THE CRITIC IS NOT THE ENEMY

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Category: Opinions

By Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia PA, 6 December 2008

There are very few people I have ever met who can match the passion and zeal, and the boundless energy, of Bakrad Nazarian when it comes to matters-Armenian. To add to these, he has put his money where his mouth is (to use an apt, but clumsy, cliché) and has invested in Artsakh.

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Having worked with him for many years, during my time in London, I can attest that keeping up with him was a challenge--but one undertaken with joy.

Thus it is with heavy heart, and no joy, that I respond to his comments about my recent essay and also, it would appear this web-site's policies.

My essay was about corruption in Armenia and I used as the peg on which to hang the essay the petition on this web-site protesting the threat to freedom of the press in Armenia and I expressed my view that it will have no affect on the crooks and thieves and thugs who are ruining Armenia. (I say, again, however, if there are among you those who think such petitions will do any good in Yerevan, please sign and send the petition.)

To those of you who have just joined us, permit me to suggest that you read both the petition's text and my comments.

As a journalist, I am aware more than most about the threats to journalists around the world--and, especially, in Turkey. But I wasn't commenting about the threats around the world. I am aware, also, that corruption exists elsewhere, but I wasn't writing about the universal corruption (though my essay in July, "The Remittance Curse" touched on the world-wide corruption and the role the diasporas play in abetting corruption in "homelands").

For Bagrad to suggest that Armenians in the Diaspora remain silent about the corruption in Armenia because it exists elsewhere is to suggest that because starvation exists in Zimbabwe, for instance, people elsewhere should not eat anything.

Whatever shortcomings may exist in America and its press, rest assured that investigative journalists in America win Pulitzer Prizes, and my own organization--the Society of Professional Journalists, to which I have belonged for more than 60 years--awards prizes for excellence in investigative journalism and other aspects of journalism, as do many state-based journalism associations. The only case of a murdered investigative journalist I can recall was about 40 years ago, and the reaction was such that journalists from throughout the country descended on Arizona and continued the investigative work of the slain journalist and not only helped

expose the corruption he was investigating but also helped find the murderer—who was arrested, tried, and convicted. Our press may not be perfect, but we don't beat journalists as is done in Armenia.

Neither the petition nor the essay touched on the matter of recognition of the fact of the Armenian Genocide, so there was no need for this web-site or me to be criticized.

What I find interesting is that after I wrote about corruption in Armenia, earlier this year (for which I received nasty comments, which I chose to ignore), there followed shortly thereafter a damning report which showed that Armenia had slid down the scale of corrupt countries. Now, following my essay under challenge, there appears on this web-site a truly obscene report about the poor housing for some young people in which corruption has played a hand. Would I be considered immodest if I were to say quod erat demonstrandum?

While reading that report, I could not help but think about other reports of the huge, luxurious villas that house the government officials. The land on which these villas stand were more than likely stolen from poor Armenians who could not fight back, and the money to build these villas came from money that was supposed to have been spent on the poor Armenian people. Dare I ask, "Where did their money come from?"?

This is not the time or the place for me to relate my sad record of failure to help Armenia and Artsakh during and following my two visits to the former. But I will mention that after I narrated to someone who knew how things worked in Yerevan my disappointment over the failure to get anywhere with any of the projects, I was asked, “But after you finished your proposals, did you also say, ‘and, of course, we will give you. . . .’?” I said “No. It was his job.” He laughed so hard and so long, I feared he would die of a heart attack.

In his reaction to my essay, Nazarian also is critical of Bruce Tasker. I did not recognize the name nor why he should be criticized, until I noticed his name attached to a recent essay on this web-site. I had read it, but failed to note the name. Re-reading it, I can understand why he, too, is on Nazarian’s “nasties” list. Tasker is critical of things in Yerevan.

Nazarian is not a spokesman for Armenia, and there was no need for him to be so aroused, but knowing him as I do, I am not surprised; he will not tolerate any criticism of Armenia. (He should hear and read my criticism of this country!) However, I would have hoped that he would have kept his remarks private.

This is not an apology, for I have no reason to apologize, but I must say that because I criticize the shortcomings in Armenia does not mean that I am an enemy nor that I am encouraging the enemies of Armenia (as someone has accused me--in private).

Armenia's most dangerous enemies are in the Armenian government.