' association.

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Keywords: Afghanistan, communism, Maoism, radical left, Trotskyism, post-communism

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