

# The Pre-World War II Greek Community of Australia: Class Divisions and Trends

by CHRISTOS N. FIFIS

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The aim of this paper is to discuss the structure and social stratification of the pre-War II Greek community in Australia, to trace the development of the Greek Orthodox Communities (GOCs) and other major Greek organizations and institutions and their role in the development of the community up to 1940. A GOC or 'the community' denotes the organized "*Koinotita*" in differentiation to the general Greek community or "*Paroikia*."

## *The Early Figures*

The first Greek presence in Australia is recorded on 28 August 1829 with the arrival in the port of Sydney of seven young Greek convicts from the shipping community of Hydra who had been sentenced to death for piracy by a British court in Malta in 1828. In 1829 the sentences of three of them had been commuted to life sentences and those of the four others to 14 years of forced labor and all transported to the English convict colony of New South Wales. The seven were fighters of the Greek revolutionary naval forces. Their ship had been captured in 1827 by the British Navy for interfering with a British commercial ship outside Crete, checking and taking away some materials from its cargo. The des-

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CHRISTOS N. FIFIS teaches Greek Studies in the School of Historical and European Studies, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. His current research project is entitled: *A History of the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria 1897-2003*.

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tinuation of the commercial ship was Alexandria, a base port of the Turkish-Egyptian naval forces aiming to destroy the Greek revolution. After negotiations between Greek and British authorities in the early 1830s the seven were pardoned in 1836. Five of them returned to Greece with their traveling expenses paid by the Greek government. The other two chose to stay and live in Australia. Gilchrist (1992) mentions a few more early settlers including the Zante lady Diamantina Roma, wife of Sir George Bowen, the first British Governor of Queensland between 1859 and 1866. In the 1850s more than five dozen Greeks arrived in Australia during the period of the gold rushes.

The establishment of GOCs in 1897 and 1898 in Melbourne and Sydney mark the beginnings of the organized Greek community in Australia. This was more than two years before the federation of the six English colonies of Australia and the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901.

These two GOCs were the first Greek organizations at a time when the entire population of Greek settlers throughout Australia was 878 in the census of 1901 and 1,798 Greece-born persons in the census of 1911 (Gilchrist, 1992: 386-9). It was a community where the male population exceeded females more than ten to one. According to Charles Price the sex ratio of the Greek community in 1901 was 1202.7. For every 100 females coming from Greece there were 1202 males. By 1940 the total Greek population in Australia had increased more than tenfold and the sex ratio, although not ideal, had much improved. There are no figures for 1940 but in the census of 1933 there were 8,338 Greece-born persons. However, there was not much change in the movements of Greeks during the war years, between 1940 and 1947. In the census of 1947 there were 12,202 Greece-born persons and the sex ratio was 287 (Price, 1984: 8-12). The total number of persons of the Greek-Australian community, however, including Greek Cypriots, Greeks from outside Greece and those of the second generation is estimated to be about 15,000.

Some important landmarks in the history of the pre-War II Greek community in Australia can be discerned in the years 1897-98, 1912, 1916, 1923-4 and 1935. A useful starting point is the creation of the two GOCs, referred to, the one of Melbourne in 1897 and that of Sydney in 1898. The other main pre-World War II communities were: the GOC of Western Australia (Perth)

founded in 1923, the GOC of Brisbane (Queensland) in 1923 and the GOC of Adelaide (South Australia) in 1930. A GOC in Australia at that time meant the establishment and running by the laity of an Orthodox church and the election of its administrative Executive Council by its male members. In essence, the development of the organized community and Greek cultural life depended on the numbers of Greek settlers, the years of their residence in Australia and on the numbers of the established families in each city. Important in this regard are the pioneering works of Michael Tsounis, (1971, 1975, 1988 and 1993), Charles Price (1963, 1975 and 1984), Hugh Gilchrist (1992 and 1997), A. Tamis (1888, 1997 and 2002), Stelios Kourbetis (1992) and George Kanarakis (1997 and 2002).

With regard to numbers we have records of the presence of Greek immigrants for the colony of Victoria, in terms of their Church affiliation, from the period of the gold rushes in the 1850s, and of the fluctuations and movements in the subsequent decades. This data is not always precise as it is described under various names, such as "Greek Orthodox Church," "Greek Church," "Greek Catholics," etc. Nevertheless, the figures indicate persons of Greek background or members of their families. In Victoria the numbers rose from 65 in 1854 to 127 in 1857, 239 in 1861, and 332 in 1871 and falling to 103 in 1881 (Gilchrist, 1992: 386-9).

Dozens of Greeks had settled in or passed through Melbourne and the colony of Victoria in the second half of the 19th century. Some were sailors mainly in English ships that had decided to abandon ship and try their luck in the gold rush fields of the 1850s. Later many of them moved to Melbourne or Sydney. Some dispersed to other small country towns or worked as outback workers, sailors and waterside laborers. By 1880 some of them had become owners or employees of cafes and fish-and-chip shops and a few were restaurant owners. Others had been invited by relatives and compatriots to work in their businesses. In this way, the first chains of migration from the islands of Ithaca, Kythera and later from Kastellorizo were formed. Whilst some migrants were transient and remained only for short periods, others remained in Australia working for their upkeep all their lives. A small number of them did become successful businessmen. It is noteworthy that this group of early settlers was mainly unmarried men, many of who remained bachelors all their lives.

A careful observation of the statistics indicates an exodus of Greeks from Victoria between 1871 and 1881 and also between 1891 and 1901. The exodus of the 1870s suggests that many of the migrants of this period were bachelors, wanderers and transients who remained in Victoria only for short periods. There are no statistics for persons born in Greece before the 1891 census but we observe a new decrease in the number of persons of Greek background in the 1890s—there were 203 Greece-born persons in Victoria in the census of 1891 and 181 in the census of 1901. This decrease seems to be due to the economic depression of the 1890s, which afflicted Australia for 3 to 4 years after 1893. This depression was especially harsh for Victoria and forced many Melbournians to leave, mainly for Western Australia (WA). It seems that amongst those who left were also some Greeks. In WA there were 17 Greece-born persons (15 males and 2 females) in the census of 1891. The census of 1901 showed an increase to 148 (146 males and 2 females), (Gilchrist, *Ibid.*).

