The Development of Left-Wing Political Thought and Organisation in Afghanistan

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Abstract
Communist rule in Afghanistan (or rule underpinned by some tenets of communist thought) ran from 1978 to 1992, when the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was the party of government. One of the many outcomes of the Saur Revolution of April 7th 1978 was the belief that organized leftist, socialist and communist political parties were initially formed through grassroots political organization that took place on the university campuses in the major cities during the 1960s. However, with the involvement of Afghans in the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East and the formation of underground parties in the 1950s there is evidence to suggest that the antecedents of left-wing thought in Afghanistan go much further than the foundation of the PDPA in 1965. This paper will aim to explore the history of left-wing political thought in Afghanistan and will attempt to provide an overview of the long-history of class division and political organisation. The paper will look at how leftist thought developed before, during and after the PDPA regime and will conclude by providing a sketch of the current situation of left-wing political thought and organisation that can be seen in Afghanistan today.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Left-Wing, Communism, Socialism, Revolution, Reform

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Introduction

Afghanistan is often presented as a place of kings, clerics and warlords with the Afghan people relegated to insignificant bit-part players or referred to in quasi-mystical terms as noble people of indomitable spirit and will. This view is misguided for a number of reasons including its ignorance of the many examples of quasi-colonial domestic and external domination that have characterised Afghanistan since, at least, the 18th century as well as being out of step with the study of history as seen in other more politically significant countries. The majority of the literature on Afghanistan, as the Afghan scholar Hafizullah Emadi (1997: xv-xvi) writes, ‘…lacks analysis of socio-economic and political developments and fails to note the class-character of the state’. One of the outcomes of this view of political history in Afghanistan is that there have been noticeably few attempts by scholars writing in the English language to explore the development of indigenous revolutionary movements in Afghanistan and to explore how and why they developed in a country of such seemingly religious and conservative people. This paper will look at the development of left-wing political thought in Afghanistan and will argue that far from emerging from a vacuum of Soviet control in the 1970s its roots can be taken back to at least the early 1920s as a result of the rapidly changing external geo-political and domestic socio-economic realities.

The paper will be split into five sections and will examine the development of left-wing political thought and organisation in Afghanistan from the beginning of the 20th century to the current day. First, it will begin by exploring the ground for political change that was laid in the period of Amir Habibullah Khan (1901-1919) that eventually led to the anointing of the reformist King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929). Second, the paper will look at the implications of the Russian October Revolution, including early Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and will examine the evidence of proto-Communist or Socialist movements.

Third, the paper will look at the impact of the end of the Second World War and the development of national liberation movements across the world and will attempt to place the growth of radical leftist movements within this framework of global political change. Fourth, the paper will review the history of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) (Hezb-e-Demokratik-e-Khalq-e-Afghanistan) from its formation in 1965 up to and including its eventual demise as the party of government in 1992 and will explore this in conjunction with the Maoist opposition. Lastly, the paper will look at the role of left-wing political groups in Afghanistan after 1992 and will show that left-wing ideas and organisation have not become totally obsolete in this period but have reformed and adapted to the political situation and still operate, albeit from a position of far less influence than the previous decades.

* See, for example, the letter from Phillips Talbot to American Universities Field Staff (1940:1) in which he describes Afghans as “…a well-built, sturdy man who is defiant, he is so independent”.
† For example, understanding of the history of Nazi Germany has developed to such an extent that the idea of merely focusing on the elite-level decision making of Hitler or Goebbels was discredited many decades ago.
‡ The work of Thomas Ruttig and Hafizullah Emadi are noticeable exceptions to this.
Antecedents of Left-Wing Thought

It was with the accession to power of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) that Afghanistan first became recognisable as a “modern” state with defined boundaries with British India, the Russian Empire, the various Khanates of Central Asia, China and Persia. Afghanistan’s history in this period is indelibly linked with that of the British Empire. While not a direct colony of the United Kingdom, Afghanistan was long within the remit of British India and, due the internalisation of British ideas about what it meant to be “Afghan”, the legacy of understanding Afghanistan through the British colonial lens has become the dominant conceptual framework (Hanifi, 2009). When Amir Habibullah came to the throne in 1901 it was amidst a backdrop of elite reformulation across the Muslim world that saw the rise of constitutional movements in the Ottoman and Persian empires, the growth of pan-Islamic movements, the burgeoning power of workers’ movements in Russia and the progress of independence movements in British India. It was during this period of historical tumult that the first clearly defined reform movement began to take root in Afghanistan.

