

International VIEWPOINT

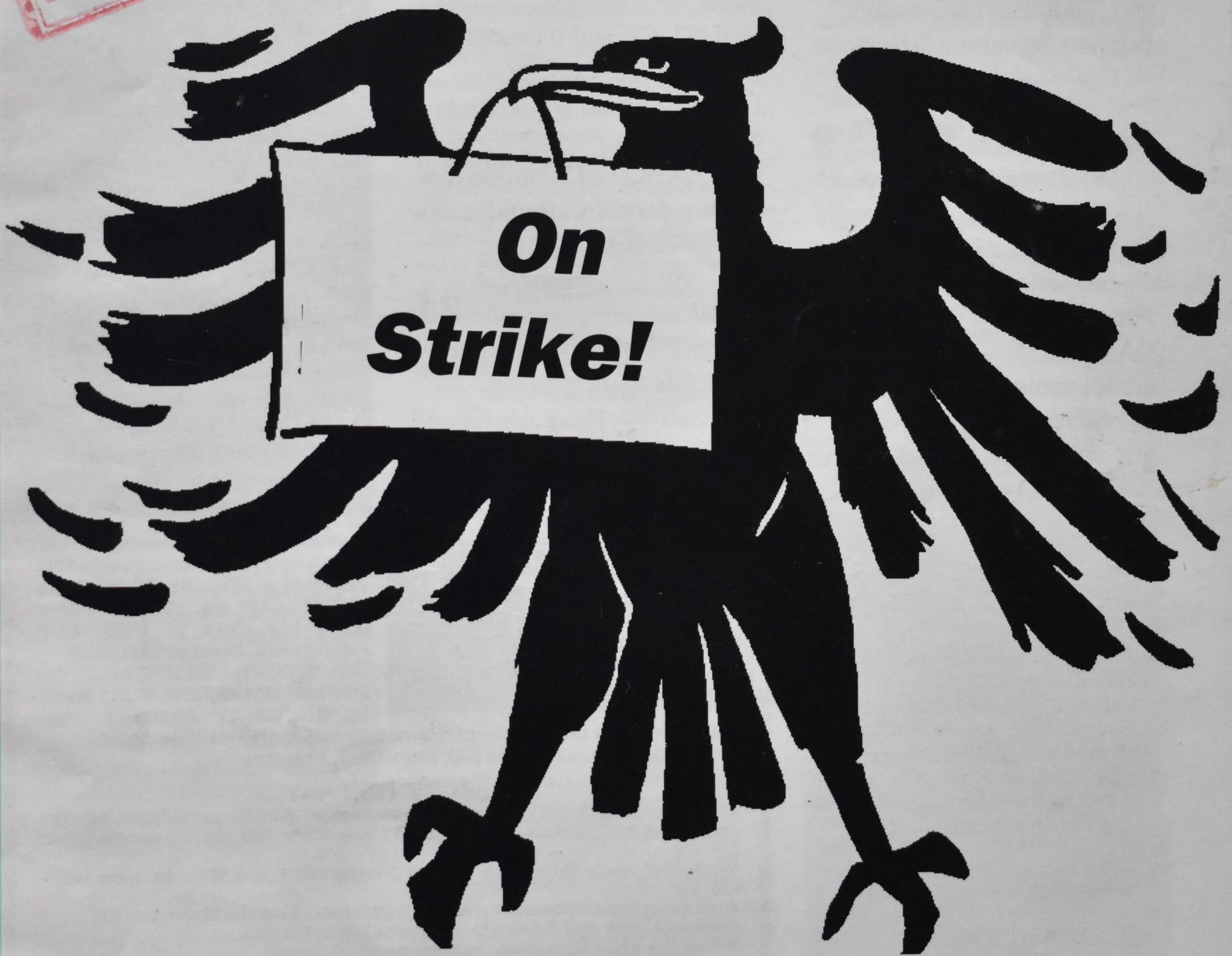
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After the fall of Najibullah

THE only possible surprise in the fall of the Afghani dictator Najibullah — the former head of Kabul's secret police, the *Khad*, who was installed in office by the "modernists" in the Soviet secret police, the KGB in 1986 in Gorbachev's time — was that it took so long.

It is unlikely that the new government that has arisen out of bloody confusion to succeed him, giving a taste of what the "Islamic" future will be like, will last long either. Afghanistan seems destined to be plunged into what has become known as "Lebanonization" — fragmentation into rival military-political zones according to all manner of divisions.

