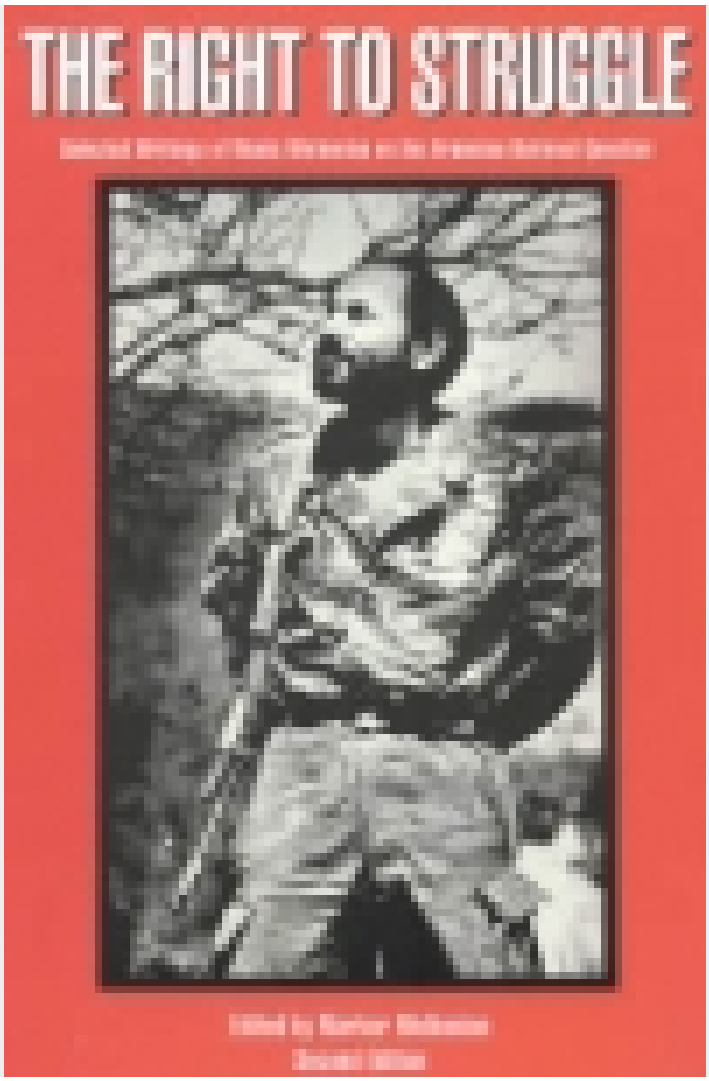
"FREE, INDEPENDENT ARMENIA"

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Category: Opinions



Monte Melkonian, 3 September 1987

> ***Below is an excerpt from a letter that Monte wrote in response to an article published in the San Francisco-based Sardarabad journal. It was written from Poissy Prison in France. Note the date which was prior to the collapse of Soviet Union, but the ideas expressed are relevant to the discourse related to the ongoing process of defining national goals, aspirations and fair governance. The section appears on pp.11-12 of Monte's The Right to Struggle, Second Edition, Yerevan, Sardarabad Collective, 1993.*** *- Editor*

The first problem the author of the article mentioned was the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan. This is a rather straightforward issue to sift through. In fact, it is likely that most Armenian progressives no longer even consider this to be a serious subject for debate. First, we should clearly define the term "Free, Independent (and one might add " United") Armenia." What could this mean, politically, economically or demographically?

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The first problem the author of the article mentioned was the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan. This is a rather straightforward issue to sift through. In fact, it is likely that most Armenian progressives no longer even consider this to be a serious subject for debate. First, we should clearly define the term "Free, Independent (and one might add " United") Armenia." What could this mean, politically, economically or demographically?

In the absence of a clear, coherent definition from proponents of this slogan, let us consider a couple of hypotheses. The word "Free" may possibly refer to the "free market" of capitalism. If this is the case, the "liberation struggle" would not merit the name, since its goal would leave the majority of Armenians unliberated from capitalist exploitation. On the other hand, "Free" may refer to the foundation of a state system which is not structurally connected to any state system outside of the

regions of our homeland. In this case, the word "Free" would seem to be a mere repetition of the word "Independent"--at least as far as "independence" is generally understood *vis-a-vis* state structures.

But does an "independent" state necessarily guarantee genuine national independence? The examples of many formally independent states in Asia, Africa and Latin America attest to the fact that, in this day and age, formal independent statehood may have nothing at all to do with true independence. In fact, in this period of neocolonial domination, formal independence may in some cases even conflict with the ability of a people or nation as a whole to determine their own interests and pursue those interests. The political independence of the Confederacy from the United States of America, for example, would not have been in the best interests of either the Black population of the southern states, or even of many southern Whites. Nor does political independence guarantee that a country will have a free hand in the spheres of either foreign or domestic policy. Just how "independent," one might ask, are Haiti, Honduras or even Canada? True independence can only be achieved through economic independence. In the present situation of global economic interdependence, however, the very notion of political independence must be relativised.

Let us now reflect on the word "Armenia" in the slogan. If we read the literature of proponents of the "Free, Independent Armenia" slogan, and if we review their maps, we are led to believe that they define the geographical limits of our homeland as those drawn by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson. But these borders were drawn according to imperialist calculations of what sort of "Armenia" would best serve their own strategic interests. Needless to say, the incumbent populations of the area were never consulted as to their wishes. Thus, from the position of the Armenian people themselves, the borders of Wilson's "Armenia" were grossly indefensible--morally and militarily. The entire scheme was doomed to failure at the outset, and as it failed, the result was even more destruction for what remained of the Armenian nation. Wilson's "Armenia" was a travesty which, in any case, is entirely irrelevant to the present and future realities of the region.

For some time now, Armenian progressives have generally recognized that the struggle should aim to liberate our people, not a plot of land. Of course, the relationship of a people to their homeland is crucial. A people will naturally have a difficult time maintaining a common cultural identity without a collective presence in their homeland. Only in its homeland can a people develop economically, culturally and socially as a homogeneous entity. In fact, this is this crux of why some of us consider it necessary to struggle to live in our homeland.

It should be noted, however, that establishing the presence of our people in our homeland does not automatically necessitate an independent Armenian state apparatus. Nor is the establishment of such an apparatus necessarily the highest expression of national self-determination. As I mentioned earlier, national development and the true interests of any people depend more on economic potential than on formal state independence. This has become clearer and clearer with the advance of industrialization and the global interdependence of national economies. Only when an

independent state structure can better serve (or at least not hinder) the economic, social and cultural development of a population should it be considered a higher form of self-determination.

In view of these observations, let us ask ourselves whether in principle a "Free, Independent Armenia" is a realistic goal that would serve the interests of the Armenian people in the long run. As we seek an answer to this question, we should keep in mind that realism is a guiding principle for revolutionaries. Before advancing a political slogan, one should first pose the question: Is it realizable? If it is not, then it should not be adopted.