The constitutionalist movement or mashrutiat (1903-1909) should be seen as the first organised political movement focused on institutional and political reform in Afghanistan. Its organisation was based on constructing a new political system around reforming the absolutist qualities of the Afghan Amir, removing British control of foreign policy and establishing a constitutional monarchy that invested power in Afghan elites outside of the Royal Court (Ruttig, 2006: 3).

Throughout this period the intellectual call for reform came from within the hierarchical Pashtun elites and there is little evidence to suggest that popular social movements had the capacity to develop outside of these circles due to the lack of national unity and low socio-economic development of the geographical space known as Afghanistan. This period led to significant elite discord and certain members of the Pashtun elite, based around the Afghan nationalist Mahmud Beg Tarzi, began to formulate a process of modernisation of the Afghan state through the creation of its first newspaper (Saraj-ol-Akhbar-e-Afghaniyah (The lamp [or torch] of the news of Afghanistan) (Dupree, 1964). Saraj-ol-Akhbar was the first attempt by Pashtun elites to establish an “Afghan” identity that, for the first time, attempted to ‘redefine the term “Afghan” on a geographic and religious, rather than merely ethnic, basis, implying the equality of all the inhabitants of the country’ (Gregorian, 1967: 349). Newspapers have great power in helping to create a sense of national belonging through their ability to create a sense of simultaneous understanding of the existence of other people with the same national identity (Anderson, 1983: 30). It was with the establishment of newspapers in Afghanistan that the first seeds of national identity were sown – something that is vitally important for the establishment of left-wing political movements.

After World War I and the October Revolution

The Bolshevik takeover of Russia in the October Revolution of 1917 had a significant impact on domestic politics in Afghanistan. For the first time in its history Afghanistan was now bordered by a state with a declared interest in assisting other states in seeking “liberation” from imperialism and domination from external

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One of the key concerns for the Bolsheviks in the period following 1917 was the establishment of ties with liberation movements and independent governments across Asia. This took many forms including the subjugation of Islamic independence movements such as the so called “Basmachi” movement and the attempt to develop closer ties with independent countries and liberation movements such as in Afghanistan and India. In 1919, *Pravda* wrote that “Comrade Lenin met the Ambassador in his private office with the words, “I am very glad to see in the red capital of the worker and peasant government the representative of the friendly Afghan people, who are suffering and fighting against imperialist oppression”” ('Interview with Mohammad Wali-Khan, Ambassador Extraordinary of Afghanistan, October 14, 1919’, 1919). Following this a series of letters were exchanged between Amanullah and Lenin which outlined the respective positions of the two states. It was clear from Amanullah’s words, where he stated that Lenin was “…the humane defender of civilization, the sincere protector of Eastern peoples and the friend of the free Afghan State and nation’ that he saw the pre-Stalin USSR as the main guarantor of Afghan independence (Amstuz, 1986: 11-13). In addition to what was happening in the USSR the situation in British India also provided external context for the ability of the Afghan monarchy to establish Afghanistan’s independence. Since, at least the Indian Mutiny in Bengal in 1857, political stability in British India was beginning to founder amidst calls for Indian unity and independence. Eventually the British brought into effect the Government of India Act 1919 which sought to placate these movements by offering limited political autonomy through a system described as “dyarchy” where rule is shared by two powerbases (i.e. the British and Indians) (Curtis, 1920: xxxi; Mitra, 1921). In many ways, this was the beginning of the end of “British India”.

Amanullah’s social, economic and political reforms played a significant part in establishing the class-based dispute that was taking place among the Afghan elites. For reasons that can only be hypothesised, Amanullah and his Royal Court of advisors became convinced that the only way that Afghanistan could develop was through a process of top-down European-style reforms that would re-shape society along the lines of what had been seen in Turkey under Kemal Mustapha. These reforms aimed to establish land reform that broke-up power landholders, mandatory education for both sexes and emancipation of Afghan women. What became apparent after these reforms were implemented was that his government would have address and challenge two major internal bases of powerful landowners and clerics, both of whom were heavily intertwined socially, politically and economically. The Mullah’s, as Emadi (1997: 4) writes, were opposed to socio-economic reforms but this was ‘…not a manifestation of their religious prejudices…but rather an expression of their class interests because a great number of Mullahs either were landowners or were on their payroll’. Due to the lack of a popular base, no external support from the USSR (caused by domestic Soviet issues and Afghan intransigence over Khiva and Bukhara) and the lack of a powerful standing army, the imposition of Amanullah’s reforms became an impossible task. The inability of Amanullah to formulate a political movement that would see through his

