

The Sin Of Their Mouths, The Word Of Their Lips

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The orange revolution keeps teaching us important lessons. At first we thought that the lesson of democracy, with the practical workshop on Independence Square, was the most important. Then the entire nation learned a fantastic lesson of jurisprudence - something we had only known from lectures on the U.S. judiciary. That was followed by a school of face-saving political compromise. But from the very start of the presidential race, all these political and judicial collisions have taught us one great lesson of personal and public ethics. An ethical trial follows no conventional procedures, and the final verdict needs no majority vote. But this very trial shall be decisive.

The moral aspects of this presidential election in Ukraine have for weeks been the focus of public attention, and it was the immorality of the Ukrainian authorities that provoked the people to revolt. By the first round of the presidential election [on October 31], nervous tension was critically high. The entire administration and public media flaunted their mendacity. That was part of the authorities' plan to demoralize the people and convince them that no protests would help. And then the people took to the streets. What happened could be described with the words spoken by Jesus: "For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Hundreds of thousands gathered on Maydan [Kyiv's central Independence Square] in His name, the name of Truth, Justice, and Love, and everyone felt that He was in the midst of them and blessed them, and that was why no evil encroachments overcame them.

Now it is clear that the authorities' insolence only made Yushchenko's position stronger and that morality, which the authorities never cared for, turned out to be the most valuable electoral resource. Having realized it at last, the pro-Yanukovich political exhibitionists are now trying on the fig leaves they once discarded so rashly. The new roles of a "devout Christian", a "devoted" angel, a "forsaken" regional leader, and the like are meant to whitewash Yanukovich's image and destroy the previous detrimental counterpositions: "authorities - opposition", "evil - goodness", "immorality - honesty". Now the new "stage directors" come up with a new pattern of rivalry between two regional varieties of goodness rather than between evil and goodness. Besides, they mean to display their "goodness" as offended and persecuted and thus melt the hearts of compassionate Ukrainians.

Resorting to social-political mimicry, they appeal to this nation's imbued aptness for staying aloof from reshuffles of the elites. But mute submission has always been the root and cause of all

tragedies this nation has suffered, and it has always corrupted its leaders. The source of evil for Ukraine is not its leaders - they are neither better nor worse than any others. The trouble is that until now Ukrainians have put brave questions like “Where did you get the money for your pleasures?” in their heroic songs only.

On the one hand, it is good that so many MPs quit the pro-government factions - it is just absurd to hold on to this badly compromised authority. But on the other hand, an orange ribbon in the lapel can hardly guarantee an absolution. There is one definite prerequisite for restoring the people’s respect for supremacy of law: the public servants guilty of crimes must be brought to account as the axiom of justice is the inevitability of punishment. Any haggle for guarantees of immunity is immoral, no matter how politically expedient it may be. As criminals say, “If you steal a hundred or two, you’re in for a prison term. If you steal millions, you get transferred to another post.” Such bargains deprave criminals, criminalize society, and nurtures a disregard for civil and moral laws.

Unfortunately, at the dawn of independence in the early 1990s, most Ukrainian dissidents did not demand punishment for their torturers. First, the sin of communism had infected the entire social organism, and the judges who had sentenced me to twelve years did not seem to me guiltier than those who testified against me in court. Second, however evident the sins of communism were, I was not certain as to who should be its “moral judge”, remembering the Lord’s prohibition to punish Cain. I believed that the crimes committed by the communist Cain were so grave that they could only be judged by God. I was against ideological persecution and was more inclined to the reconciliatory principle: “We all are guilty, so we have to start with a clean slate”.

What came out of it is known but too well. The ruling elite that never repented only changed the colors and slogans. They did start with a clean slate, but they only started committing new crimes. That is why I can justify the prosecution of the guilty, even though the judges themselves may not be impeccable. I will turn a deaf ear to laments about the “witch hunt”, “squaring of accounts”, and the like. There are at least three reasons for being so hard-hearted.

First, all those who are “debased” and “humiliated” today were strangely insensible to the injustice that reigned in this country through their time-serving connivance. It was safe to keep silent then. Today’s popular indignation is but too justified, and the degree of this indignation is directly proportional to the crimes that the guilty committed and their stooges complied with. This has to be remembered by the time-servers who think they put on orange colors just in time.

Second, the new traitors - Taras Chornovil, Larysa Skoryk, or Hanna Stetskiv - obviously fail to disguise themselves as Yanukovich's moral supporters and to estrange themselves from "the old authorities". In terms of electoral choice, there is a great difference between them and the millions of Yanukovich's earnest supporters. This is a matter of their moral responsibility for the deliberate and cynical deceit they proliferate so enthusiastically. To estrange oneself from the truth means to be a liar. The truth puts them beyond the limits of human tolerance, and such people are normally rejected by any civilized society. In this case, social ostracism can not be explained by the allegations about opponents being "intolerant" or "undemocratic", which are reiterated by the self-vitiated ex-president Leonid Kravchuk. The only reason is the vital human ability to tell evil from goodness. Without this ability the cartesian coordinates of social ethics tend to flatten into a single monotonous line of moral relativism. All this concerns such journalists as Pavlo Pikhovshek, Dmytro Korchynsky, or Dmitri Kiselev, who would be just shunned in any civilized country.

And third, any references to Yushchenko's or his team's weaknesses and drawbacks indicate support for the crime-stained authorities. There is an old Vietnamese tale about a dragon and a hero. Having defeated the dragon, the hero takes the dragon's throne and soon he has the same dragon's claws. It may seem that today's warnings about Yushchenko becoming a new dragon are morally justified.

But such warnings and precautions only play into the real dragon's hands. They dampen the people's ardor in their fight against today's dragon. Besides, they give the people illusory hopes that some day they can produce a perfect hero, who will never become a dragon. What the people really need to do now is help our imperfect hero to defeat today's dragon, and then keep a watchful eye on him so that he can never turn into a dragon.

The Ukrainian lesson of social ethics is not over. We are witnessing an enchanting sight: elevation of "pure hearts" and debasement of dishonest liars, mimicry of time-servers and purification of sinners