

MELBOURNE'S GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE



Neos Kosmos 27 Mar 2012 PETER ADAMIS

Last Sunday saw over 20,000 people march to the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne to commemorate Greek Independence Day in 2012.

Under an array of cumulus cloud cover, Australians of Hellenic origins congregated along St Kilda Road Melbourne according to their pre-assigned order of March to commemorate Greek Independence Day for 2012.

The overhead patch blue and white sky blended well with the blue and white flags, banners and costumes of the marches and that of the thousands of visitors who had come to see the annual Greek Independence Day march. The mild weather conditions had attracted large crowds who arrived by hired buses and personal transport, lining the sides of the Shrine of Remembrance to watch the parade. Birds flew down from amongst the towering trees that surrounded the steps and the sacred areas adjacent to the shrine; screeching their opinions and adding to the chatter of many voices congregated below them.

Parade marshals responsible for the march were to be seen actively working with the various groups that represented the many regions of the Hellenic Republic and monitored their preparation for the parade. Organisations, such as Colleges, schools, Australian Hellenic communities, such as the Pallaconians, Cretans, Womens Associations, Epiotes, Pan Macedonians, Cypriots, Peloponnesians, AHEPA and various school bands, stood around, making their final adjustment to their dress, costumes, unfurling their banners and flags in preparation for the parade.

Although thousands attended this year's parade, old timers who had participated in the past were overheard to mutter that the attendance was down from previous years. They wondered whether this was as a result of the changes made to the dates of the Antipodes Glendi Festival which was historically held on the 25 Th March of each year to coincide with the Greek Independence Day.

These changes by the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria it would appear may have affected the reduction in numbers for 2012. Kostas Nikolopoulos, Secretary and one of the

organisers responsible for the parade; remarked that although it had been a long and tiring day for the organisers, it was well worth the effort in bringing about a successful Independence day parade for 2012.

During the forming up period, there was a chatter of young men and women amongst the marchers each jostling and making room for each other within the ranks, while others took up their pre-assigned positions at the head of their respective group. Flags, banners, signs, colourful costumes with the traditional predominate blue and white depicting the colours of the Hellenic Republic was evident. It was a sight that brought many a tear to the older generation who had known and could remember the horrors of WW2 and the Greek civil war.

Although the Greek Independence day is commemorated for its break away from the Ottoman Empire it also represents a day where freedom is also celebrated and it's a constant reminder that the freedoms we take so much for granted this day was not without bloodshed, misery, grief and sorrow.

The Greek nation has suffered much throughout the centuries under many a hard task master, but never yielding until they overthrew their occupiers. Even today, while Greece is suffering a financial crisis in Europe, there are signs that the Greek people are resisting the strict measures being imposed upon it.

On reflection, one could safely say with some degree of confidence that the Greek Independence day is what ANZAC Day is to the Australian nation. It is ironic that Greeks in 1821 and Australians in 1914 both fought the same indomitable foe, the Ottoman Turk.

The similarities do not end there as in each case both days are commemorated with a sense of reverence, remembrance, respect, and reflection of a time when nations were at odds with each other. Today both days represent a freedom to live life without fear of oppression and aggression, where people come together as one to watch the parade of marchers who represent the various organisations and to the many individuals who gave their lives in order that we live a life according to their beliefs.

Amongst the guests was The Hon Ted Ballieu (Premier of Victoria), Eleni Lianidou (Greek Consulate General of Melbourne Victoria), Member of the Hellenic Parliament, The Bishop Iakovas and Mr. Kon Kontis (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia), Maria Vamvakinou, (Member for Calwell), Nicholas Kotsiras (Minister for Multiculturalism), John Panadazopoulos, (Member for Dandenong), Vasili Papastergiadis (Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria), Sophie Mirabella (Member for Indi), Anne Barker (Member for Oakleigh), Chin Tan and Phillip Bain (Multicultural representatives), Jenny Mikakos, (Member for Northern Metropolitan Region) Martin Ferguson, (Member for Batman), Victoria Police, Australian Defence Force representatives, community leaders, and Hellenic representatives.

The march participants formed up down at the bottom of the steps in their pre-assigned order and the parade began to wind its way towards the dignitaries who were located at the lower steps of the Shrine of Remembrance.

A few of the Communities leaders stood in front of their respective organisations like Chris Paikopoulos the President of the Pallaconians of Melbourne Victoria. Chris proudly led the

Lakonians with their banners and flags of the Australian and Greek Flags fluttering in the air along the parade route leading up to the dignitaries.

As the parade approached the first steps it turned left, past the dignitaries and in doing so the Premier the Hon Ted Ballieu raised his arm in acknowledgement as the Pallaconian contingent marched past. The parade then crossed the shrine steps behind them, reforming again on either side of the everlasting flame in time to hear the speeches by the dignitaries.

At the conclusion of all the speeches relating to the Greek Independence day, the crowd dispersed into their particular groups and slowly melted away. While those who had participated in the march made their way back to their mode of transport returning to their original destinations. Others who had come for the day visited the shrine absorbing the essence of what the shrine stood for.

As the above clouds dissipated and the heavens opened allowing the sun's rays to penetrate the earth and bring warmth to the crowds below it was time to depart from the sacred grounds of the Shrine. A fine ending to a day that is revered by all Greeks no matter what part of the world they may call home. As Australians of Hellenic heritage, they could go back home satisfied in having paid their respects and homage to a generation long gone but never forgotten. Lest we forget.

Source: <http://neoskopos.com/news/en/melbourne-marches-for-greek-independence-day>