

SUPPORT TO HELLAS BY THE AUSTRALIAN MELBOURNE VICTORIAN HELLENIC COMMUNITY

The night air was heavily pregnant with the moist atmosphere of the preceding downpour of rain. This however did not detract the passerby to walk without the aid of an umbrella as he made his way from the parking area to his destination. A distance of perhaps five minutes separated him from his vehicle and his destination. Parking ones vehicle at this time of night did not seem a problem if one was lucky enough to arrive after 6.00 pm, upon which a parking bay could be found for a fee of a mere \$7.00. Finding the correct entrance was interesting as it was barred by two elderly couple talking in the Hellenic language oblivious to those attempting to enter the building. On entering the building, the visitor is faced with a long passage which housed a lift at its termination. The lift appeared antiquated by today's standards but it was serviceable, safe and quickly to one to the selected level.

Not having been a guest before, one's mind conjured up a vision of what to expect when we reached the top. Would we see a board room cluttered with Hellenic paraphernalia, posters, flags and other familiar Hellenic images? Would the air in the Board room be thick with cigarette smoke, mingling with the smell of womens perfume lingering at shoulder height and followed by the bushy eyebrows of the alpha males watching each other with a look of cunning? One also expected dapper suits, hairy chests, loud voices, buxom ladies, laughter of young children, and the zealots, left wingers, right wingers, unionists and the dedicated nationalist's fresh from the land of Hellas.

However, these thoughts of a bygone era were all brushed away upon alighting from the lift. The visitor could not but admire the magnificent view from the third floor where one could look down with impunity upon the passersby's below. The Board room had simple but Spartan look about it which belied its guests who represented many of the Hellenic organisations, communities and institutions that were located in and around Melbourne and the greater Victorian countryside. In fact it was most pleasing to note that many if not most of those present were members who were second and third generation Australians of Hellenic heritage, still taking a vital interest in all matters Hellenic. However having said, that it was with some regret to notice the absence of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia at a time when all Hellas is at a crisis point. One hopes that this minor oversight by the organiser can be rectified at any future meetings.

Those in attendance involved the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne Victoria, represented by the President Bill Papastergiadis, Hellenic media groups, Neos Kosmos, 3XY, Hellenic journalists and freelance journalists and photographers, Welfare groups, Australian Greek Welfare Services, Elderly care groups, Fronditha, Victorian Multicultural Commission Deputy representing the Minister Nicholas Kotsiras, Sporting Clubs, Business representatives such as Black Swan Dips (Con Saris), Griffiths Coffee (Dennis Patisteas), Minoan Industries, (Emmanuel Starakis), Andonis Petsis, and many other business personalities), Hellenic RSL, ACTU members, Educational institutions and local and international youth. However despite the presence of the above institutions, the majority of the members present were representatives and/or leaders of various Hellenic communities, Federations, clubs such as the Macedonians, Thracian's, Cypriots, Athenians, Cretans, Lakonians, to name but a few that service the Melbourne and Victorian Hellenic communities.

Suffice to say; having not met the man, the President Bill Papastergiadis who chaired the meeting is a large strapping of a man who is over six feet tall, youthful looking and spoke with much confidence that was at once infectious and endearing to those present. He fielded the many questions that arose from the floor so to speak and he made it possible for as many representatives to put forth their point of view. It was very cleverly done and one must admire his youthfulness and an observer wonders who were his mentors to give him that flair of leadership that is so often missing from Hellenic organisations. If Hellenic institutions and organisations can put aside their differences for the good of the Australian Hellenic community and select leaders such as Bill Papastergiadis to lead the new generation of Australians of Hellenic heritage into the future, then Australia's Hellenic people will become an asset and greatly strengthen the fabric of Australian society.

During the meeting, the President Bill Papastergiadis briefed the audience on his dealings with the Australian Immigration authorities and without going into any great detail, said that he was optimistic on what the outcome could be. However, he said that we as a community could not afford to be complacent and that every effort should be made to influence any Member of Parliament, influencer and/or lobby groups that would take a kindly and sympathetic view of the Hellenic crisis. The theme that President and other members of the "front bench" wanted to express was that it was best to initiate positive action now, rather than wait until Hellas has reached a crisis point. He spoke about coordination and the need to have a centralised data base that would encompass the following resources: Employment opportunities, accommodation, educational support, welfare, health and medical advice, recruitment support, Resumes, legal representation and migration assistance.

