

I STILL DON'T HAVE ENOUGH, SO THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEIRS

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an essay on presidential election in Armenia

By Avedis Kevorkian Philadelphia, PA March 7, 2008

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"The only honest politicians in Armenia are those who are out of office, and the most honest politicians," he went on cynically, "are those who have just lost an election."

The speaker was an American working with a non-governmental organization (NGO), and he had been in Yerevan for (up to that time) five years.

He explained his observations. "When they lose office, they get religion. They know what they did and they recognize that what the newcomers are doing is the same thing--lining their pockets at the expense of the public. But, now," he went on, "they can criticize."

His observation came back to me during the upheavals in Armenia following the recent presidential elections. As one nation after another congratulated the new president, what the world said to Armenia, in effect, was "OK. You have had your election. Now, get on with it."

"It," of course, was the running the country, the dealing with other countries, and the improving the lot of the people. There was no indication in the "it" that those other countries were blind to the cheating and the dishonesty of the election. Even those who pretend to be friends, held their noses as they said, "Congratulations and best wishes."

However, as the recognition tally soared, the more petulant Levon Ter Petrosyan seemed to have become. No slouch when it came to corruption and oppression in his years in office, LTP had the yerness to cry "Foul" and "Corruption" as he rallied his supporters and they demonstrated.

Never mind the effect on the world. As he should know, as the world knows, Armenia has no natural friends in this world.

But, the joy that the increasing demonstrations and protests--resulting in the inevitable violence and death--must have brought to

the hearts of those who are Armenia's avowed enemies cannot be measured. "And, this is the country to which you give your support," they must be saying to the lip-service countries who say they are friends of the Armenians. And, not least, who support the Genocide-recognition campaigns.

Imagine the behind-the-scenes comments that will be made as Genocide-observance groups around the world demonstrate, march, hold silent vigils on or around April 24. Will countries want to be identified with a country whose president "has stolen the election" according to rivals? More than likely there will be principled leaders who will ignore the protests and will accept the Genocide as fact. But, can anyone blame Armenia's enemies from working on the others? Already Azerbaijan has been probing the Artsakh borders in hopes that Armenia may be diverted from protecting its borders and may be vulnerable for a major incursion.

One--at least this one--has to ask what the priorities of those who lead Armenia are.

In 1991, the "leaders" of the newly independent nation missed the opportunity to make Armenia a paradise on earth by taking the best ideas and ideals from the successful nations and implementing them in a truly democratic Armenia. Instead, they created a kleptocracy and a medieval world of fiefdoms.

In pursuing their goal of dividing-up the loot among themselves, the politicians do not even think of the people. Earthquake victims, twenty years later, are still living in shipping containers. The poor in Armenia are getting poorer, daily. The election was not about which president--and, by extension, which party--could do the most and the best for the poor people of the country, it was about the "ins" striving to stay in, and keeping the "outs" out. It was about dividing up the loot, because they still have not agreed on when enough is enough.

The Economist Intelligence Unit, in its report commenting on the disgrace in Yerevan, picked up on this very point:

"Compounding disillusionment with the electoral process is the perception that only a small elite have benefited from Armenia's rapid economic growth of recent years. Yerevan is in many ways a changed city. . . , with a gleaming new central residential and commercial district (for which many residents were forcibly evicted and moved to apartments in the city suburbs to make way for the new buildings). . . . Yet life is becoming increasingly expensive for many citizens, as the presence of monopoly importers of staple goods, such as fuel and some foodstuffs, has meant that a strengthening currency has had little impact on prices of staple goods. The stronger dram has also weakened the incomes of those households receiving remittances from family members working overseas. And corruption is still rife, with the public perceiving little official effort to combat it. Parliament is viewed as acting to safeguard the interests of its members rather than those of Armenia's citizens." (My emphasis.--ak)

More than one-hundred years ago, H. F. B. Lynch, writing in 1901 about the Armenians still living in the Ottoman Empire, said that "Armenians are quite unused and as yet unfit to govern themselves." A century later, Lynch would revise that statement only slightly: "Armenians are still unfit to govern themselves."

