

Muslim people struggle

by Cathy McDonald

Fear of the rising power of Islam spurred the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan, an editor of Islamic Horizons said recently.

Tariq Quraishi gave a moving account of the Muslim struggle for self-determination, to an audience at Dalhousie on January 21. The fight against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is "the last line of defense" of Muslim people, Quraishi said.

The growing awareness among Muslim people of their self-identity challenges Soviet authority in central Asia. Despite efforts to exterminate the religion, the number of followers of Islam has increased steadily to 20 per cent of the population of the Soviet Union.

Quraishi said three reasons could have caused the Soviet invasion, namely its fear of losing authority in a region which has importance as a defensive buffer, is a rich source of natural resources, and is earmarked to develop an irrigation project to solve Soviet agricultural problems.

"The Russians would have you believe that they are the only ones who represent the oppressed - but they are actually the oppressors. There is no nation on earth so consistent in its tyranny, its lust for territory and its deception," Quraishi said.

Soviet aggression employs a strategy of fratricide against its target nations. Through propaganda and bribes, the youth of a country are roused to fight their own people, even killing their parents in the name of an ideal. This is an inexpensive war in which the Soviet Union is engaged. In Afghanistan, the national army has dwindled from 80,000 to 20,000 men fighting

their own people. This serves the Soviets well by weakening the only organized force in the country capable of rising against them.

The brutal occupation has not been aided by the West, Quraishi said.

"The West believes a prolonged war is in its interests, allowing Russia to 'bleed' ". A weakened Soviet Union, losing \$7.5 billion a year on the war, would then become more financially dependent on the West, giving it a political lever.

Egyptian aid to the Afghan "freedom fighters" was little more than propaganda to appear as if the Americans are fighting the Soviet Union. The rusty, inoperable missiles are of little use to the Afghans, he said.

On another front, the Islamic revolution is being tested in the Iran-Iraq war. The Gulf nation states have given \$20 billion to Iraq's side of the war. Quraishi said the war is "a good development". "In six to eight months Iran will get rid of Iraq, which will be the end of American influence in the region."

It is time for Muslims to assert their rights, Quraishi said. For Muslims it has been a century of failure and humiliation, living under western and eastern colonialization. However, the last 30 years witnessed Pakistan's independence and the Iranian revolution, both events which hold "great promise" for Muslim people.

Quraishi made a plea to all Muslim and non-Muslim people who value freedom to support the struggle in Afghanistan, through the Human Concern Relief Fund Society, in Calgary.

"Never before in history have so many people had so much hope," he said.

The Soviet Union is afraid to lose its influence in an area of great political importance. Of concern to Russia even before the revolution, Central Asia now serves as a defensive buffer to anti-communist aggression. It was deemed to act as a "show window" to the East, a link to successful revolutions in Asia.

Natural resources are a second reason why the Soviet Union keeps a stronghold on Central Asia. The region has practically a monopoly on the Soviet supply of uranium, mercury and chrome, as well as providing roughly 80 per cent of copper and lead, and 30 per cent of coal and oil, essential for the Soviet Union's industrial development.

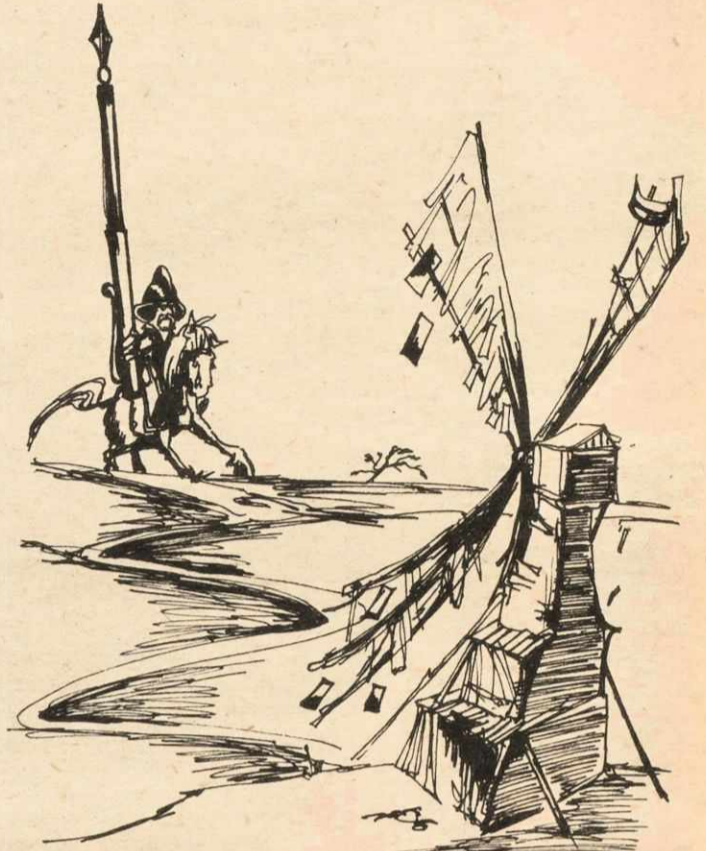
As an example of the Soviet Union's exploitation of the area, Quraishi pointed to the export of Afghanistan's natural gas. Importing this resource at half the world market price, the Soviet Union will deplete it in 50 years.

Despite the Soviet Union's exploitation of Asia and Africa and its centrally planned economy, it is in a very poor economic situation, Quraishi said. Its starving population presents the third reason for Soviet interests in Afghanistan, namely the Oxis River.

A 35-year old plan exists to divert the Oxis River through 410 miles of canal, away from Afghan tribes, to irrigate a Turkistan desert. This project, covering an area the size of France, would solve the Soviet Union's agricultural problems. However, international politics have prevented this move.

Quraishi said he did not know the true reason for the Soviet invasion, but he said it could include a combination of these theories.

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