



SUPPORT TO HELLAS AUSSIE GREEKS

Abalinx 17 January 2014 Peter Adamis

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 women's 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 passers-by'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.

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 and Sporting Clubs.



There were also 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. 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,.

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.



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