SO FAR CHANGE IS COSMETIC

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Category: Opinions

By Dikran Abrahamian MD, Ontario, 28 May 2018

> ***Following the April 2018 uprising in Republic of Armenia a Keghart.org article observed that the new administration enacted merely nonessential changes. We re-publish 'So Far Change is Cosmetic' post Artsakh War of 2020 and the 2021 June elections as the subject remains relevant and draws attention to the urgency for real reform.*** **Ed. (10/7/2021)**

More than a month ago the people of Armenia flooded downtown Yerevan declaring "Velvet Revolution". It's, of course, up to the people in the homeland and their representatives to chart a new future. As observers from the Diaspora, we can only speculate what course this "revolution" may take. The situation is fluid; some might aver that we should not comment because we run the risk of being out of date within days if not hours. However, the urgency of the situation forces our hand.

In a previous article, we opined about the Herculean task the new administration faces. It appears that under the heavy weight of that responsibility the administration has opted for the easy way out. What we have seen is no revolution but an almost-aborted strong popular movement with rightful aspirations for a better and fair distribution of wealth under the rule of law. Revolutions create their own institutions to implement their socio-economic programs. So far there has been no sign or appreciable willingness to that end.

The administration is asking the "impatient" sectors of people to calm down and be patient. To what end? It's wishful thinking that change can take place within the parameters of a flawed undemocratic constitution in which the administration has boxed in itself. A case in point is the reforming of the judiciary system. Under the articles of the present constitution, it may take forever to promulgate true reform that will respond to the call for an untainted judiciary. .

It is true that energetic but inexperienced young people have taken various administrative positions. Unfortunately, this is more of a cosmetic change rather than real progress. How can we explain the presence of representatives of the old regime in the new administration? Who is co-opting whom?

There are calls for economic reform. The administration seems to be intent to follow the prescriptions of neo-liberalism. Does such an aim make sense when neo-liberalism itself gave rise to the oligarchic system not only in Armenia but throughout the world? Unfortunately, in the past almost three decades, since the implosion of the Soviet Union the people in Armenia and elsewhere were constantly bombarded by a narrative that democratic values have a life of their own divorced from economic underlying systems. Western democratic values, norms and economic standards were praised without an all-important footnote. They wilfully neglected to mention that Western democracies today enjoy those benefits, primarily the economic fruits, thanks to the exploitation of Africa, and a good part of Asia and Latin America.

The panacea for Armenia and many failed states is not neo-liberalism. For one thing, Armenia is

under the partial colonial rule of oligarchic Russia that can tip the balance at any moment. Environmentalists, socialists, and progressive-minded intellectuals of all stripes in Armenia should have the courage to iron out their secondary differences, boldly engage the public with the intent of educating it about the relation of real democracy and underlying economic factors. They should present a unified coherent program of change based on the realities of Armenia by clearly defining the limits of ownership, the societal ills of monopolies and the role of the state in areas that affect the vast majority of the people, such as education, health and welfare of the most economically vulnerable people in society. People of Armenia deserve better; they do not need another round of neo-liberalism.

The visionaries of our traditional parties, the Armenagans, Hunchaks and Dashnaks, were ahead of their times. Their voices were silenced because of the Genocide and unforeseen international developments. They advocated solutions based on circumstances that our people lived in the Ottoman and Russian empires. They made many mistakes, but their vision is more valid today than at any other time.

There are those who will mock this assessment, especially in the West. It does not surprise us. They are simply expressions of the economic environment that they live in and enjoy its benefits. It's understandable. We are talking about our brethren in Armenia. Projecting a lifestyle that is ours in the west unto Armenia is irrational. The socio-economic bases are different and require solutions other than what's experienced in the West.

Will you mock the Scandinavian experiment, the envy of millions of ordinary people both in the developed democracies and in failed states? Will you mock 1.4 billion China that exercises a hybrid system? Will you mock the attempts of many Latin American countries that are trying to establish a fairer society right under the nose of U.S? What's the difference between an oligarchic Russia and imperialist U.S that exploits as much as it can the rest of the world but keeps its own people at bay by satisfying their minimal economic needs? The difference, as far as we are concerned, are in the methods, not the content.

The popular movement in Armenia that started in mid-April should continue its perpetual activism until its socio-economic demands are met. Foremost, immediate extraordinary parliamentary elections should take place to have a representative body that truly represents the majority of the people. It's argued that the administration will initiate elections once a fair electoral supervising body is formed. How can we be so naïve that such an electoral body will not be tainted when the majority of the present parliament is still controlled by representatives of the old regime? The constitution states, "The Chairperson and other members of the Central Electoral Commission shall be elected by the National Assembly, upon the recommendation of the competent standing committee of the National Assembly, by at least three-fifths of votes of the total number of Deputies." Have faith in local representatives of people who know all too well who can be impartial. They can form supervising bodies that will oversee the elections. Bad apples will be inserted, yes, but it's worth

taking the chance.

Free all political prisoners, including those whose victims were policemen carrying their duties. There are precedents in many jurisdictions where due to social turmoil such tragedies have taken place. Arbitration to settle such matters by applying principles of blood-money is not unheard of. The perpetrators unwillingly took an action, because of political reasons. There was no premeditated murder. Amnesty is a form of satisfying society and not necessarily individual victims and their families. If the intent of the new administration is to be "fair", will it investigate and punish those who carried the 1999 massacre in parliament and also the 2008 March tragedy? Freeing the political prisoners will provide confidence that the leaders of the "Velvet Revolution" are truly representatives of the people's will. It will cement the cooperation of the majority of the people with the new administration.

As we see it from abroad, the imperatives for the homeland at present are immediate extraordinary parliamentary elections, freedom to all political prisoners, and judiciary reform. The method is the perpetual agitation of sectors of people who have a stake in the wave of change through a broad coalition of all social forces: the non-oligarchic middle class, the dispossessed farmers, the environmentally threatened villagers, the unemployed poor, the factory workers, the veterans, the freedom fighters (ազատամարտիկ), the youth and the intellectuals with social conscience.

While reforming Armenia's governance, let's not forget the other change which should be implemented in our traditional spiritual home, namely the church. Ostensibly church and state are separated. Yet, we have observed a close relationship between the two, a symbiotic relation the underlying factor being the perpetuation of oligarchy. The hierarchy of the church is rotten and often immoral. We stand by a commentator of Keghart.com who states, "Now that the people of Armenia have gotten rid of oligarch-in-chief Serge Sargsyan, when will the clergy dismiss co-oligarch Karekin II, the so-called "Catholicos of All Armenians"? If the clergy doesn't defrock K II the people of Armenia should march on Echmiadzin and demand his resignation.

There are no comments yet.