In relation to other Australian colonies or dominions (after 1901 states) the available statistical data for this early period indicate that the Greek born population of Victoria was second to that of New South Wales (NSW). In the census of 1891 there were 203 Greece-born persons in Victoria compared with 255 in NSW, in 1901 there were 181 Greece-born persons in Victoria and 392 in NSW and 297 and 822 correspondingly in the census of 1911 (Gilchrist, *Ibid.*). The outbreak of the Balkan war in 1912 marked the concerted action of the Greek community of Australia to collect money for the Greek war effort and the return to Greece of many young migrants from Australia to enlist in the Greek army. The year 1913 saw the publication in Melbourne of the first Greek language newspaper in Australia, *Afstralia*, by Emmanuel Venlis, a Greek migrant from Egypt.

### *The Developments of 1916*

Some important developments are recorded in 1916. One is the growing suspicion of the Australian government and the Australian public towards foreigners, especially Germans. They feared that Bulgarians and Greeks might ally with the Germans during the First World War, undermining the cause of the Australian

allies and damaging the Australian interests. This suspicion was directed more acutely towards the German community but also towards Greeks due to the alleged pro-German sympathies of the Greek King Constantine I. This suspicion led to the banning of trade between Greece and Australia, suspension of naturalizations of Greeks under the age of 60. There were incidents of violence and looting of Greek shops in Brisbane (Queensland) and Sydney (NSW) in 1915 and wrecking of Greek shops in Perth, Kalgoorlie, and Boulder (WA) in 1916. The damages to the shopkeepers were estimated at about 10,000 pounds. Insurance companies refused to pay riot damages and despite owners making representations for more than 10 years, no form of compensation was received. The suspicion also led to a June 1916 governmental direction for a secret census and filing of all Greeks, their particulars, their occupational status and their ideological sympathies. Thanks to this we have official detailed data of the occupations of most Greeks in 1916.

The most significant development in 1916, however, was the publication of the first Greek-language book written in Australia, *I Zoi en Afstralia* (Life in Australia). It is an important social guide to the Greek life and presence in Australia which marks a stage of Greek-Australian community self-knowledge and self-assertiveness. Of course this publication did not happen overnight. It took at least two to three years of research and preparation. The book documents the commercial achievement of a community of successful shopkeepers, the resounding success of the 1912 community appeals to assist the Greek war effort, and the publication in 1913 of the first Greek language weekly newspaper in Melbourne, *Afstralia*.

The publication of the book was sponsored by John D. Comino, a wealthy Sydney businessman from Kythera and compiled by the Corinthian George Kentavros and the Kytherian brothers, Kosmas and Emmanuel Andronikos. It was published in the printing shop of the first Greek newspaper, *Afstralia*, in Melbourne. Ten thousand copies were printed at a time when the total number of Greeks in Australia was less than 4,000. The book was aimed to be a guide to the commercial successes of Greeks in Australia for the Greek authorities and Greek readers in Greece. Although the book was written in Greek it also aimed to convince Australian authorities about the law-abiding nature of the Greek-Australian community and its progressive spirit.

The book, *I Zoi en Afstralia*, is written from the point of view of successful Greek businessmen in Australia, describing Australian business conditions, praising good, hard and honest work and the enterprising spirit and giving biographical notes, photos and a description of the commercial achievements of some 155 successful Greek businessmen. It provided a "who's who" in the Greek-Australian business community. Among the highlighted businessmen is the sponsor of the book, John D. Comino, an oyster saloon proprietor, described as the richest Greek in Australia, a life honorary President of the GOC of Sydney and presented as a father figure of the Greeks of NSW.

In Victoria the father figure of Greek businessmen is presented in the person of Antonios J. J. Lekatsas—or Anthony Lukas. Antonios Lekatsas was born in October 1862 in Ithaca and had come to Melbourne in January 1887. He was a proprietor of luxury restaurants and President of the GOC of Melbourne, the richest Greek in Victoria at the time. He is described as "μοναδική εμπορική ευφορία" and as "παλαιός βιοπαλαιστής και μέγας επιχειρηματίας της σήμερον." Ten years later, Lekatsas was the richest Greek in Australia. He was appointed Honorary Consul-General of Greece in Sydney from 1923 to 1926. In 1931 Lekatsas was appointed Honorary Consul of Greece in Melbourne and retained that honorary position till his death in August 1946. In 1943 he donated 10,000 English pounds to Winston Churchill for the victims of the recent German raids of London. In Adelaide (South Australia), the father figure of Greek businessmen was Dimitrios Politis from Constantinople who was running his business in partnership with his sister-in-law Athena Konstantinidou. In Perth (Western Australia), the father figure of Greek businessmen was the cigarette manufacturer Petros Michelidis, born in Kastellorizo in 1882 and a resident of Perth since 1904. In 1916 Michelidis was the Honorary Consul of Russia and France, later became the President of the GOC of Western Australia and still later, the Honorary Consul of Greece in Perth.

Most of the other *I Zoi en Afstralia* businessmen in 1916 were relatively young bachelors with an average age of 28-30 years, and with an average residence in Australia of about ten years. They were running restaurants, cafes, hotels, confectionary and fruit shops, old type fish-and-chips shops and American-style milk bars. The authors are at pains to educate the new Greek businessmen

and to cultivate the right attitudes towards Australia and Australians. Cleanliness is stressed in the book and the reader is informed that there is a hefty fine of 20 English pounds for the adulteration of milk with water. Honesty and hard work are essential qualities for success.

