OPPORTUNISM SEEMINGLY PAYS OFF

Posted on March 15, 2016 by Keghart

keghart.com

Category: Opinions

Editorial, 15 March 2016

For seventy years the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) had as one of the main pillars of its policies opposition to the Soviet Union and the Soviet regime in Armenia. The rousing "Armenia befits Tashnagtsoutune" (*Lepo Lele...Lepo Lele... Kachutyunuh... Hayoutyunuh... Hayasdanuh Tashnagtsoutyan guh vayleh)* song was for decades a sure-fire hit at party celebrations. Thus when Armenia became independent the ARF rushed to Armenia to claim its place in the political arena there. Citizens of Armenia, who had chaffed under the Soviet rule and some had admired from afar the ARF's unflinching opposition to the Soviets, welcomed the party--an organization which was also the strongest political entity in the Diaspora. But since its return to Armenia the party has had a chequered history there. It has also disappointed some Diaspora party members who had expected a more robust support from the citizens and politicians of the homeland.

Editorial, 15 March 2016

For seventy years the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) had as one of the main pillars of its policies opposition to the Soviet Union and the Soviet regime in Armenia. The rousing "Armenia befits Tashnagtsoutune" (*Lepo Lele...Lepo Lele... Kachutyunuh... Hayoutyunuh... Hayasdanuh Tashnagtsoutyan guh vayleh)* song was for decades a sure-fire hit at party celebrations. Thus when Armenia became independent the ARF rushed to Armenia to claim its place in the political arena there. Citizens of Armenia, who had chaffed under the Soviet rule and some had admired from afar the ARF's unflinching opposition to the Soviets, welcomed the party--an organization which was also the strongest political entity in the Diaspora. But since its return to Armenia the party has had a chequered history there. It has also disappointed some Diaspora party members who had expected a more robust support from the citizens and politicians of the homeland.

Not only the ARF failed to become a leading party in the Third Republic, but it was even banned for a spell (1994) by the country's first president. And for good measure, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan jailed several of the party's leaders. The second president, Robert Kocharyan, restored (1998) ARF's legitimacy with some aplomb. The third president, Serzh Sargsyan, also clashed with the ARF mostly because of the latter's opposition to the notorious Protocols which were foisted upon Armenia and Turkey by Washington. The ARF eventually pulled out of the Sargsyan coalition (2009) to protest the government's rapprochement with Genocide-denying Ankara. Although he continued to support the Protocols, Sargsyan eventually shelved them because the Turkish parliament had nixed the US-initiated plan.

Several years ago, pretending that it believed Sargsyan had buried the Protocols for good, the ARF in Armenia began to develop ties with the Sargsyan government. Although it refused to join the coalition, for all intents and purposes the ARF supported the government on most issues. Sargsyan showed his appreciation by appointing several ARF personalities to senior diplomatic posts. Last

October the party also supported the Sargsyan plan to change the constitution from a presidential to parliamentary system. To firm up the unsaid alliance with Sargsyan, last month the ARF cut a power-sharing deal with Sargsyan's Republican Party. ARF leader Armen Rustamyan described the agreement as "a long-term vision on cooperation" between the two parties.

In announcing the party's alliance with Sargsyan, Rustamyan said the development would improve the state of affairs in the country. "In this situation, we can see that the authorities are discredited, but their being discredited is a problem for all of us, isn't it? We are looking to change the quality, approach and policies of the government and to charge this situation in the country," said the ARF spokesman. A tall order indeed for a party that holds a measly 5 seats in the 131-member National Assembly.

As a pre-emptive move against the critics of the alliance, Rustamyan acknowledged that the move would be unpopular among a significant segment of the electorate. "Naturally being part of the government automatically means losing your approval ratings," he said. And sounding like Cassandra, he mysteriously intoned: "But it's better for us to pay this price than for the whole nation to lose the state." He added that the ARF was going to pay the price but as a result of the entente "we are also going to have a much better Armenia." He didn't explain how his tiny party's cooperation with Sargsyan would result in a much better Armenia.

Soon after Rustamyan's announcement came the news (surprise, surprise!) that three ARF members (Levon Mkrtchyan, Davit Lokyan, and Artsvik Minasyan), who had respectively served as ministers of education, territorial administration, and economy in the '90s and the early 2000s) would return to their former positions. Two governorships (Shirak and Ashotyan) were also slated for ARF representatives. It was obvious that the party was being rewarded for cooperating with Sargsyan. But what shocked observers was the return of the discredited Mkrtchyan and Lokyan to power. It's a mystery why the ARF would back the two corrupt and reviled politicians. Is the party that thin on the ground? Why the 'business as usual' cynical stance from a party which had just announced that its presence in the government would improve the life of Armenia citizens and ensure the Sargsyan government duly implements the new constitution?

The ARF has never managed to obtain more than 13.14% (2007) of the votes in any Armenia election. With fewer than 4% of the seats in the current National Assembly it's not a player. So why does Sargsyan bother with the party? Is ARF Armenia being admitted to the halls of power because Sargsyan is indirectly courting the Diaspora ARF--the most effective Armenian organization in the Diaspora and the spearhead of the opposition to Sargsyan's misguided Protocols?

Foxy Sargsyan might have even a more devious plan: Knowing that relations between the Diaspora ARF and ARF Armenia leave room for improvement, he could have embraced Armenia ARF as a ploy to decrease the power of the party's Diaspora wing. So if next time the Diaspora ARF opposes his policies an accommodating ARF Armenia would deflate Diaspora ARF's clout by siding with

Sargsyan? A case of divide and conquer?

Sargsyan is playing ARF Armenia like a virtuoso pianist tinkling the ivories. Meanwhile, the opportunistic leaders of ARF Armenia are happy to benefit from the Sargsyan largess, damn integrity, not to mention ideology. For the right price, “socialist” ARF Armenia leaders are happy to slide into bed with the jungle capitalists and treacherous oligarchs who are plundering the homeland of the Armenians.