

# PASHINYAN SHOULD RESTRAIN FOLLOWERS

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On the 27th of November 1095, Pope Urban II delivered the famous speech at the Council of Clermont, calling on the Christian World to pick up arms to free the Holy City of Jerusalem from the 'clutches' of Islam. Muslims had been ruling over Jerusalem and the Holy Land for way over four centuries, during which, according to records, Christian pilgrims who were in the Holy Land or headed there were attacked, robbed and even killed, mostly by Turks. Reports of mistreatment of Christian minorities in the Middle East, among them Armenians, had reached Europe in the form of appeals for help. The Pope decided to respond by mobilizing the Christian World. What is noteworthy about the speech of Pope Urban II is the way he was able to use the 'otherness' of Islam as a means to marshal support for his cause. His calculations weren't wrong. Support for the Holy Cause came flowing in, especially after European governments and masses got convinced that it was a noble venture and would please God. *Deus vult* or "God wills it", the Pope had declared. Essentially, he was speaking on behalf of the Almighty.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is not new to politics and commands every trick there is to know in the craft in order to draw support from the masses. While the process of "otherisation" of his critics is slowly but sadly becoming self-evident, his claims to be saying everything based on 'the will of the people' draws uncanny similarities between him and Pope Urban II who delivered his speech over 920 years ago. Not only does Prime Minister Pashinyan have unfinished business with the remnants of the former regime, such as the President of the Constitutional Court of Armenia Hrayr Tovmasyan whom he wants to see gone, but he also has his increasing critics to deal with on a daily basis. While the former is a representative of the ousted corrupt regime and makes for a natural foe, his supporters are not particularly tolerant of citizens critical of Pashinyan either. The polarization of society has divided people into "revolutionary" and "anti-revolutionary" camps depending on their opinions of the government. Anyone criticizing Pashinyan, whom the people perceive as modern Moses sent to lead his people to the Promised Land, is often seen as someone who supports the former regime of the Republican Party or is labelled as Kocharyan's ally, and therefore is an anti-revolutionary.

It cannot be denied that the ousted regime

tries hard to de-legitimise both the current Government as well as the National Assembly, yet one should be cautious not to allow society to be divided and polarized. Ordinary people who participated in the Revolution and even voted for Pashinyan's "My Step" alliance in the general elections are being labelled as anti-revolutionaries because of their critical view of some actions of the Government. The infamous "You are either with us or against us" approach seems to be taking root among the people and one has to be alarmed about it. By associating every word of protest to the ousted regime, the current Government or some of its supporters indirectly legitimize them, thus making them relevant in the political arena of Armenia even to this day. This approach can pose a danger for the government and its supporters in the future.

In 2014, the former president of Abkhazia Raul Khajimba, who was then the leader of the opposition, led mass protests that forced Alexander Ankvab to resign as president. He won the subsequent presidential election and ruled Abkhazia until January 2020 when he was forced to resign owing to mass protests against his rule. The same person that successfully led the Abkhazian Revolution had to step down because of mass protests against him.

The first president of post-Soviet Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was forced to resign in 1998, managed to garner a very large number of supporters when he made a political comeback in 2007. Thousands marched in his support -- including Prime Minister Pashinyan -- after the notorious 2008 general election that saw violent crackdowns and resulted in the deaths of 10 people. In a matter of a few years, Ter-Petrosyan's popularity declined and the people who were out on the street protesting on behalf of him did not do so any longer. The president that had enjoyed vast popularity fell victim to his political mistakes but also to the passing of time.

In politics, nothing is permanent and it's not ruled out to lose the support of the electorate. Prime Minister Pashinyan, of course, realizes this. If the alternative to his rule is seen to be the remnants of the former regime coming back to power and not the other opposition parties, then his chances to continue enjoying the support of the people will persist. While this benefits him, it also assists the representatives of the former regime who get a chance to claim importance and relevance as a political force. They should best be left to fade away instead of making them a topic of everyday

Prime Minister Pashinyan is seen as a saviour, a one-man army which will solve everyone's problems. People's expectations of him are high; some are perhaps even illogical and impossible to deliver. A slight criticism of his actions is not taken lightly by his supporters who rush to his aid. However, time is of the essence and Prime Minister Pashinyan should look at examples, like that of President Raul Khajimba of Abkhazia. Pashinyan should have a *tête-à-tête* with his take-no-prisoner supporters and modify their self-damaging behavior before it's too late.

**There are no comments yet.**