These relatively young businessmen came from Kythera, Ithaca, and Kastellorizo. About 43% of the Greek migrants to Australia of the time and indeed up to 1947, came from those three islands. The majority of the businessmen portrayed in the book, however, came from Kythera and carried on their business in Sydney and various towns of the state of NSW. There were some, however, coming from the Peloponnesos, Lefkas, Zakynthos, Samos, Athens, Piraeus, Smyrna, Constantinople, Preveza, Siki-nos, Livadia and Karpathos. Interestingly, there were no Cypriot businessmen presented in the book, as Cypriots came to Australia later. All of the businessmen presented were men, except for Athena Konstantinidou in Adelaide and Antonios Lekatsas' English wife, Margaret Wilson, in Melbourne. The book presents these businessmen as "τέκνα πτωχείας οι περισσότεροι, αφίκοντο εις Αυστραλίαν με υψηλούς και ιερούς σκοπούς." They were children of a background of poverty who migrated to Australia with high and sacred aims to become successful businessmen. This indicates the ideology and values of the people described and also of the writers of the book. The book stresses success through persistent and honest work and pride in their ethnic origin. Many of them, although they only recently arrived, left their business and took the 35-day return trip to Greece to enlist in the Greek Army during the 1912-13 Balkan wars. The authors claim that more than 500 young migrants returned to Greece to join the army (p.114), a figure which seems much exaggerated as the list of names of those who returned to Greece numbers only 23 (p. 301) plus another two (pp. 295 and 302), including Ioannis Tambakis killed in action.

The book informs the reader that there were at that time 630 Greek shops around Australia, about half of them in Sydney and Melbourne, a few in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide and the rest in small country towns. These shops included 14 Greek καφενεία (coffee houses), throughout Australia. Greek καφενεία in Australia in pre-war years were meeting places, information centers, but also in some cases provided venues for illegal gambling. In 1916, the authors tell us, there were 170 Greek families in Australia, 2/3 of

which had both parents Greek and 1/3 of mixed marriages. The families in the urban areas were scattered all over the large metropolitan areas, making the creation of a Greek school difficult. As a consequence, the authors lament, many young Greek children did not have any knowledge of the Greek language. Australians are described in the book as civilized, friendly and to some degree gourmands, liking sweets and fruit, something which leads to the decay of their teeth and which makes the country's dentists happy.

The authors take pride in the success of Greeks in Australia who were distinguished for their humble beginnings and for their "μη κομψή αλλά έντιμον εργασία," their not neat but honest work. These were the people, they stress, who in 1912-13 went back home to fight for their native country and who contributed 12,000 English pounds to the National Appeals during the Balkan wars. The contribution per state was 4,500 from NSW, 3,500 from Victoria, 1,600 from WA, 1,400 from Queensland, etc. The amounts mentioned were significant when considering that at the time the weekly wage of a laborer was less than 2 pounds and the total number of all Greece-born persons in Australia was less than 4,000.

The authors complain that they did not always find the ready cooperation of people in their efforts to gather information by correspondence, etc., (Kentavros, Preface, pp.22-3), implying that there were incomplete sections which could be completed in some future edition. There was no subsequent edition. Apart from the named businessmen, a mention is made of other occupations of Greek settlers. There were some peddlers, fishmongers and fish hawkers. A reference is also made to the honorary consuls of Greece, some of whom were Australian businessmen, to the two priests Father Dimitrios Marinakis of Sydney and the Archimandrite Daniel Maravelis of Melbourne, to the retired Sydney priest Father Seraphim Phokas and to the Melbourne physician Dr. K. Kyriazopoulos. There is no reference, however, to the Perth Archimandrite Father Germanos Iliou and to the establishment by him of the first after-hours Greek language school in 1915. Nor is there any reference to a young Sydney medical student, George Takhmindzis, to whom we will refer shortly. The book was followed by another two guides, an *Odigos tou Ellinos en Afstralia* published in Sydney by Oscar Georgoulas in 1920 and an *International Directory* by Andreas Papadopoulos published in Adelaide in 1927. These later publications provided commercial and legal informa-



tion as well as moral advice to new businessmen and were much less detailed in their presentation of Greek-Australian community presence.

While *I Zoi en Afstralia* was published in 1916 the preface by George Kentavros is dated 16 April 1915. Consequently it does not mention the riots and violence against Greek shops in Brisbane and Sydney in 1915 or Perth, Kalgoorlie and Boulder in WA. in 1916, when Greeks were made a target because of King Constantine's pro-German sympathies. The writers were unaware of the secret census of all Greeks in Australia at the time. This secret census, the existence of which was discovered in the 1980s in the Australian National Archives by Hugh Gilchrist, started in June 1916 when the Director of the Special Intelligence Bureau sent a "Most Secret" letter to the Commissioner of the Police in each state "requesting that the Police in every sub-district take steps at once to quietly and most confidentially summarize all particulars relating to Greeks." Within a few weeks and without "attracting attention or exciting suspicion" the job was carried out: the names and particulars of 2,398 Greeks in Australia were recorded along with the "names and addresses and management of all Greek shops, clubs and welfare bodies" (Gilchrist, 1997: 17). Out of the 2,398 persons only seven "were deemed to harbor disloyal sentiments" and only two had previously been "convicted of gambling"—the others "had attracted no police attention." (Ibid.)