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* It is, of course, a matter of opinion whether the Bolsheviks sought true independence for colonial and quasi-colonial states or sought to develop ties with movements that would allow them more leverage in world politics but it’s clear that the ideological position of Lenin and Trotsky was based around providing support to independence movements across the world.
reforms eventually led to his downfall in 1929 but the ideas that not disappear and eventually were reformulated in a different time through different means but with the same end result: a conservative, elite-led backlash.

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and Amanullah’s reforms can both be said to have laid the foundations for the establishment of an indigenous Afghan left-wing political movement, although, as yet, no concrete evidence has ever been uncovered regarding the establishment of communist proto-political parties linked to Moscow in the 1920s. What is clear is that when the USSR called for the establishment of the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East there were up to 40 Afghan delegates who participated with three named directly in the proceedings of the Congress. The Baku Congress was held in September 1920, during the early years of Amanullah’s reforms, 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 (Congress of the Peoples of the East, Manifesto of the Congress to the Peoples of the East, 1920) and another, “Kara-Tadzhiev”, was noted to have been in attendance at the Seventh Session (Congress of the Peoples of the East, Seventh Session, September 7, 1920). During the collecting of demographic data the Afghans appeared to have been collated with the “Persians and Farsis” and “Jamshidis” and “Hazaras” (two ethnic groups from Afghanistan) as there is no separate record of Afghan attendees on the stenographic report.

What this shows is open to speculation as the single name formula commonly used in Afghanistan makes it almost impossible to track down who was in attendance and whether they represented an Afghan communist movement or were there at the behest of elements of the Afghan elite. It is possible to speculate that the Afghans were in attendance at the behest of King Amanullah in order to provide intelligence regarding Soviet aims across Asia and the Muslim world. However, with the development of proto-communist movements in Central Asia, the continued poverty of a majority of Afghans and the establishment of revolutionary movements in India and Persia it seems likely that there would have been genuine agitation for change among some sections of Afghan society, especially among the minorities such as Hazaras and Jamshidis who were noted to have been in attendance. While this issue will be open to debate for many years to come the records of the Baku Congress suggest that left-wing political activism can trace their history to at least the October Revolution of 1917.

**Post-World War II National Liberation and Internal Reform**

The period after the fall of Amanullah is one that offers little information about the continued importance of left-wing political movements in Afghanistan. As Tom Kemp (1977) notes in the foreword to the minutes of the Baku Congress, the “…leading figures, entrusted by the Communist International with the important work of encouraging the building of sections in the underdeveloped areas and among the national minorities in the Soviet Union, Zinoviev, Radek and Béla Kun, were to be murdered by Stalin in the 1930s” (Foreword to the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, 1977). After the death of Lenin and the excommunicating of Trotsky the ideals

* The editor’s note of the stenographic report notes that 40 delegates from Afghanistan travelled to Baku to participate in the congress (Congress of the Peoples of the East, Composition of the Congress by Nationalities, 1920).
and beliefs of the Communist International gave way to the USSR’s position on “Socialism in One Country” as espoused by Stalin in 1924 (Hallas, 1985). This had a significant impact on the construction of revolutionary movements across the East where many countries were still incredibly poor with little, to no, ability to develop sophisticated political organisation. It is of no doubt that the Stalinist eradication of the theorists and activists of Eastern revolutionary unity would have had a significant impact on the ability of Afghan revolutionary movements to organise and work against the power of the monarchy and other Afghan elites. As such, and due to the lack of any historical data to suggest otherwise, it seems certain that the left-wing movements moved towards the underground and had little impact on Afghan history during the 1930s.

During this period Soviet involvement in Afghanistan appears to have been limited to state-sanctioned imperialism in which the goals of Soviet foreign policy, such as the rights of the ‘…Russian émigrés from Turkestan’ who lived in Afghanistan for fear of reprisals from the USSR due to their Islamic beliefs, were at the forefront of concerns (Castagné, 1935: 703). Gone were the days of the USSR supporting genuine Asian revolutionary movements in the countries on its borders and beyond.