Bill Papastergiadis also gave the unfortunate example of many youth being returned (deported) back to Hellas because they had placed on the entry visa application that they were coming to Australia to find employment. He said that it may cost as much as \$20,000.00 to sponsor a member under the age of 35 to work in Australia. Furthermore it is well known that in Hellas the youth unemployment is high and that one out of two are unemployed, creating financial and psychological havoc for those families trying to cope on reduced wages and resources..

Throughout the two and half hours meeting, many opinions, thoughts, ideas, concepts and offers of support were mingled with the odd constructive criticism to provide the audience with an idea that the Hellenic community was certainly united on supporting Hellas in her time of need. There was no shouting, no drowning out of any speaker, no negative vibes or the cutting of any tall poppies during the robust discussions that took place and if any criticism was to be levelled it could be that there was insufficient time to hear everyone. Still it was a well conducted meeting and the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria are to be congratulated for their initiative. Bill Papastergiadis concluded the meeting by advising members that they will all be contacted again for another meeting and requested that representatives on their return to their respective organisations brief their members on tonight's meeting. **Peter Adamis Abalinx**

COORDINATION CALL TO HELP NEW DIASPORA

Business and community organisations will join the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria (GOCMV) and the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) on February 28

NEOS KOSMOS 19 Feb 2012 MIKE SWEET

Business and community organisations will join the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria (GOCMV) and the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) on February 28 to thrash out a raft of new approaches to help Greek migrants settle in Australia. The meeting follows concerted efforts by GOCMV to encourage Immigration Minister Chris Bowen to support Greeks wishing to emigrate down under. GOCMV president Bill Papastergiadis told *Neos Kosmos* that the forum will discuss how a more coordinated approach between agencies can be developed, and that the meeting would look at other initiatives underway, including continued lobbying on working holiday visa arrangements between Greece and Australia.

The working holiday visa (sub class 417) allows people aged 18 to 30 years of age to come on a working holiday and spend up to 12 months in Australia. Plans for a reciprocal arrangement with Greece (as Australia has with most European countries), was first put forward by the Australian Government eight years ago, but the Greek government declined to act upon it. The GOCMV president said he was optimistic of a final resolution to the proposed bilateral visa agreement. "Apparently it's been signed at the Greek end," said Mr Papastergiadis, "and that's something we need to clarify." It is understood that if Greece has accepted the agreement and passed the necessary legislation to allow Australians to go undertake working holidays in Greece, then the ball is now in Minister Bowen's court for moving the initiative forward.

Tina Douvos, Deputy Director of AGWS told *Neos Kosmos* that the forum comes as the Victorian welfare organisation experiences increasing levels of inquiries from new Greek migrants. "We're getting approached by

migrants experiencing housing problems, wanting information on settlement issues, to finding education facilities for their children," said Ms Douvos. "We're also getting people who have been psychologically affected by the experience of coming out and leaving their families behind,- it's right across the board." Ms Douvos said AGWS expected this month's forum to help agencies share information and create new ways to deal with the growing demand on community services relating to increased migration from Greece.

Mr Papastergiadis said the February 28 meeting offered the chance to bring together the community's resources and create a managed network of support systems for new arrivals. "It's an opportunity to come up with some practical measures for how we can help those making the move to Australia, said Mr Papastergiadis, who added that he foresaw the creation of a working group made up of community organisations who would steer coordinated efforts. "It can work out how we can best deal with the social issues they are facing, identify employment opportunities, and look at issues like education for newly arrived families. It's all about co-ordination and creating a point of reference. "Formalising arrangements and working off a register for instance, is all going to help," said the GOCMV president. "There's a lot of goodwill out there in the community. This meeting is about how we can coordinate that goodwill more effectively."

Source: <http://neoskosmos.com/news/en/Coordination-call-to-help-new-diaspora>