SALAH JABER — April 30, 1992

FOUR years ago we highlighted the reasons why the Kabul regime would be able to survive the withdrawal of Soviet troops which took place in September 1989.¹ This view was based on the one hand on an assessment of the regime's policies and its real social base and on the other on the heterogeneity of the Afghan Islamic Alliance, the cartel of fundamentalist and traditionalist factions opposed to the Kabul regime and its Soviet mentors.²

Gorbachev's faithful pupil

The Najibullah regime attempted to present itself as the promoter of "national reconciliation", echoing Gorbachev's policy for dealing with regional conflicts. Although spurned by the Alliance organizations based in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, the new regime in Kabul nevertheless succeeded in extending its social base. To this end it combined measures of political and economic liberalization and clever manipulation of fluid ethnic/tribal allegiances, drawing on the long experience of the former leader of the *Khad* in this field.

By such means Najibullah was able to survive the departure of his Soviet protectors; indeed in this respect the Soviet-inspired "Afghanization" of the conflict was more of a success than the "Vietnamization" that US imperialism had tried out in Indochina. He could probably have held on for a long time if the whole Soviet edifice had not collapsed at the centre. Economic and military support from the Big Brother to the north was essential to the survival of the Kabul regime, which was as incapable as its adversaries of funding permanent war out of its own resources.

The growing paralysis of the central Soviet regime had already taken its military toll on the Afghan protégé with the fall of Khost in April 1991. But the final tragedy played out in Moscow between August and December 1991, resulting in the humiliation of both Gorbachev and the KGB, meant the certain end of the Kabul government; its days were numbered since the start of this year. Its struggle did not cease for lack of fighters, but for lack of any means of paying them.

Its opponent, the Islamic Alliance, on the other hand, has never lacked petrodollars from Saudi Arabia and co. to cover any interruption in US funding and, furthermore, has been able to draw succour from the return of the military-Islamic coalition to power in Pakistan after Benazir Bhutto's fall in August 1990.

Shifting loyalties

Najibullah, in the tradition of the country's rulers, is a Pashtun like the great majority of inhabitants of the southern half of Afghanistan and the north-west of Pakistan. However he did not succeed in winning decisively on the ethno-tribal plane, the influence of Pakistan and the Muslim fundamentalists remaining decisive outside the capital. On the other hand, the weight of the USSR and its Tadjik and Uzbek republics had an influence on the corresponding ethnic groups in the north of Afghanistan, who were in direct contact with their brethren living under Soviet rule.

After the collapse of the empire to the north, the Uzbeks and Tadjiks who had stayed faithful to Moscow shifted massively over to the Islamic Alliance, while continuing to make alliances according to ethno-tribal allegiances. Thus the Tadjiks have rallied to the famous commander Massud, the Afghan Rambo, who is based in the Tadjik zone and who belongs to Rabbani's Jamiat-i Islami, which has close links with Pakistan. At the same time the Uzbek chief Dostam, whose men are notorious for their terrible raids and which had supported the Kabul regime, now again

changed sides to join the Alliance loyalists who support Massud.

This camp brings together the majority of the organizations in Peshawar, a hodge-podge of more or less strict fundamentalists and partisans of the restoration of the monarchy overthrown in 1978. Its motley complexion flows from the fact that it brings together the so-called minority (that is, non-Pashtun) peoples. They have reached agreement on an interim government council of 51 members which has to organize elections in two years. The fact that the least powerful of the Peshawar leaders, Mujaheddi, has been put at the head of this council says a lot about its compromise character. Already disputes are raging over the division of offices in the new regime between the numerous and diverse factions, whether political, ethno-tribal or even ethno-confessional — such as the Shiite Hazaras, supported by Iran, who are demanding extra representation.

However the most threatening competition comes from the Hezb-i Islami of Hekmatyar. He is a hardcore fundamentalist and a Pashtun, who has played this card for all its worth and who has thereby won the allegiance of some factions of the former Najibullah regime. The installation of the new government in Kabul was preceded by days of fierce fighting between supporters of Massud and Hekmatyar — both belonging to the same Islamic Alliance and represented in the Interim Council for control of the capital.

And it is far from over yet. ★

1. See IV, no. 145, July 11, 1988.
2. IV, no. 117, April 6, 1987.