In order to understand the reaction against foreigners and the secret census against the Greeks we need to understand the general climate at the time. Australians often discriminated against Asians, and to a lesser degree against non-English speaking Europeans and especially Mediterranean Europeans. There was a general xenophobia against aliens and the 'White Australia Policy' was the first act to be enshrined by the newly created Federal Parliament in 1901. In 1916-17 the Australian government of William Morris Hughes was participating in the war on the side of Britain but could not pass legislation to allow conscripts to serve overseas. Australia participated in the fateful Gallipoli campaign in 1915 and the Western front in France totally with volunteers. In a population of less than 5,000,000 at the time there were 416,809 volunteers of whom 329,000 served overseas with a loss of approximately 60,000 dead. It is said that "Australia became a nation on Gallipoli." (Crawford, 1968:166-168). According to

Gilchrist, at least 57 men (volunteers) of Greek descent served overseas with the Australian armed forces and two in the navy. Of these at least seven were killed in action (1997:32). In 1916 the need for conscripts became more pressing. The Australian Labor Party and large sections of the Australian public were, however, against the war and against conscription. Twenty-five percent of the Australian population was of Irish descent and anti-British. The Hughes government pressed the conscription issue by way of referendum. The question was put twice to the voters and twice failed to gain the required majorities. The secret census seems to be a preventive measure to locate possible opponents of the war policy and if required, to administer punishment measures against them, as the government did against members of the German community. According to Tsounis:

(In translation) . . . The Greeks were put in the same category with the Germans and Bulgarians of Australia (whose countries of origin had sided themselves with the enemy) and a bad fate was awaiting them if Greece was to participate in the war with the pro-German camp. German migrants in Australia who in their majority did not have any relations with the Kaiser and the German war, were treated badly. Some hundreds of them were put in the Torres Island jail near Port Adelaide, whereas at the same time the Australian authorities closed down all of the 60 German schools, most of which were operating in South Australia and some of which had been established in the 1840s (Tsounis, 1991: 47).

Indeed, the secret census was more detailed and informative in its description of Australia's Greeks at the time than the book, *I Zoi en Afstralia*. Some of the Greek occupations recorded in the secret census include 311 restaurateurs, café-proprietors, oyster saloon keepers or managers; 117 shop keepers, merchants and dealers, 246 greengrocers and fruiterers, 158 shop assistants, 126 fish mongers, fish hawkers or fish shop assistants, 95 working in the Port Pirie smelters (a strategic industry in South Australia), 94 laborers of various kinds, 17 miners and a smaller number working in various other businesses. There were also 3 unemployed, 7 old-age pensioners, 100 women in "domestic duties," two wait-

resses, one medical practitioner in Melbourne, one engineer and four priests. Also, there is a recording of 104 cane cutters and others working in the sugar industry, in the tropical area of Northern Queensland. The authors of *I Zoi en Afstralia* don't discuss at all the hard conditions of the shop assistants, working 10 to 12 hours a day for at least six days a week for a meager remuneration and their accommodation, but do make a brief reference to "κοπή του ζαχαροκαλάμου εις την εσχάτως ήρχισαν επιδιδόμενοι τινές των ημητέρων," the cane cutting industry in which some of our people have recently started working.

The authors of *I Zoi en Afstralia* do not discuss issues of class divisions in the Greek-Australian community. In April 1916, however, George Takhmindzis, a 22-year-old Sydney University medical student, wrote a letter to King Constantine of Greece arguing that he, Takhmindzis, should replace the inactive Greek Consul-General (the Australian businessman Samuel Cohen) for the betterment of the Greek community in Australia. As he is quoted by Gilchrist, he started analyzing for the king the grave situation of the Greek-Australian community and the Greek working class in Australia. The only kind of work reserved for Greek workers in pre-WWII years was in most cases that of a helper for many hours a day and a long 6-day week, in a compatriot's shop, for their food, accommodation and very low wages. The few factory jobs at the time were reserved, almost exclusively, for Australian workers, so Greek workers were exploited by their better off compatriots. Takhmindzis was asking the Greek king for the investment of the authority so he could "make the word 'Greek' beloved, respected and admired."

Looking at the morally and materially corrupt Greeks here, who are moving by giant steps towards a catastrophe, I have decided, Majesty, to set forth in a few words their wretched condition, because I know that one day, You, my country, will ask me why I did not try to do my duty to the fatherland.

The Greek population here may be divided into three groups: the working class, the rich and those who rule. The workers, unfortunate people, are condemned by fate, reinforced by the other two classes, to work many hours a day in hard labor for low wages—worse off even than the

helots of Sparta; and because of this overload they very often fall ill.

Visiting the hospitals I see people with hernias, kidney displacement, general debility, even venereal disease. Why? Because they have no one to advise them about their rights and about a proper life-style. The rich, exploiting this situation, receive a good income because of this injustice to the poor . . .

The Consulate, I have heard, is just a rubber stamp. Our unfortunate workers—people whose Hellenistic instincts remain intact—are unanimously urging me to liberate them. I have sought it prudent, however, not to address or counsel them until I receive some degree of authority from Yourself. (Gilchrist, 1997: 307).

The letter is more significant than a radical student's opinion, as it seems at a first glance, because it was accompanied by another 168 signatures of Sydney Greeks. Takhmindzis, the first Greek student in Australia to graduate later in medicine, was acting then as the spokesperson of Sydney's Greek poor. In the same letter he accused the Sydney Greek community priest, Father Dimitrios Marinakis, of "sloth in the performance of his duties, . . ." preoccupation with money making and flattering the rich. "The rich are his collaborators and relatives" (Gilchrist, 1997: 269). On the other hand, the same priest is described by the authors of *I Zoi en Afstralia* as 'one of the most modest, virtuous and learned Greek Orthodox clergymen abroad . . . He is justly highly regarded by the members of the Greek community of Sydney who respect and love him excessively for his precious virtues' (*I Zoi*, . . . 1916: 116-7). Marinakis remained in his position till 1923 when the Sydney GOC Council asked the Holy Synod of Greece for his replacement. He was replaced despite his protests but did not leave Sydney. A year later he left the priesthood and with his brother became co-proprietors of the Sydney Greek-language weekly newspaper, *Ethnikon Vima* (Gilchrist, 1997:270). There was no reply to Takhmindzis' letter. Although Takhmindzis could not know about the Australian secret census on Greeks, he should have known that King Constantine himself, because of his pro-German sympathies, was very unpopular with the Australians. A response by King Constantine would not have helped either Takhmindzis

or the community very much. At any rate, a year later, in June 1917, King Constantine was forced by the English and French navies to leave Greece and go into exile.