During the post-war period political movements based around further reform and change to the society began to take shape in Afghanistan. Of these movements two of the most significant for the development of left-wing political organisation were the Wesh Dzalmian (Awakened Youth) and Hezb-e Seri Itehad (Secret Unity Party) both of which showed characteristics of organisation and ideology that would later be seen in other revolutionary political movements. Hezb-e Seri Itehad was an underground political movement that sought to overthrow the monarchy of Afghanistan and establish a republic and 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’ (Behzan, 2012: 446). With their goals, as Behzan (2012: 449) notes, being to ‘…kill the prime minister, arm members of the party, release prisoners, and take the national radio station and the royal palace’ the platform of Hezb-e Seri Itehad had striking similarities to the eventual PDPA coup, although in this case the planned coup was never initiated. It appears that while not an ostensible left-wing political movement the underlying policies of rebellion against the status-quo had a significant impact on the development of left-wing political organisation.

Wesh Dzalmian was a largely Pashtun based organisation that formulated into something resembling a proto-political party in the early 1950s and can be said to have provided the blueprint for political organisation to other politically minded Afghans. Most importantly, for the study of the Left in Afghanistan, it was from this political environment that the two important proto-parties of the left came into existence: Hezb-e Watan (Fatherland Party) and Hezb-e Khalq (People’s Party). As Ruttig (2006: 5) writes, ‘…Both raised pro-democratic slogans: a ‘national government’, free elections and the establishment of political parties; but Hezb-e Khalq had a somewhat more left leaning agenda, adding ‘social justice’ and the ‘fight against exploitation’ to the demand for democratic rights’. The initial stages of left-wing political organisation can be seen to have originated from the political milieu World War II and as a result of wider geo-political developments, but it was not until Afghans began to organise in groups with characteristics of political parties that the clearly definable left-wing organisation can be seen to have arrived in Afghanistan. It was with the formation of the PDPA and its Maoist rivals in the 1960s that left-wing political thought and
organisation can be said to have become popular, at least among a section of Afghan society.

**The Rise and Fall of The Left (1965-1992)**

Prior to the founding of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) a period time known as the “Decade of Democracy” was implemented by Zahir Shah’s regime between 1963 and 1973. This decade saw the institutional opening of Afghan politics with the creation of a constitutional monarchy and the establishment of a form of parliamentary politics. Rather than being the hallmark of a genuinely democratic belief system it should instead be seen as an attempt by the monarchy and the ruling class to stem the tide of political agitation that was becoming a hallmark of Afghan politics as seen through the establishment of the political movements discussed in the previous section.

Throughout this period political parties were allowed to establish themselves and, in turn, created their own organs of communication such as newsletters and pamphlets that were distributed to supporters and potential supporters. However once these institutional reforms were implemented it became clear that the ruling class were unwilling to create a truly open political system and the levers of power were kept in hands of the powerful interests who had long dominated Afghan society. The top-down reforms were chaotically organised and eventually created the conditions for Zahir Shah’s government to lose legitimacy, first to his cousin, former Prime Minister Daoud, in 1973 and eventually to the PDPA in 1978. The elite-led and controlled democratic period led, as Ruttig (2013: 7) writes, “…to a further destabilisation of the country and to a radicalisation and diversification of the opposition”.

The PDPA was officially founded on January 1st 1965 and was the party of government from 1978 to 1992 having taken power in a military-civilian coup d’état on 27th April 1978 (Halliday, 1979). For a majority of its history it was split into two wings: *Khalq* (Masses) and *Parcham* (Banner). Much has been written about the PDPA’s status as a Soviet puppet deeply dependent on the USSR for its existence. While it is clear that the PDPA, and many of its most senior figures, were close with Soviet officials and implemented Soviet-style policies it is often overlooked that the PDPA grew as a result of numerous internal and external factors. The PDPA claimed power as a result of the underground work of political revolutionaries, both civilian and military, who were committed to changing the social and economic reality of Afghanistan. The existing political structure had provided little in the way of development for a majority of people and the burgeoning middle-class of teachers, junior army officers, civil servants and students influenced by events outside of the country formed the bed-rock of the PDPA’s support base (Halliday and Tanin, 1998: 1363). It was on the campus of Kabul University that the ideas and organisation for the PDPA truly found its way into the minds of the next generation of middle-class Afghans. President Daoud claimed power in 1973 with the support of the left-wing groups (before brutally cracking down on their activities). Once in office his

