

# Institutionalising Islamic Resurgence

## Critical Role Karim Alrawi

NOT wishing to begin by being embroiled in pedantry and the fine art of splitting hairs I would, nevertheless, question the use of the term "Islamic resurgence". The implication of such phraseology is that there is a benchmark, a low water level, from which the tide can surge to engulf the state and overwhelm its structures. The resurgence is therefore not a change, but more of the same. Institutionalising more of the same, or some modified variation of it, is not to my mind the issue. It may be a refusal to accept change in a changing world. An uprising of the blinkered and the bigoted. Yet, the storm clouds of resurgence need not be necessarily all negative. Its silverlining may be an attempt to reimpose good old fashioned values in a society that is losing touch with itself and being overrun with the ethics of greed and selfishness, the individualism of western monetarist society.

I suspect that what is genuinely desired is change, and that the talked about resurgence is a misnomer for revolution. I also suspect that the word Islam that is commonly used to qualify the resurgence is not the fundamentalism of the western commentators, with their images of Bible thumping evangelists casting humanity into hellpits of burning brimstone, but an Islamic populism that respects both the anguish of the individual in the modern world and the destiny of the Umma as a community of the oppressed. It is only in these terms, I believe, that one can talk of institutionalising Islamic change.

If we turn to the background of the

existing state structures in large parts of the Muslim world we are confronted by organisations that were created by colonial powers as a means of distancing the colonised people from power. In the Middle East this is particularly a problem. In its later years, the Ottoman Empire became as oppressive and unrewarding for its subject people as much of western imperialism. Bureaucracy became a means of protecting the state from the people. The British and the French compounded this with what, at times, appeared to be an endless gamut of procedures and regulations that virtually immobilised civil government. Such an approach to colonial rule left the imperialist powers relatively free to rob their colonies while the popular will was bogged down in fighting its way through reams and reams of red tape. Frustration was vented against the native bureaucracy rather than against the real culprit and the thief.

A pre-requisite of real "Islamisation" is the turning round of these institutions so that they become servants of the popular will and not its guard dogs, yapping at every infringement of a minor subclause of a subsection of an obscure regulation, that is never used to smooth the claimant's way but is given an airing only when it can be used to maximise the total feeling of impotence and frustration. That state institutions should be liberating, releasing popular energy to create and rebuild, rather than be debilitating and demoralising, is a pre-requisite for a society capable of withstanding change, of adapting and still being true to itself.

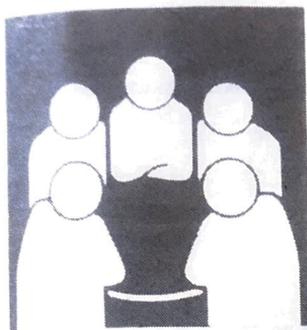
It is through its institutions that an Islamic revolution achieves permanence. Without a democratisation of state institutions the old order will gradually reimpose itself, albeit under a different guise, through the intolerable burden of paper forms in triplicate, the deadweight of overflowing filing cabinets and the barricades of grey desks and dusty counters. The guerrilla wars of the counter revolution are won or lost in the two-tone corridors of petty officialdom. The weapons of the insurgents are the blue pencils and the red stamp-pads of little men in grey suits and steel rimmed, oyster-lensed glasses. It is here that the inertia of the old confronts the energy of the new and runs it to ground.

Institutionalising the revolution calls for a body over and above all state institutions that can initiate change and can be appealed to restructure and arbitrate. It is here that a fundamentally Islamic conception of a political party can come into play. For it is the primary role of a revolutionary Islamic party to conduct the war against the bureaucratic bastions of the old order. It's role is not the militarisation of labour, the regimentation of society, the setting up of gulags and prison camps, but, rather, the transformation of state institutions along democratic lines. Such a transformation can but be informed by an Islamic ethic. It is in respecting that ethic that the party fights corruption. The best means of fighting corruption long term is through public accountability. Thus, an Islamic ethic and democratisation are two sides of the

same cutting edge. Through faith in Islam and trust in the people of the Umma the party can itself avoid being corrupted. Thus, an Islamic party

assumes a critical role in safe guarding the revolution. This is a role that is quite distinct from, and should not be confounded with that of, the commu-

nist parties, that are themselves a negation of popular democracy and whose ethic is at times extremely dubious.



