

Counterpoint

By The Defector

What Can We Learn?

I am writing about this lady for the second time, but in a different context and with a different perspective.

I was able to watch the ceremony broadcast by ABC 24 on 25 June 2013. As I sat through it, my mind went back to Sri Lanka, where two of my friends had special funerals planned by them in advance. Gunadasa Liyanage and H.M. Gunasekara left strict instructions as to how their funerals were to be conducted. My readers are well acquainted with them, one as a respected journalist and the other as one of the best broadcasters we had. Both had given the program for the occasion: no speeches, only the vote of thanks by the person nominated by the dead man.

Politicians who were waiting for an opportunity to get some exposure were disappointed. Both of them had suffered at the hand of politicians who wanted henchmen in such places.

K. Jayatilake who was one of the few writers that did not go after politicians however, had no such luck. Ever vigilant politicians somehow managed to cash in and get some credit if at all people were prepared to give them.

That in a country boasting of a two thousand year old culture and traditions. This country with a history of a little over two hundred years, showed us and the world that there is a life without politicians. There

were a number of politicians present at the memorial, including a number of ex-P.M.s. Bob Hawke the ex-husband of Hazel, Paul Keating, Kevin Rudd and the ex-P.M. Julia Gillard were there.

They were there as participants at the ceremony not to be seen and heard.

Speakers at this very memorable occasion were a select few: Henry Jenkins, a family friend, Wendy Mc Carthy, the best friend of Hazel, Hazel's daughter and grandson.

Something our funerals would not think of was there. Good part of the program consisted of music, and song, both of a very high standard. Hazel Hawke was a lover of classical music and the organisers were keen to portray that in the memorial. Mozart's music and singing of 'Zwilling Matilda' by the Sydney School choir took almost one hour.

The lesson it gives is simple. Do not waste time allowing power-thirsty politicians and the High and Mighty to show their skills. In short, put them in their place and preserve



HAZEL HAWKE MEMORIAL

the sanctity of funerals and memorials.

How much of this advice or warning would sink into our people who matter? Your guess is as good as mine.

That Sri Lankans, the Sinhala people in particular, with their two thousand year old traditions are taking the best of that overseas, was exhibited at an opening on 21 June, this year. I mean the ceremonial opening of a Sri Lankan Consul General Office in St. Kilda. No one would be surprised at the number of politicians that descended on Melbourne to grace the occasion. Not too many for the most affluent country among the poor third world nations. G. L. Peiris, the Foreign Minister plus another four M.P.s. I am not quite sure of the number of ordinary citizens who were 'compelled' to travel abroad for the occasion, such as security men and other attendants. The number varies from twenty to twenty five. Take your pick.

It was not in the numbers that our culture was on display. It was in the special 'Sinhala time' and the age old practice of selling a religious precinct in parts, i.e. in square feet or meters.

Without bothering the reader with details, let me put it in point form,

1. The official inauguration was delayed by forty five minutes, thus offering a taste of the Sinhala time to those unfamiliar with it.
2. The son of the President of Sri Lanka made a request from ex-pats to buy a part of the sacred precincts of the proposed Head Quarters of his party.

I do not remember the prize quoted. I am sure that there will be enough bidders.

Contrasting scenes from two lands, one with a history of two thousand years and the other with only two hundred years.

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