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*There is no room in this paper to explore the intricacies of the division between *Khalq* and *Parcham*. The traditional view is that *Khalq* was more rural and Pashtun and *Parcham* was more urban and Persian speaking but the author has series reservations about these particular assumptions.*
government disintegrated the institution of the monarchy and declared Afghanistan a Republic. This was a crucial last step which removed the remaining legitimacy for the continued rule of the existing elite and ensured that the establishment of a new governing framework would form the basis for any further political change in Afghanistan. It is the contention of this author that the subsequent removal of Daoud and the establishment of a new institutional framework was an historical inevitability – the exact outcome was not fixed but it is clear that the era of Mohammadzai’s, who had ruled the geographic space for hundreds of years, was over.

The PDPA-led military coup of the 7th of Saur was immediately replaced with a civilian government headed by NurMuhammedTaraki. This fact is often overlooked but it suggests that the “Saur Revolution” was not simply a military coup, as claimed by its critics and opponents, but was in fact implemented with some form of revolutionary zeal at the core of its ideology. Consolidation of power while in government proved to be harder to implement than the initial taking of power from President Daoud. After the assassination of Taraki in 1979 his deputy Hafizullah Amin (and supposed assassin) came to power before eventually being assassinated by the Spetnaz in 1979 prior to the Soviet invasion which led to the installation of BabrakKarmal. Direct involvement from the USSR helped to create huge problems for the PDPA and caused further entrenched of the political divisions that beset the partyas well asproviding the vital justification of foreign intervention to enable the rebellion to label their anti-government activity as “Jihad” against a foreign, atheist occupier. PDPA rule led to very limited reform and very few concrete changes to the social fabric of Afghanistan – in fact once the PDPA were removed from power their programmes were effectively rescinded and abolished. Perhaps the most important failure of the PDPA was their inability to construct an institutional framework that could replace the gap left by the collapse of the monarchy. It was as result of these failures, as well as the lack of external support to establish lasting change in Afghanistan, that the conditions for the anarchy and chaos that characterised the years of rule of the Mujahedeen and Taleban governments were created.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the development of left-wing politics in Afghanistan was the remarkable strength and support of the groups that aligned themselves with the theories of revolution as espoused by Mao Tse-tung. No history of the Afghan left is complete without some reference to their opposition to the movement of the PDPA and their eventual involvement in the rebellion against the government of the PDPA during the 1980s. The main Maoist current was formed around the Sazman-e-Jawanan-e-Mutaraqi (Progressive Youth Organization, PYO), known as Shola-ye Jawed (Eternal Flame) after their party political organ (Emadi, 2001: 433). Shola espoused an oppositionist radical left perspective whereby they claimed that PDPA should be seen as a revisionist party of Soviet imperialism who had failed to accurately analyse the status of the Afghan peasantry and working class. For Shola members Afghanistan was a feudal country that required revolution to be led by radicalised peasants from the countryside and anything else was doomed to failure (Ibrahimi, 2012: 2).

*This is the view of ex-PDPA Defence Minister Shah Nawaz Tanai. Author’s Interview, Kabul, 26 March 2014.
†Ibid.
In the 1960s it was student movements that led the way in the creation of radical rejectionist movements that sought to change Afghanistan and for a period of time the Maoists were, alongside the PDPA and Islamists, one of the most significant groupings on the campus of Kabul University. The divisions between the Maoists and the PDPA were deeply entrenched and there is no evidence of them working together to achieve a leftist takeover of the country. In fact, after 1978, the Maoists became members of the anti-government rebellion and actively fought in the anti-PDPA/Soviet resistance. This was a widely accepted position among the Maoists because of ideological differences and the brutal crackdown on their movement under the PDPA but, in later years, it provides some context behind the fragmentation of the Maoist left with certain ex-Maoist groups showing deep concern with the alliance with radical Islam that characterised the Mujahedeen years.