**INSTITUTIONALISATION** is one of those modern jargon words. And like all jargon, intimidating, off putting and decidedly overpowering. The kind of word that obscures rather than reveals its meaning. Because of this 'institutionalising the Islamic Resurgence' sounds as if it must be something different and utterly remote from what ordinary people do.

That's just the trouble with sociological jargon, it uses long and grand words to describe precisely what ordinary people are doing and can do. The Revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad began a process, of insitutionalisation. What that process consisted of was translating the ideals and values of the Qur'an, the nature of its Guidance to mankind, into a way of living for a community of people.

The beginning of Muslim civilization was full of the best kind of institutions. It was a time when the spirit of the Qur'an was used to solve the problem of the Muslim people. The problems were very specific, everyday problems, the answers emerged as a number of institutions and ended up devising what we today call the traditional Muslim way of life.

The institutionalisation of the spirit of the Qur'an in early Islam was thus was a process which grew out of the teaching and study of Islam and its application to the circumstances of the time to find the best balance possible. It was the growth of a body of people trained in this learning and way of thinking who spread across the Muslim world and were employed by governments and rulers to help them to administer their territories to keep them in line with eternal ideals of Islam.

Most of all institutionalisation was

## Common Necessities

Merryl Wynn Davies

something which entered into the lives of all Muslims through coming into contact with Islam. It was the acceptance of the need for remembering God by using the enduring values of Islam as a way of distinguishing the good from the bad, the beneficial from the harmful which got mixed into and involved in all the little everyday activities of washing and dressing, eating and working and living in a community and getting on with the neighbours. Institutionalisation is not a job that can be delegated to a committee, but it is a process which can grow out of employing the activity of Muslim thinkers to unite their efforts with the endeavour of the entire Muslim people.

What should insitutionalising the Islamic Resurgence be today? Very much the same as it was for the first Muslims. Most basically it is a common decision by all Muslims that Islam must be the foundation upon which we build our lives to make the best possible balance of its values according to the cuircumstances which confront us now. It is not about setting up committees to argue about how we can clear away the modern world so that we can get back to the pure simplicity of Islam. It is about agreeing that in the plight of the Muslim World today the values of Islam can help us to shape priorities of what we can and must do to make society better according to an Islamic scale of values.

Making a real resurgence for Islam is a process which can only get under way when the entire Muslim people are involved in identifying the problems which afflict them. Along side the recognition of the need goes the process of learning, which is as much for the specialist and the academic as for the man and woman in the street. For what we will be engaged upon recovering is an Islamic way of think-

ing about the modern world which is not divorced from reality but applied to making sense of the complex reality in which we actually live. From using the means of discernment which are the ideals and values of Islam can come a way forward composed of appropriate answers.

If we accomplish the job of learning to think Islamically and of thinking together as Muslims who are motivated in all our actions by Islam, then the choices and decision which must be made will begin to create their own insitutions, which answer present needs according to eternal values and which make cherished values familiar in different guises, to achieve the age old ends.

Out of matching our thought to the needs of the Muslim people in the light of a shared understanding of Islam will come a host of new organisations and agencies. These indeed will be buildings and ways of doing which can be called institutions, institutions for the study of the problems of society, economy, health, education, welfare. But as institutions their usefulness and functioning will only solidify the forward movement of Islamic Resurgence when they march with the times, hand in hand with ordinary citizens to deliver practical relief and enable the umma as a whole to sustain more just and equitable societies which work together for the communal good, which is the Pleasure of Allah.

The end product of insitutions of Islamic Resurgence will be getting clean water to villagers, building ways in which small and poor communitites can pool their resources to work together for the public well being, can join their talents together with the skill and ideas of scientists and engineers to create self sustaining, self reliant and self sufficient communities which flourish and enrich themselves