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## COMMENT

### RIGHT MESS

THE astounding growth of the right as a global political phenomenon has more or less eclipsed the left and made notions of equity and egalitarianism look outmoded. Whereas during the Heath era unrestrained greed was branded as the "unacceptable face of capitalism", the Reagan-Thatcher doctrine has raised it to the level of the prime virtue and the key component of economic growth and progress.

In the process the societal consensus which had evolved in the wake of the threat posed by the Bolshevik revolution has been totally negated. The key element of this consensus was of course some form of a welfare state where naked greed was tempered by the need to accord a decent living to all and sundry financed by a mixture of progressive taxation and nationalisation of key areas of economic activity. It was realised that collective societal resources needed to be distributed equitably and a climate was to be created whereby 'equality of opportunity' prevailed. The basic assumption behind this thinking was that wealth or the lack of it was not only a result of individual effort, but was influenced by a host of factors over which individuals had little or no control. Thus, for harmonious existence resources needed to be shared by 'corrective' redistribution in favour of the less privileged members of the society.

There was much abuse of the systems created, but by and large the societies which resulted were free from violent pressures for change. However, the emerging right ceased upon abuse of the system as a symptom of the malaise of this kind of organisation, and preached naked greed as a more efficient mode of operation. While this growth of the right was accompanied by increased arrogance on the global scene with little time for the rights of the "oppressed" of the world, it was also coupled with an increased flourishing of religious revival and enhanced concern for morality. However, this revival is reminiscent of the moral rightitude of the days of the slave trade, in that a particular pernicious and truncated morality is to be foisted on all and sundry. Thus, on the global level all notions of equality of nations in international organisations was the first casualty, whilst on local levels there was a revival of notions of racial supremacy and crude forms of eugenics.

This growth of the right has also found its echo in socialist and third world countries and the panacea of "naked" greed finds an echo in the writings of Michael Gorbachev and Deng Hsiao Ping. Even ardent socialists like Julius Nyerere have had to concede points to supply side economics.

Muslim countries, including parts of the Islamic movement have also not been immune to the phenomena. Taking the sanctity of private ownership and building upon *mudareba* and *musharika* as cornerstones of economic organisation, they have been able to sweep notions of equity aside. However, the basic notion of trusteeship rather than absolute ownership of man over natural resources, provides an unsurmountable obstacle in the path of the growth of the right in Muslim societies.

Muslims should be more worried about the inequity implied in the growth of the right, rather than be lured by appearances of sound morality.

M Iqbal Asaria