

THE COSTS OF SPONSORING A HELLENE TO AUSTRALIA



Reports of a random and anecdotal nature are being bandied about, that Australian Hellenic business representatives, philanthropic individuals, welfare groups, interested individual and communities are pledging their support towards assisting young men and women under the age of 35 to find meaningful employment in Australia. Then we find the self interest groups (that will remain nameless at this stage) because their interests are more in lining their own pockets and highlighting to the media just what wonderful human being they are; rather than actively supporting those who are in need.

Over 100 years ago, when Hellas was bankrupt, America was the favoured destination from Hellas. To obtain a ticket to America, you needed funds and when funds were not available, an individual was sponsored under the Padrone system. Suffice to say, America was plagued by the "Padrone" who made deals with American organisations seeking labor to build their railroads, knitting mills, roads, Skyscrapers, farms, and the myriad of sweat shop factories. These same American Greeks would also take advantage with their own countrymen and women by pledging their labor to these employers. In Hellas there were individuals who were able to recruit men and women who were destitute, unemployed, starving with nary a drachma to their name.

The Padrones agent in Hellas would obtain a commitment of those wishing to obtain a ticket to America that they would work and repay the price of the ticket plus any sponsorship fees. Once these unfortunate wretches were in America they became easy meat for the "Padrone" who would milk them and ensure that they were in his debt for some considerable time After a while, some of these unfortunates bandied together and

complained to their employers and/or to the local constabulary of the illegal activities of the "Padrones" and so called protectors. In one particular case, the Padrone was chased out of town by those under his so called umbrella of protection.

There were many cases of ethnic groups feeding off their own people and the Padrone system of labor was not consigned only to the Hellenic race. The Chinese, Jews, Irish, and Italians were also to suffer the same fate as the Hellenes trying to find employment, obtain sufficient funds to return back to Hellas and enhance their quality of life. The Irish and Jews worked in the factories, the Hellenes in the knitting mills, railways, mines and/or pushing barrows, the Chinese on the railways, laundry and the Italians in construction, Greengrocers. Many remained in America, seduced by the higher wages, better quality of life an eventfully sinking their roots deep into their adopted country.



Australian Hellenic Community and Business representative at a recent meeting

Although the same cannot be said of Australians of Hellenic heritage who have made Australia their home. The difference between the two countries was that the Padrone system did not operate or flourish in Australia due to the sponsorship system that proved to be more equitable and having learned the harsh lesions of their American cousins. What was familiar to both countries was the resentment t to the new arrivals by the people and surprisingly enough by their own people who looked down upon them as new arrivals who were in their eyes peasants and agricultural serfs. These new arrivals clung to their old customs and heritage along with their religious beliefs and such revitalised the Hellenic communities in America and Australia which on reflection was a blessing in disguise.

In Australia, some twenty years ago, an academic George Papadopoulos made a speech at the North end of Swanston Street, RMIT building. (George must forgive me if I have failed to capture his entire theme on that day, but I have tried to capture the essence of what he was communicating to his audience).

The theme was that Hellenes were not as united as in the past and that he was concerned about the Hellenic Diaspora in Australia because he felt that Australians of Hellenic background were losing their cultural roots and forgetting their past origins. He went on to say that in the early years of the Hellenic community, Hellenes were united and that the reason that they were united was because many doors were closed to them and therefore communication, businesses, cultural events, marriages and other Hellenic factors were contained within the microcosm of the Hellenic community.

He went on to say that all doors were open to Australians of Hellenic background and as such individuals, groups; communities were able to "leak out" of the main Hellenic reservoir that they were contained in. George went on to say that this was not a bad thing as The English, Welsh, Scots, Irish, Italians, people from the Baltic states, Chinese, Germans, Irish and Jews faced the same problems and had integrated well into Australian society while at the same time still retaining their cultural heritage. It is believed that George Papadopoulos was advising his audience that the Hellenic community could well learn the lessons from their ethnic brothers and applies the same ideals and systems within the community. Looking back to the past, George Papadopoulos in my eyes was a prophet lamenting in the wilderness and as such many in the Hellenic community heeded his words.

The Australian Hellenic community within the Melbourne and wider Victorian countryside are proud of their achievements, contribution to the Australian nation and continue to participate in every Australian event and become involved in all of its institutions. Having said this, the Hellenic community is now faced with the dilemma of how to support the Hellenic state in its time of need. Will it go down the path of the Padrone system and feed on its own origins, will it is out to make a fast dollar and line their own pockets, will the philanthropic, business, welfare groups and communities unite to create a movement that is conducive to both Australia and those Hellenes wishing to come to Australia.

This remains to be seen as Australian immigration authorities would be more concerned about being seen as laying favourites and or upsetting the balance of ethnicity in amongst its Australian population or will it succumb to political lobby groups or of its own political ministers. Whatever the case may be has yet to unfold as immigration authorities, interest groups and politicians grope to find the answers that will palatable and acceptable to the Australian people. No matter the ethnicity of any group wishing to migrate to Australia, the current quota and considerations for skilled migrants to Australia needs to be reviewed to ensure that those who contemplate migrating to Australia have long term aspirations, preferring to make Australia home.

On the other hand, the short term skilled migration quota should also be reviewed to ensure that those who arrive in Australia are not systematically stripped of their persona, financial status, livelihood, self respect and/or unfairly taken advantage of by the Padrone or Sponsorship system. Those responsible for the coordination and sponsorship should have in place realistic objectives, resources, manpower support, skills, knowledge and finance without having to rely on local, state or federal grants to fund their sponsorship programmes.

We in Australia do not wish to see a repeat of the American style Padrone system or that of what occurred to the Indian students from the Indian sub continent that were at the mercy of shoddy migration merchants and under resourced and mismanaged educational institutions. The resources necessary would involve: accommodation, security, food, clothing and health needs, employment, legal advice, migration support, employment and career resume support, sponsors, welfare and counselling.

In addition to the above, coordination, case managers/supervisors and a central body responsible to oversee such matters will require the support of all Australian Hellenic communities within the Melbourne and wider Victorian countryside. Without a united effort on the part of all the Australian Hellenic communities, the responsibility would fall upon the few and as such may fail, which will not be in any community's interest. The question is can the Australian Hellenic community put aside any differences and work together in the interests of their Hellenic cousins in Hellas.

A central body can be created from representatives within each community on a either a volunteer, philanthropic or funded basis or the central body can be located within an existing organisation with community representatives. We are not looking at large sums if migrants pay their own way, nor should we believe that migration agents should pocket between \$5000 to \$7000 when the administration can be handled for free by the central organisation. Neither should the figure of \$20,000 be bandied as the costs of integrating a new migrant into Australia, be used as a possible benchmark when there are current existing organisations to provide the support of integration into Australian society.

In conclusion, should Australian politicians and migration authorities decide to widen the migration barriers and allow as many new skilled migrants to mirror those of the refugees that arrive illegally by boat into this country; then maybe the Australian people will find these new arrivals more palatable and welcoming. At least we in Australia will be gaining the best of those who wish to migrate to this country. Organisations prepared to welcome the new migrant will need to be audited for good management, at the administrative and financial level along with the capacity to ensure migrant outcomes are successful and are able to integrate within the Australian community. Anything short of this is doomed to fail. **Peter Adamis**