

Afghanistan Memories

by Reg Green



What is happening in Afghanistan is awful: awful for world peace, awful for the standing of the US, awful above all for any man or, worse, any woman there with a shred of independence of mind.

But this is the Iconoclast where you are allowed to have more than one regimented thought and my second thought, when I saw those vehicles piled high with people and all they owned fleeing from Kabul, was of one bitterly cold day when I was there for a day or two as a newspaper reporter in my thirties with an afternoon to spare and decided to fill it by getting out into the country.

I found my way to the chaos of the bus station, saw the

bus I wanted, saw too that it was bursting with people but that some of them were on the roof. They, good souls, hauled me up and we began our journey through the savage Kabul Gorge, thousands of feet below the road. It was a regular bus roof, no luggage rack to hold on to, the only support being a frozen arm spread out on each side.

I traveled probably thirty miles like that, the only diversion from the unending struggle not to slide toward the rounded edges of the roof being when the fare collector clambered up, as the bus was moving. I remember digging out of my pocket a 100 Af bill, which had a slight tear in it, and holding it out to pay.

In an instance, the piercing wind tore the bill in two and one half was whipped away while I was left gazing in astonishment at the other half in my numb fingers. All around me I heard a collective sigh "Aaaaaiiiiiiii," such as you might hear at a funeral.

A hundred Afs were worth perhaps two dollars, an unheard of case of money being blown away. They probably still talk about it.

Returning to Kabul, I flagged a bus and was instantly in steaming heat, standing – of course – for thirty miles in a swaying, shuddering claptrap, shoulder to shoulder with the packed people going to the market with their chickens and goats, but *inside*, safe and cosy. I think of that trip back as one of the most luxurious of my life.