In 1916 there were only the two GOCs in Australia: one in Melbourne and the other one in Sydney with their priests and churches. The Kastellorizan Association in Perth was established in 1912. There was a priest there but no established community and no church. In addition, there were the Ithacan Philanthropic Association Ulysses Club and the Cultural Pan-Hellenic Association Orpheus Club in Melbourne, both established in 1916; also a Pan-Hellenic Association in Brisbane, established in 1913. All these organizations were mainly run by the Greek business class purporting to provide services to the community and the enhancement of the good name of Greeks in Australia. The communities were offering church services and contributed in the organization of funding appeals to assist the Greek army and navy as well as war orphans, victims and refugees. From 1916 onwards the GOC in Melbourne started celebrating the Greek National Day. They were also organizing picnics for their members and friends. Other cultural activities, such as occasional concerts, lectures and theatrical performances, were mainly organized by the associations, especially the Orpheus Club in Melbourne. Unlike in Perth, there was no proper after-hours Greek school organized in Melbourne and Sydney and the need for it was felt by the authors of *I Zoi en Afstralia*.

### *1916-1940: Continuities and Changes Greek Organizations and Their Economic Problems*

In Melbourne, between 1921-24, there were unsuccessful moves to have the two associations merge with the community, so they could form a strong organization and provide better services to all. The moves reflect the adverse economic situation faced by all of them in carrying out their aims. On 17 February 1921 a joint meeting of the three executive councils took place in the rooms of "Orpheus" in Melbourne to discuss proposals for an amalgamation. Dim. Mavroedis, the President of the GOC of Melbourne, thanked all participants for their response to the invitation and explained the grim economic situation of the Melbourne commu-

nity. Vice President E. Thalassinos made a plea that the two associations come to the community's assistance. Aristotle Papalexandrou, the General Secretary of the community, made a passionate speech to the joint meeting analyzing the problems of the Community and the larger Greek community:

(In translation) . . . The financial situation of the supposed Community and its earnings from the church are nothing compared to its expenses. If this situation is left to continue we won't be able to remain as a Community Council of a non-existing Community and neither we will be able to keep a church and pay a priest . . . (Minutes in Greek of the joint meeting of the three Executive Councils, 17 Feb. 1921).

For the first time, in the over twenty-year history of the community, a member of its Executive Council was voicing the need to pursue new priorities, and not merely offering church services:

(In the past), (*Papalexandrou continued*), the whole emphasis was given to the provision of church services . . . They (*previous Community Councils*) gave no attention to the General community issues and they had never thought how to unite and how to plan for its progress by establishing for example a Greek School, by undertaking philanthropic tasks of assisting the poor, of being of help to the sick, of contributing to the Greek national causes, of celebrating the Greek National Day or anything else contributing to the progress and welfare of a community . . . (Ibid.).

The solution for Papalexandrou was the dissolving of the Pan-Hellenic Cultural Association Orpheus and the Ithacan Philanthropic Association Ulysses and the participation of all in forming a strong community, where a larger number of Melbourne members would be able to pay subscriptions for the implementation of progressive programs. After some discussion, however, Papalexandrou's proposal for an amalgamation was rejected.

The need for the creation of a community school in of Melbourne was taken further at the annual general meeting of the community on 20 February 1922 by the newly arrived priest from

Greece, the Cephalonian Archimandrite Eirinaios Kassimatis. President Mavrouedis praised highly the qualities of the new priest who was present at the meeting. The treasurer's report, however, was less euphoric. The balance in the bank was only 4/9/5 English pounds. A. J. J. Lekatsas asked the priest not to be disappointed by the financial situation because the supporters of the community were its members. The Reverend Archimandrite spoke to the meeting, showing no signs of disappointment. He made a short warm speech that attracted the applause of those present. He praised the intellectual gift of the Greek race and the work of the Greek communities outside Greece. He expressed, however,

(In translation) . . . The sorrow which depresses my soul due to the lack of organization of Greek community forces . . . Don't forget that you are descendants of Homer and the Ancient Greeks, of the geniuses of knowledge and learning, descendants of the last Emperor Konstantinos Palaiologos and the heroes of 1821 Revolution and brothers of those still fighting in the plains and mountains of Thrace and Asia Minor. The voice and testament of all these are "Motherland loving Greeks «μη λείψετε» don't neglect to educate your children as is proper for Greeks. (Minutes in Greek of the Community Annual General Meeting, 20 Feb. 1922).

Concluding, the priest proposed the establishment of a Greek school "for implanting the Greek sentiments." This raised an aura of enthusiasm in the audience and various amounts were promised. It took more than a year, however, before some Greek after-hours classes could start operating in the rooms of the Ithacan association Ulysses. The problem was that the number of school-age Greek Australian children in Melbourne in the early twenties was small and families, due to their type of work, were widely scattered. The president of the community, A. J. J. Lekatsas, in an interview in the Melbourne Greek language newspaper *Εθνική Σάλπιγξ* on 25 April 1923, stated that in contrast to Perth, where an after-hours Greek school started operating as early as 1915, in Melbourne and Sydney, long distances were a serious problem for the establishment of a community school. Father Eirinaios Kassi-

matism, in an article in the same newspaper on 4 July 1923, admitted that the typical Greek families were either newly married or their children were past school age.

