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Published by Tropvale Limited
55 Banner Street,
London EC1 8PX
Tel 01 253 4726. Telex 262028
ISSN 0266-2701

Afkar/Inquiry is published
monthly for \$30 per annum.
Second Class postage pending at
flushing, NY.

Photo Credits : SIPA (Paris); Unistage
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RIGHTS OF THE MIGHTY

COMMENT

THE media has turned the whole question of human rights into one of the Soviet Union allowing free emmigration of zionists to Israel. Indeed, whenever, there is a summit between the two superpowers or a visit to the Soviet Union by a European leader, press attention is focussed on concessions granted on this issue.

The problem is that even on this very truncated vision of 'human rights' only parts of the facts are presented. Thus, as the hapless Palestinians are tired of portraying, every zionist who migrates to Israel displaces at least three native Palestinians. Such parody of justice and morality permeates the whole human rights debate.

Gross violations in 'friendly' countries like Iraq or Indonesia or parts of Latin America are ignored while legitimate clampdowns against armed revolt in 'hostile' countries like Nicaragua or Iran are endlessly harped upon. Every criteria one can use to classify countries on their 'human rights' record is breached by political considerations.

One thing is clear, however. Human rights abuses flourish in unrepresentative regimes. It is also clear that such regimes are the most favoured partners of the superpowers. This is no coincidence. Only dictatorial regimes can guarantee trouble-free encroachments of their countrys' sovereignty, which is essential for the superpower's foreign and economic policy. Thus, we have the paradoxical situation of some 'champions' of human rights promoting the very regimes which are at the root of gross violations of human dignity.

There is also the point that the present global economic and political order leaves the bulk of humanity in a state of abject poverty. Any attempt to redress this inequity is met with force and imposition of a 'friendly' dictatorship. Talk of human rights, while actively promoting such a scheme of things, is nothing short of cynicism.

The pitiable situation of the 'deposed' Prime Minister of Fiji is a good case in point. The poor man bred on a diet of respect for 'the rule of law' was even refused an audience with his own monarch to demand protection for his constitutional rights as a duly elected leader of the majority party! Complaining of CIA involvement in the coup that ousted him, he learnt the true weight attached to human rights by their most ardent supporters the hard way.

It must be recognised that the vantage point of the oppressed on the question of human rights is entirely different. To them the nurturing of the Zionist regime in Israel or the apartheid regime in South Africa is of primary concern. To them the inequities in the global socio-economic order are of acute concern. From the vantage point of the oppressors, however, the maintenance of the status quo is paramount, lest their hegemony is threatened. For them only tinkering with the worst cases of abuse is the legitimate domain of human rights.

M Iqbal Asaria