# AN ACCIDENT, A TRAGEDY

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**Category:** Opinions

By Dikran Abrahamian BA MD, Ontario, 20 April 2008

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A friend's email posted in a private "chat room" and reproduced here with his permission states: "About 20 years ago, on a Sunday, I was involved in an accident on Bayview and Finch. There was a Volkswagen Rabbit stopped at the traffic lights at the intersection. I hit the car at the rear; I smashed it like an accordion. The car ended up on the other side of the street. It was 12:45 p.m. and there were many witnesses to the accident. The front of my car was much damaged and I returned home.

My next door neighbour, a lawyer, who was outside of his house, saw my car and asked what had happened. I told him the story, and that the police had taken the names of a number of the witnesses who were there; I finished by telling him that I was guilty, and I was going to pay the ticket the following day. My neighbour said "Jack I know you, you are not guilty. Let me send one of my lawyers to handle your case".

We went to court. I was surprised to see that each witness who saw the accident and appeared in court that day had his own version of the accident which was different from the version of the other witnesses. At the end, the judge found me not guilty. Can you imagine? I had hit the lady at the back of her car which I had demolished and I was found "Not Guilty"!

After the court case I went and apologized to the lady, and I told her that I was very sorry for what had happened to her and her car. Needless to say, she was shocked. I was also shocked to see that there were really three versions of the same accident (there were three witnesses)".

Reading this story and lately being preoccupied with the recent events in Armenia that culminated in March First Disaster, I could not resist the temptation of thinking what an impartial and a fair judge's verdict would have been taking into account testimonies of not three but thousands of witnesses. When a motor vehicle incident which appeared so straightforward to the owner causing the accident did end up in an unexpected not guilty verdict, how could a societal tragedy rooted in complex problems be described in simple terms of a villain and a victim?

It took quite a while for the Diaspora Armenians to get adjusted to realities following the first president's forced resignation a decade ago. It appeared that old overt animosities, to say the least, had abated and "enemies" had started to talk to each other in more cordial terms. Witness the joint declaration between ARF and ADL in Armenia and the commemoration

of the 93rd Anniversary of the Genocide with the participation of the three "parties" in Toronto. The latter was "negotiated" prior to the recent presidential election, almost a year ago.

Unfortunately the recent sad events in Armenia have shaken us all, and emotions have overtaken calm logic. It's hard to tell how matters will be resolved. So far there is no substantive evidence that a true dialogue is in the offing. Meanwhile, as in the past, repercussions are visibly sensed in the Diaspora, and of particular interest in Canada. Hai Horizon TV's recent extremely partisan unspoken repudiation of the opposition in graphic presentations seemed to evoke a sense of spreading almost hatred towards the leaders and participants of the opposition.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the principle that a country's highest authority is ultimately responsible for upheavals under its jurisdiction, some people are trigger happy to throw whatever allegations they can on this or that personality. One wonders whether a supply of Ritalin would be appropriate to calm them down, or better still some Olanzapine to embrace complexities of reality. Something is terribly lacking: an awareness of what kind of fire they are playing with by demonstrating a self destructive behavior akin to a pyromaniac's .

It's an understatement to say that if our community is fed with bigotry and biased expressions by any side it will lead to resurfacing old, lingering animosities that consumed our meager energies and reserves for more than six decades dating back to the political schism of our religious institutions. We cannot afford to go through a similar experience again.

Our local "party" leaders, designated or otherwise, are not up to the task of promoting a healthy civic discourse at present. Some are interested in finger pointing to score points and "help" their counterparts in Armenia. Others are probably expecting some favors from the new establishment in Armenia. Within our community the average Canadian Armenian has never been given a chance of empowerment and exercise her/his individual voice to counteract the negative implications of such a state of affairs; and those who have expressed themselves have been "silenced" without realizing that our institutions themselves are getting marginalized in the process.

Intellectuals and scholars at large have a role to play to ameliorate the sad and unhealthy atmosphere that appears to be spreading. Lee Iacocca would have said, "You don't get anywhere by standing on the sidelines waiting for somebody else to take action." Scholars in particular know much better than "politicians" that a country emerging from the collapse of a totalitarian state capitalism on a large scale was almost inevitable to go through a stage of upheavals. It was especially so in a geopolitically sensitive area such as Armenia-Artsakh that neighbours oilfield rich Azerbaijan and Iran, not to mention strategically important Turkey. No wonder it has attracted the attention of shakers and movers of the global onslaught of transnational interests.

If not a scholar in its strictest sense Vartan Oskanian is a preeminent intellectual. He leaves a ministry that is free from corruption and he has gained the respect of almost all factions or parties. Witnesses abound. Yes, I have heard stories about his expensive attire. How would you like to represent your country in the presence of dignitaries in various courts and international forums, in rags? If the president and other ministers had exercised the same discipline and frugality the recent tragedy of March First might not have happened. The electromotive force that drove thousands and thousands of

people into the streets was foremost the grossly unfair distribution of wealth, insensitivity and arrogance of the regime.

Perhaps the opposition erred in not expecting a brutal crackdown and in "tactics, methods and goals". Try as you may to depict the leaders of the opposition to be larger than life, it does not at all explain why for days in a row the squares in Yerevan were occupied by angry citizens. External factors, though conjectures at this stage, naturally could have played a role. However, in the absence of a discontented populace no such outside interference could have motivated people to take the streets. Ask yourself whether any revolutionary or a leader inclined to drastic reforms or change of regime has ever been able to mobilize people to such an extent solely based on external "help"? "At the end of the day, (the administration) is responsible for what happens in this country", Armenia (Oskanian).

Vartan Oskanian himself with the support of cool headed scholars, intellectuals, and people of common sense of all walks of life could take the initiative to restore sanity and take practical steps to start a true dialogue, both in Armenia and the Diaspora. A process of public education through presentations, public panel discussions with the intent of clarifying the complex factors that led to such a tragedy is urgently expected. Emotions will lead nowhere, nor the simplistic notion that this should not have happened to Armenians. After all Armenia shares many common elements with other decolonized countries. An understanding of this essential fact is a much needed prescription. Simultaneously it is incumbent on the new president his Excellency Serzh Sargsyan to keep his promise of "destroying the wall" that separates people into antagonistic camps.