The influx of Asia Minor refugees increased the population of the small Greek communities after 1923 but not sufficiently to make their churches, schools and newspapers financially viable and independent. According to Tsounis, at least 8,000 Greeks came during the 1920s but many were also leaving. "Over 40% (of Greek pre-war II) immigrants left Australia after trying their luck for a while" (Tsounis, 1993:26). Nor was this expansion welcomed by some sections of the host society, as the 1925 Ferry Report, in the State of Queensland, suggests:

Socially and economically this type of migrant (the Greek) is a menace to the community in which he settles and it would be best for the State if his entrance were altogether prohibited. (Cited by Price, 1963: 205).

Of course this sort of prejudice thrived on ignorance and misunderstanding, as illustrated by the 1916 riots and looting of Greek shops, the 1928 bombing of the Acropolis Café in Melbourne and the anti-Italian and anti-Greek, "anti-dago" riots of January 1934 at Boulder-Kalgoorlie in Western Australia.

### *The Church-Communities Dispute in the 1920s*

Early in 1924 the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople created the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Australia. In July 1924 the new Metropolitan Christophoros Knitis arrived in Australia. His appointment generated much opposition from the communities. In Melbourne, a new joint meeting of the three organizations took place on 18 November 1924, at the shop of community President Pythagoras Hatzimikhail. Metropolitan Knitis and the honorary Consuls A. J. J. Lekatsas and A. B. Maniakos participated. The meeting was chaired by His Eminence the Metropolitan Christophoros Knitis. This was the last time that such a united meeting of Melbourne Greek organizations was held for at least eight years. Panayotis Lekatsas, on behalf of the Ithacans, stated that the association Ulysses found it impossible to hand over its hall.



Also the Consul-General, A. J. J. Lekatsas, said that it was not possible for the community to undertake the debts of Orpheus. Thus, the idea and the efforts for uniting the Greek community in a common, strong organization failed dismally. Given the manner of the organization of the Greek community in Australia, this was, in any event not very feasible, and perhaps it was not necessary.

The controversy over the appointment of Knitis divided the communities deeply over the next four years. The leaders of the GOCs were struggling to cover the expenses of running their churches and could foresee difficulties in keeping up with the expenses of running a diocese and keeping a Metropolitan. They resented the fact that they had not been consulted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate about the appointment of a Metropolitan; they had simply been informed in a letter about the decision and congratulated for becoming part of the newly created Greek Orthodox Diocese of Australia. They did not wish to cut off their connections with the church of Greece or to share community power with a Metropolitan. Furthermore, Knitis was resented by part of the Greek press and a part of the congregation for his authoritarian behavior and alleged homosexuality. Very early he came into conflict with Father Eirinaios Kassimatis in Melbourne and Father Athinagoras Varaclas in Sydney who had been appointed by the Holy Synod of Greece. He ultimately dismissed and unfrocked them. Thus the appointment of Knitis divided the communities of Sydney and Melbourne. Most of the Ithacans and Kytherans were against him and demanded his recall whereas the Samiots, who were his compatriots, were supporting him. Finally, Knitis was forced by the Patriarchate to be transferred to an honorary position in 1928. It was not until 1932 that the new Metropolitan Timotheos Evangelinidis arrived in Australia and the communities-church wound started healing slowly.

### *Class Divisions*

Between 1916 and 1940 a considerable number of regional associations and brotherhoods had been formed reflecting the diversification of the wider Greek-Australian community. Those earlier Ithacan, Kastellorizan and Kytherian fraternities had been

joined by Macedonians, Asia Minor Greeks, Cypriots, Samiots, and other regional associations and brotherhoods.

The early 1930s saw the Great Depression in Australia and Greek community organizations and individuals suffered alike. According to Antonios Lekatsas, the richest Greek in Australia at the time, the situation was bad but not as bad as the Depression of 1893. At a dinner in his honor given by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne he donated 105 English pounds to the Lord Mayor's hospitals appeal. In the previous depression of 1893, he had lost everything except 9 shillings (*Hellenic Herald*, 27/10/1932). However, it was not that easy with others. Many businessmen did lose their businesses and workers lost their jobs. Many, unable to keep up with payments, lost their houses and others were evicted by their landlords. According to Tsounis, in 1933 18% of the Greeks in Australia were employers, 25% self-employed and the rest employees, but in the census of that year, 33% were unemployed and 6% working only part-time. Unemployment for the total Australian population was 25.5% (Tsounis, 1971: 203). In addition,

79% earned less than the basic wage of some three pounds (40% earning a pound a week or less; and that some 70% were not citizens. From Greek Church records in Adelaide we learn that the average age of Greeks at burial between 1925 and 1940 was 41 years (some twenty years below the Australian national average). (Tsounis, 1993: 27)

After 1935 the economy was recovering and the war years brought some prosperity. From the census of 1947 we learn that

57% of the Greek born lived in the five mainland capitals (as against 49% in 1933) while 54% were listed in the "employer and self-employed categories." (Ibid, p. 28)

Alekos Doukas, a left-wing Greek intellectual and writer in Australia, born in Asia Minor in 1900 who arrived in Australia in 1927, commented on the state of the Greek community of the 1930s. In his novel, *Káτω από Ξένους Ουρανοίς* (Under Foreign Skies), published posthumously in Melbourne in 1963, he described the Greek community of Australia of the 1930s, in terms similar to those of Takhmindzis in 1916:

(In translation) . . . The Greeks (*in the depression*) were divided into three categories. The first were the 'Patricians', those who were stingy from their cradle. They made money and showed off as the "good class" . . .

The second class of the "compatriots" were those who had small shops, fruit shops and fish shops. Their rent was small, they did not pay salaries by working themselves 80 hours a week, they were leading a dog's life and making economies so they could put aside a few shillings to send to their families in Greece, or to be able to climb a step further up on the social and community ladder.

