

I have not been a student of the Melkonian Educational Institute. For reasons that are not important now, I attended the local Grammar school.

My house was a stone's throw away from the MEI grounds in Nicosia and I did pass the MEI gates everyday from where I could see the modest monument nestled between the two famous twin Melkonian buildings.

Yet, that basically was my "interaction" with the school at the time. The years passed, and upon the completion of my studies in the US, I returned to Nicosia and in a rather bizarre twist of fate, was employed at the Melkonian as a Math and Computer teacher. The year was 1988.

On my first day, as soon as I walked into one of the imposing buildings I was surrounded by students milling around, books in their hands, walking briskly from place to place, talking excitedly to each other.

Two things struck me that first day: one was the fact that the buzz, the talk, the laugh, the giggle coming out of these youngsters was in Armenian, my own mother tongue which, sadly, I was not so well versed in. Years in English speaking schools had eroded my fluency in the Armenian language. And second, the excitement on the student's faces, a pure delight, a joy that sprung from the fact that they were here, at last!

From that day onwards, I started to realize what it was all about. As I walked from one building to the other, past the gaze of the busts of the two Melkonian brothers, I started to comprehend the importance of the school. And as I attended the frequent cultural events at the ever-famous Melkonian auditorium I was able to grasp what the two great brothers intended to do. And how well they had succeeded. Music, poetry and plays performed in Armenian were a revelation to me. And watching the fresh-faced youngsters performing them was heart warming and amazing to say the least.

I must admit that the day-to-day existence of the school was a bit less glamorous for us employees. Just like any workplace, the arguments and disagreements were rife between the management and staff. There was also an immediate need to improve the academic standard of the school. With the new world order that was evolving at the time, our students needed even more ammunition to face the prospects and demands of the "outside world".

The achievement of those greater goals was and is the responsibility of the governing bodies of the school, may that be the board in the AGBU headquarters or the local board of the school in Nicosia. And yet the proposed solution to the problems of the school, as "ingeniously" outlined by the Central Board in the US, is to sell it!

To sell it, to give it away, to replace the MEI with an unimaginable amount of cash. The perfect business deal waits to be struck. After all, the grounds of the school stand on prime land, currently a very precious commodity in Cyprus.

So, go on, give it away, let it all be demolished and be replaced with whatever the new "investor" will think of. Let the trees be cut, let the buildings be torn down, brick by brick.

I have heard many versions as to how the school will be transformed. But we all know what the eventual fate of MEI will be if the current "intermediary" plans are carried out.

Money is the key factor. That is the cruel reality of it all. Money that stands to be gained by all involved. By the prospective investor, the intermediary parties, the lawyers, and AGBU itself.

Yet, do not forget that the notion of “azcabahbanutian” will never be taught from the now torn down classrooms of MEI.

Do not forget that the rendition of the MEI song will never be heard in front of the now torn down monument of the Melkonian Brothers.

And never forget that a 14 year old child will never be heard again from the podium of the now long lost auditorium. A nervous voice, young, yet beautiful, singing an Armenian Song.

And the following bitter words will be heard in countless Armenian homes: “There once was a Melkonian School in Cyprus...”.

So go on, put that signature on that paper that will give it all away. I would like to know how steady that hand would be. How it would hold up to the fact that it is about to give away a glorious past and a potential for the sake of Money. How it is about to replace the irreplaceable. And how it is about to put a price on the priceless.

The apathy of many Armenians fuels the strength of that hand. Yet the voices of the thousands of children of the Melkonian brothers simply want to, and must, stop it, before it is too late.