

AUSTRALIANISM OR HELLENISM

The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis



Australians of Hellenic background have had to come to grips with who they were once they arrived in Australia from their place of birth. Australians from Ireland, Wales, England, Scotland that colonised Australia did not have that problem as they considered Great Britain the mother country.

It was not until at least two world wars and an influx of migrants following those wars that Australians began to realise that they were truly a race apart. (No disrespect to indigenous Australians). The Australian referendum some years ago was a good indication that Australians despite their integrated society were not ready to ditch the monarchy and become a republic. To retain the status quo, meant that each generation had to take on the responsibilities of the past, retain the institutions and way of life. This meant that a process of a smooth transition of Power was required to be implemented.

The transition of power in Australia from one generation to another has not been without its battles and as such, each generation that took on the mantle of leadership had to prove itself to those that elected them to those positions in the first place. Leadership is not inherited and neither is it a gene that comes down through the generations and nor is it a part of the DNA structure inherent to one particular race. Leadership can be learned either by training and preparation and or through many years of experience in dealing and managing with complex human issues and resources.

Those of the first generation that sunk its roots into Australia were fired with the zeal and imagination of a community possessed to retain some semblance of their past in their adopted country and lay institutional foundational stones for future generations to build upon. Many who arrived after World War Two had some form of leadership potential as a result of their military training as well as their experiences in the Greek Civil war.

Others who were able to take on positions of power did so because of a personal following, this alone is leadership material based on popularism. The first community were well aware from their Hellenic history that without some form of cultural identity with the past, they would lose their soul so to speak and therefore have lost the reason for travelling to their adopted country.

Having said the above, we who have Hellenic origins and have identified with our adopted country must realise that despite our proud history and its contribution to the democracy of the world are not immune to battles with Australian Hellenic community organisations. Like the Celtic, German, Irish, Scottish, Baltic, African, East European, Asian, Indian, Middle East communities and a host of other related communities that makeup of the very fabric of Australia; there will always be a robust battle between the generations.

To say otherwise, one must be intellectually handicapped, lacks emotional intelligence, a poor understanding of human behaviour and is inept in the ways of the world. It is a fact of life. Any transition of power within any Australian organization, whether it's at governmental level, community, non profit, educational and/or interest group will always attract recalcitrant elements on both sides of the fence.

The Australian Hellenic community is no different to any other community that has sunk its roots into the Australian soil and thus embraced another culture. The word embrace does not necessarily infer assimilation as opposed to integration and therefore one must be cautious when using the word assimilation to a community that has roots deep in the history of man and in the origins of democracy.

It has been acknowledged for the past twenty years that the Hellenic community had become an integral part of the Australian fabric of society, still retaining its cultural roots; although one must admit frayed in some areas. However having said this, society is not judged alone by its people, but rather by its institutions, way of life and how the world perceives it. Australians of Hellenic origins have been absorbed into the Australian community without having lost their Hellenic roots and cultural origins.

Even those of mixed heritages still proudly point to their Hellenic heritage and have been able to adapt to both cultures. Some identify themselves as Hellenic with an Australian upbringing, others identify with being Australian of Hellenic origins and then there are those who have difficulty in identifying which of the two cultures is appropriate for them. Whatever the case may be and whatever choice one makes, Hellenic influence still remains.

To those who state that "What was not envisaged was the rapidity of the social assimilation of the second generation within the mainstream and its mass desertion and rejection of our existing community organisations. "[Dean Kalimnou - Neos Kosmos] is merely one persons point of view and one must admit it may be closer to the truth. However, this matter was duly noted by some notable academics at a lecture at a RMIT during the early 1990's.

They warned that in the past doors were closed and as such the communities that made up Australian society relied upon each other and thus community awareness was available. The academics warned that with all doors being opened and with the introduction of new technologies, Hellenism in Australia as we knew it would be diluted. They argued that those who held the mantle of power should take prudent steps to ensure that their institutions flourished and retained their cultural heritage without impinging or denouncing their Australian roots.

With this in mind, the second generation has taken heed of those words and have where possible retained the threads from the past and woven them successfully with the Australian fabric of society. The battle with the third generation while the first remains above and influential will be a robust one, based on organisational methods and good management rather than on heritage and cultural issues.

Those of the first and second generation that fail, to understand this phenomenon are bound to lose their influence and judgement when dealing with the next generation of leaders. The first and second generation of leaders and community influencers should not be afraid to hand over power or the reins to the next generation. They should be identifying them at an early stage and appoint mentors along with the appropriate suitable base to ensure that when the time comes, the transition is a smooth one.

However, this will take time and much soul searching but the first and second generation to put into place and accomplish. Knowing the Hellenic mind is one thing, working with a Hellene is another, and working with an Australian Hellene is even more interesting and challenging. We as Australian Hellenes should not be afraid of change, but we should embrace it and weave into the neo Australian Hellenistic cultural roots.

Consider well the errors of the past, and embrace a future with optimism and confidence. One does not have to compromise ones cultural soul to satisfy the needs of another, but work together to blend the both to make it even stronger. I for one have much faith in the abilities of the next generation and with the support from those of us who believe in the future, they will do well. Give the next generation a chance and you will be surprised by their enthusiasm and zeal.



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