The third group, which was the most numerous, were the "ragged proletarians," anarchists and unorganized, with a bitter taste in their throat. No one of them was a factory worker, nor could become one in that period. (Doukas, 1963: 233).

The awareness of these class divisions were much felt by the 1920s and led to the creation of a number of left-wing associations in the late 1930s. Even from the 1920s there were some less formal leftist organizations. According to Kourbetis:

(In translation) Peter Alexanders remembers that since 1923 there was in existence a left wing cell which was bringing in Australia from USA and distributing in the Greek *καρνελά* the newspaper *ΕΜΠΡΟΣ*, a newspaper of the Greek-American communists. (1992: 26)

The first formal left-wing association created in the 1930s in Australia was the Democritus Greek Workers League in Melbourne in 1935. It was followed by the Sydney Atlas in 1939. Later similar associations were formed in other major Australian cities. Greeks of the left were relatively not numerous in Australia in the pre-war years but were quite active in the Australian trade unions and the life of the Greek community. These left-wing associations were pan-Hellenic and broad in their character, not limiting themselves to a particular party of the left, aiming to draw their members from workers and small businessmen. They kept ties with other Australian working class organizations and trade unions and aimed with their information bulletins and cultural and political

activities to provide to otherwise lonely and isolated workers language assistance, forms of alternative entertainment and advice to avoid gambling houses. They also provided information about Australia and their rights in their places of work. Kourbetis mentions a strike action undertaken by Democritus members to support the position of a dismissed worker by a Greek employer:

The founding constitution of the first workers' club *Democritus* specifies as its main aim, the development of the intellectual and class consciousness of its members. It's worth noting here that the first Greek-Australian strike was organized by Democritus in late 1935. In response to a shop-owner's replacement of a worker for one willing to work for lower wages, members of Democritus organized a sit-in until the employer re-hired the sacked worker. (1992: 88).

The workers' clubs supported community activities regarding the running of the church and the Greek school but their opposition to the exploitation of workers, as seen above, brought them on some occasions into conflict with Greek employers. Alekos Doukas in his novel, *Under Foreign Skies*, presents the experiences and feelings of his main character, Stratis, towards his exploitation by his employer while he was trying desperately to keep working in his shop in the early 1930s:

(In translation) His hatred for this man was overflowing every Saturday night when Stratis was paid by him his wage, an amount of 30 shillings. He knew very well that his legal wage was 85 shillings for 48 hours work; he was working 75-80 hours a week for 30 shillings. (Quoted by Kourbetis, 1992:16).

Doukas, in the same novel, refers also to a Greek unionist who was trying to organize Greek restaurant workers in Australia and attracted the enmity of Greek employers who reported him to the police as a troublemaker and anarchist. The police kept a constant watch of his movements without ever arresting or interviewing him so as to keep his nerves on edge. The man was driven to suicide. (Doukas, 1963) Dimitris Kalomiris, a Greek-Australian

journalist, confirmed in a 1989 interview that Doukas' reference was a true story of a union organizer who committed suicide in 1941. The unnamed man referred to by Doukas was Andreas Raftopoulos, a migrant from Ithaca, whose wife and two children were living in Greece. In the late 1930s he became an organizer of the Restaurant Employees Union and one of the founding members of the Sydney Atlas Association in 1939:

(In translation) . . . Andreas Raftopoulos at that time worked at a restaurant of his brother in law at Oxford Street . . . (Like all others) he was working also from morning to night, seven days a week for three pounds. He left to become an organizer for the Restaurant Workers . . . He was a good organizer, an enthusiastic one and managed to organize some Greeks . . . His work, however, was difficult and dangerous for him. He was working under the most unfavorable conditions because the climate of the period was stiflingly against unionism. There was widespread unemployment, the only jobs Greeks could get were in Greek restaurants and in order for someone to find a job he needed to know some owner well or wait for some worker to die and try to get his job. How could you organize workers in such a situation? In the small Greek community of Sydney Raftopoulos became a target of hatred, threats and persecution. Employers threatened him with jailing and deportation. And those threats against him were repeated by the Greek Consulate . . . At the beginning of 1941 Mitsopoulos (*one of their comrades*) was sent to a Liverpool concentration camp where Italian and German fascists were also interned. . . . Raftopoulos was like a stretched wire, a man about 30, young and anxious as he was, they eventually broke his nerve. One evening he went to the shop of Mitsopoulos's mother asking to go upstairs to get some rest . . . They found him in a pool of blood. (Kalomiris, 1989: 13-15).

In April 1939 the Sydney Greek Consul-General, Emiliios Vrysakis, was booed by Democritus members in the hall of Orpheus in Melbourne where he and the establishment of the community were celebrating the name day of King George II of Greece

and propagating the Metaxas dictatorial regime. As a result a strain in the relations of Democritus and the middle class Greek Orthodox Community leaders followed for many years, reflecting the climate of the period.

This political conflict was also reflected in the Greek Australian press. The first Greek language newspaper, *Afstralia*, appeared in Melbourne in 1913 followed later with few others, some short lived. By 1939 only three weekly Greek-language newspapers had survived and continued publication during the war and post-war years, two of them in Sydney and one in Melbourne. They ranged from the extreme right-wing Melbourne weekly *Phos*, 1936-1973, to the two conservative Sydney weekly papers, the *Ethniko Vima* which in 1922 succeeded *Afstralia* under new management and the *Hellenic Herald* established in November 1926. The left-wing associations had no newspaper of their own but they were issuing information bulletins.

