

## Reaching for the Future?

They go hand in hand –revolution and counter-revolution. Progressives throughout the world hailed the 1979 Iranian revolution with limitless jubilation as it was a thunderous break with the regimented past and Iranian people achieved that revolution against the notorious Shah regime and its sponsor—America. After three decades of counter-revolution Iranians are still in search for a new beginning. They are still in a dilemma as to how to cope with the continuity and discontinuity of “1979”, its unfinished agenda and its meaning for today in the context of ensuing Arabian nightmare. No doubt Iraq’s attack on Iran in 1981 was, in essence, an attack on the revolution and Uncle Sam played the dirty game, only to destabilise Iraq’s secular polity once and for all while blocking revolutionary transformation of Iranian society, though masses in their millions, proved how all powerful they became even for a short period as they unfurled the banner of freedom, not oil, what actually defines the Middle East.

Who bothers about Polish Solidarity today? Nobody. Even a section of Indian far left floated organisations imitating the ‘Solidarity’ style hoping that they would be able to mobilise people without much difficulty. No, that didn’t happen. It could not be because Indian objective reality was totally different from the then Polish situation. Not that ‘1979’ was the first major mass outpouring against the tyranny in Iran. The Gilan Republic is a forgotten chapter in Iran’s revolutionary history. “The socialist Republic of Gilan, the Iranian province, lasted from June 1920 until September 1921”. Despite a glorious revolutionary past, Iranians find it difficult to respond to the challenge of ‘where to begin’? As counter-revolutionary forces are so organised and powerful today, the ghost of the Shah under a different garb continues to haunt them.

Every mass upsurge discloses something new and specific. So does the Egyptian mass-quake that lasted for 20 days and finally forced the autocrat Hosni Mubarak to quit. But the return of democratic environment in Cairo doesn’t mean a radical shift in the would-be dispensation. A new constitution that is going to be drafted soon and put to a referendum is unlikely to change much.

The point at issue is the Egyptian left cannot reappear on the scene with the same symbols, flags, language and slogans and pass it off as revolution. In the entire drama of people’s festival, labour remains a distorted and less-understood category, especially among Egyptian socialists who shout the loudest about labour in the wake of today’s mass upheaval. The first thing that the Supreme Military Council and the caretaker government in Cairo did was to ban strikes by workers, ostensibly to restore law and order, albeit Egyptian socialists issued a call to workers to join revolution and organise a general strike in all the vital industries and transnational corporations. But military is an integral part of the system. Workers encouraged and emboldened by the unexpected turn of events joined the ranks of revolution to demand better working conditions and wages. True, transformation did happen at Tahrir Square but it was hardly in favour of Egypt’s socialist left. Unlike the islamists, more precisely the Muslim Brotherhood, in case of Egypt, in pursuit of their fundamental goal, the socialist left in Egypt simply reacted to spontaneity without offering an action plan of their own and leading the masses from the front. As America is desperately searching for moderates among islamists, it is quite likely for the policy-makers in the White House to turn to Muslim Brotherhood while not allowing toilers—workers, peasants—not to speak of unemployed youth, to go beyond Tahrir Square.

With unpopular governments coming under people's ire in one country after another in Arab world America has no option but to make new deals and align with opposing parties, to protect American-Israeli power equation and their economic interests. Iranians made the revolution for freedom and got unfreedom. It remains to be seen whether Egyptians can really turn the table as democrats and liberals around the world are watching with eagerness whether Mubarak's departure is the first, or the last step of February Revolution. □□□