Reformulation and Reform after 1992

The PDPA (now renamed as the *Hezb-e Watan* or Homeland Party) started the decade of the 1990s still clinging to power. By 1992 the support of the (now) Russian government had dried up due to major domestic issues taking place and there was no international support for a peace treaty even after the many concessions that Afghan President Najibullah had offered to the rebels. Eventually it became clear to Najibullah that his time was up and that it was time to hand over power to a transitional government sponsored by the UN – on his trip to the airport to seek exile he was captured by the troops of his erstwhile ally General Dostum and was sent into exile at the UN compound where he lived until his eventual execution by the Taliban in 1996. The period after 1992 is one of an almost total breakdown of the state – there was little law and order and many Afghans continued to flee to Pakistan and Iran as well as the more educated finding themselves in various Western states. In many ways it seemed that the end of the PDPA was also the end of left-wing political organisation in Afghanistan – they had lost the war and the political tide had turned toward Islamism. This, however, was not the full story. The history of the left in this time period is hazy and sketchy at best but it appears that the ideas behind the movement did not just disappear; they reformulated and reformed both in exile and inside Afghanistan.

Groups active in Afghanistan during the civil war period of 1992-1996 and the Taliban period of 1996-2001 were forced to operate in the political underground. This involved all of the various leftist groupings including *Khalq, Parcham* and Maoist. As a result of the violence of the war, the politically opposed Mujahedeen and the fact that organisational structures had disintegrated due to many powerful figures living in exile, the members of left-wing political groups tended to operate as secret discussion circles. These discussion circles were crucial for the continuation of left-wing organisation and enabled members to meet and discuss political issues without the fear of being caught in public actively working against the new powerbrokers. Another significant approach to left-wing organisation in Afghanistan after 1992 was in the formation of exile groups in Pakistan and Europe. These groups played a key role in keeping party members together and collectivised and provided a base through which

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*Loyand, Nasir. Foreign Affairs Representative of the Left Radical of Afghanistan. Email Interview. 28th December 2012.*

*Arian, Abdur Rashid, ex-PDPA Politburo Member, Interview, 28th October 2013, Kabul.*
they could continue to formulate ideas and policies for Afghanistan. After Afghanistan was invaded by the US and its allies in 2001 and the Taliban government was removed, many of these groups felt it was now possible to operate in the ostensibly democratic “new” Afghanistan. As such many of the exile groups reformed either as official parties or underground movements and, although forced to renounce their socialist views should they wish to become legally registered, they continued to call for reform to Afghanistan’s social and economic structure. Some of the groups who reformulated in this period included Hezb-e-Watan-e-Demokratik-Afghanistan (ex-Parcham and direct successor to Najibullah’s PDPA/Watan), De-Afghanistan-De-SolayGhorzangGond (ex-Khalq, led by PDPA Defence Minister Shah Nawaz Tanai), Hezb-e Hambastagi-e-Afghanistan (a radical-left oppositional group) and Hezb-e Komunist-e (Maoist-e) Afghanistan (Shola-e-Javid) (the Maoist oppositional party). This is not an exhaustive list of the political movements in Afghanistan but it goes some way to show that far from disintegrating and disappearing from the political scene, reformulated political movements still adhering to the political ideas of left-wing, socialist reform continued to exist and operate in Afghanistan.

**Conclusion**

Radical calls for reform and revolution have been a hallmark of Afghan politics for the last one hundred years. The historical reality of significant social change and political organisation in the early 20th century had a profound impact on the course of Afghan history. Certain sections of the elites within Afghanistan, whether through ideological commitment or understanding that social changes were already taking place outside of their control, understood that change was both necessary and historically inevitable. This understanding led to significant attempted reforms of the social, political and economic fabric of Afghanistan and, as a result, helped the justifications for counter-reform movements based around elites who rejected these changes. The counter-reform movement, while ostensibly successful in ousting Amanullah, undermining reforms during the period of Zahir Shah and violently rejecting the modernisation reforms of the PDPA has not been able to prevent the ideas of change from becoming engrained in Afghan culture, most notably within the urban centres of the country. This paper has attempted present a general overview of some of the historical factors, both internal and external, that have created the conditions for the establishment of left-wing political thought and organisation in Afghanistan. The end of Soviet-controlled socialism in 1992 seemed to signal the death of radical left-wing political thought and organisation in Afghanistan and yet, while very much weakened, the ideas of reorganising Afghan society in order to improve the living conditions of all people lives on among a small section of politically engaged citizens.

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