The GOCs were, on the main, run in the pre-war years by middle class shop owners who had organizational skills but very little time. In post-war years, apart from businessmen, there were also working class and professional members on the Community Council. The Greek Orthodox community of Melbourne and Victoria (as it was renamed in 1938) started in the late 1930s playing a more involved role, mainly through the efforts to undertake the running of the community after-hours school and the preparation of the Annual Grecian Ball. The proceeds of the ball were allocated to causes outside of the community such as the appeal of the Lord Mayor for the city hospitals, the Australian Royal Navy or the needy back in Greece. A similar role was played by the other GOCs in the other Australian states. Although women members of the GOC of Melbourne and Victoria were playing a vital role in its functions they were not given the vote until 1952. Women, however, sometimes played an important role in the running of the left-wing associations of Democritus and Atlas. In 1942 Kiki Tsounis was perhaps the first Greek woman to be elected to the management council of a Pan-Hellenic Greek organization in Australia, when she was elected Secretary of Democritus (G. Vasiliacopoulos and T. Nicolacopoulos).

In 1952 there was an immigration agreement signed between Australia and Greece. The picture of the community changed drastically between 1952 and 1972 with the mass migration and the

arrival of tens of thousands of Greek post-war immigrants who worked mostly as unskilled workers in the growing Australian manufacturing industry. The Greece-born persons increased from 25,862 in 1954 to 77,333 in 1961 and to 160,200 persons in the census of 1971, which was the highest recorded number of Greece-born persons in Australia. (Fifis, 1999: 67).

### *Summary and Concluding Comments*

A critical point in the formation of the Greek community in Australia occurred in the years 1897 and 1898 with the establishment of the first two GOCs of Melbourne and Sydney. The establishment of such communities required the participation of businessmen with knowledge of Australian society and its political and legal system, as well as the ability to lend financial support to the communities. It was to the advantage of Greek businessmen to organize themselves in formal organizations so they could approach more easily, both formally and informally, the Australian state and local government authorities to counter social prejudices and discrimination and to make themselves accepted and respected. The organized community was also providing a venue to approach and establish relations with the Greek government and ecclesiastical authorities, something important for their business, their social profile and their sense of public participation and self-importance. The first Greek honorary consuls of Greek origin were individuals who associated themselves with business, community organizations and Greek patriotic issues (financial appeals for the Greek armed forces, the war effort or providing financial relief to war victims and refugees).

The year 1916 presents a landmark in the development of the Greek community in Australia in the sense that various trends and occurrences culminate in that year. The most significant occurrence is the publication of *I Zoi en Afstralia*. The book presented the achievements and values of the Greek shop-owning class. It marks an advanced stage of the community's self-understanding and self-assertiveness. It was also aiming to be a means of educating new Greek businessmen about values and qualities necessary for success, to create a better understanding between them and the host mainstream society, and to promote the good Greek name and

overcome the existence of prejudices and discrimination. The book was also seen as a means of building better relations and understanding with the Greek government and ecclesiastical authorities. The authors promoted the idea that the good Greek name in Australia implied patriotism but also that hard and honest work for business success would promote acceptance. The business successes of some Greeks go back to the 1880s and 1890s but the bulk of businessmen presented and celebrated in *I Zoi en Afstralia* were post-1900 migrants, many of whom started their business quite young, often in their mid-twenties.

The success of these businessmen started a chain migration bringing relatives and compatriots to Australia. These new immigrants could not find work in the manufacturing industry and depended on the support of their compatriots for employment. The success of these employers often depended on the cheap labor supplied by their compatriots who worked for 10-12 hours a day for at least six days a week for their food, accommodation and meager remuneration. This situation led to class divisions and conflict as described by Takhmindjis, Doukas and Kalomiris. It led also in the 1930s to the creation of left-wing Greek workers clubs.

The Church-GOCs dispute of the 1920s reflects different approaches to community organization. The Patriarchate of Constantinople aimed to create a centralized church organization which set the community priorities and the use of its resources. The Greek church organization in Australia, up to that time, however, had been started and developed by the initiative and work of the laity, that is, the Greek-Australian businessmen. They enjoyed being elected and participating on the Community's executive council, building a church, making approaches initially to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and later to the Holy Synod of Greece for the appointment or the recall of a priest, and making the important decisions for their city's GOC. They did not wish to cut ties with the Holy Synod of Greece, nor to share or hand over their community power to a Metropolitan and retain only the obligation to financially support the central church organization. The 1920s were characterized by economic hardship and the communities had difficulties paying the priests and running their churches smoothly, without the extra expenses of supporting a Metropolitan. These issues led to community conflict. In addition, Knitis' weaknesses led to his failure and recall in 1928. The new



Metropolitan, Timotheos Evangelinidis (1932-1947) was more diplomatic. He accepted the independence of the communities and cooperated with them in carrying out his functions and deciding community priorities. This policy of mutual understanding and cooperation was followed by the Metropolis until the death of the third Metropolitan Theophylaktos Papathanassopoulos in 1958.

The 1920s and especially early 1930s were periods of widespread slumps and economic depression, low returns and high unemployment. During the depression of the early 1930s many people suffered loss of their businesses, homes and livelihood. Greek communities and other community organizations suffered loss of membership and financial hardship. Only three of the Greek-language newspapers managed to survive. Immigration in the early 1930s came almost to a stop. Sometimes there were more departures than arrivals. The 1920s and 30s, however, witnessed an increase in the regional associations and brotherhoods which aimed to assist compatriots in need and to provide outlets for meetings and cultural functions.

Although the Greek-Australian community changed significantly after 1952 the major community institutions and trends were in place by 1940 including the church, the communities, the schools, the newspapers, the first major brotherhoods, the pan-Hellenic cultural and left-wing associations. They developed as a response to social and economic progress and to the needs of self-help and self-preservation. In the improving climate of post-WWII years the expanding Greek organizations and institutions were able to contribute more effectively to the promotion of the Greek culture and language, whereas up to 1940, they were primarily concerned with the preservation and enhancement of their particular status as a minority group in Australia. The conflict between the left- and right-wing in the Greek community subsided between 1941 and 1944 but continued unabated during the Greek Civil War and was clearly rife till the collapse of the Greek junta in 1974.

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