

KILOMETRE DEVALUATION SHOCK REPORT

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29 November 1986: My IBM is in dock for a minor mechanical transplant and general clean-up (cat-fur, dust and cigarette smoke tend not to improve an electric typewriter's performance), so welcome to the first appearance in any apa anywhere of Sally's Adler J5 portable. It's a lovely little machine, very quiet after the IBM, about ten years old, I think, and well looked after by its previous owner, an American lady from whom I bought it and a lot of books and records two years ago. Like the Adler Gabrielle, which it closely resembles, it is built to last for ever.

Which is something that could never be said of me. I have a new doctor, and just in time. For nearly twenty years I had recurrent and increasing pain in the vicinity of the sternum; from 1967 to 1977 I had all sorts of tests, all negative; and it wasn't until July 1984 that a doctor diagnosed gallstones. X-rays and an ultrasound scan confirmed it (I say 'it' because what I mainly have can only be described as a gallrock, about the size of an IBM golfball). Also I have a crook liver, but I'd known about that since 1977. On 31 July 1984, when I got all the bad news in one hit, I stopped drinking. Without alcohol I lost interest in food. (Without both I lost interest in television: TV is extraordinarily boring when you are sober.) By December I had lost 70 pounds, down from 16 stone to 11; at Xmas I was 10.8. Meantime my doctor had abandoned me; referring me to Royal Melbourne Hospital he described me as 'a former patient'. So I started going to the local clinic, and there I got some bad advice. The bad advice went like this: 'You know, there's nothing wrong with a glass or two of wine with dinner.' So, on election night, the first Saturday in December, I had a glass or three of wine with dinner. It tasted awful, but I persevered.

Now, 1985 was a bastard of a year, and the wine helped me cope, but I started putting the weight back on. By August I was 12.7, by January 13.7, and three months ago 15.7 and progressing steadily towards 16. In all this time I had had no useful advice from the clinic. I knew how to get the weight down, but they didn't seem interested in helping me. Eleven days ago I went to another doctor, a humourless Portuguese-Indian. I weighed in at 16.2. He said 'I can only give you pills. You must change your life-style. If you don't, you might last another ten years, maybe not.' Well, that's what I've been thinking lately, but to hear a doctor say it is something else. He said more. When he reckons I'm ready he will get me into a public hospital in six weeks and operate. That's the best news I've had in two years. The relief, already, is incredible. I had no idea how much the uncertainty about this operation had been affecting me. Eleven days without alcohol, I honestly don't miss it, and I've lost 10 pounds so far. But just to complicate things, in the last month or so my back has started packing up; the pain never quite goes away, but varies from vaguely annoying to sheer crippling agony.

I'm working on average five or six hours a day, which is enough to get by, but leaves no time for ANZAPA. Reluctantly, I give you as minac an article I have been thinking about for over a decade. This version dates from about 1981-2. 'National Alf' started interrupting my writing in 1972. OK? Merry Xmas, Lucy for DUFF, and Ghod bless Tiny Marc.

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] In a surprise move last weekend that caught even Treasury pundits and Reserve Bank prognosticators off guard, the Prune Minister announced that the Australian kilometre had been devalued by 10 per cent, effective immediately, and that in future it would be allowed to float against a mixed airline-bag of international distances. This is in line with the government's ongoing overall strategy to stimulate the economy, tighten liquidity and confuse motorists.

[However, the Prune Minister warned, this meaningful and purposeful move could only accomplish its objective with the full co-operation of all sectors of the community, including minority groups, whose views he well understood, such as trade unionists and taxi drivers. Questioned as to the nature of this objective, the Prune Minister said that he had nothing further to add to his statement at that present point of time, but that full amplification would be given to the matter, and adequate opportunity for discussion, in the proper place and at an appropriate time.

[The Leader of the Opposition said that nothing surprised him any more. The ^{move,} ~~proposal,~~ as he understood it, ~~was~~ implied that the kilometre ~~should~~ ^{would} be tied ^{in future} to a mixed basket of international units of linear measurement. "If I may explain the absurdity of this," he said, "it means that this week we may have parity with the Dutch kilometre and next week with the pre-revolutionary Russian verst or, for all I know, the Tongan pa'anga. Now clearly this

will be very confusing to the average Australian motorist. It would not be ~~mean~~ true to say that he won't know whether he's coming or going, because Labor's policy of universal free rear-vision mirrors did away with all that, and try as it might, the present government will find it pretty hard to dismantle that bit of legislation. But it will still be confusing for the average outer-suburban commuter, whichever way he is going, and it is clearly a retrograde step, in my view."

[^{Interviewed, the}~~The~~ Minister for Lateral Mobility said that the move had been under discussion for some time in the Cabinet, or possibly in the Members' Bar or the swimming pool at the Lodge, but wherever it had been, he was of course aware of ^{its full implications,} ~~such rumours,~~ and although some concern had been forcefully expressed as to its possible adverse effects on the primary producer generally, the Prune Minister enjoyed his full confidence and no doubt would amplify the full ramifications of the devaluation at some suitable juncture. Questioned, the Minister said that he understood from his colleague the Minister for Technicalities and Obfuscation that a 10 per cent devaluation of the kilometre amounted only to 0.06 of the imperial mile, or something like that, which was really only a drop in the bucket.

[The Minister then caused a sensation by going on to say that he had never been in favour of fully abandoning the imperial mile for the kilometre, and indeed regarded this as one of the worst excesses of a totally irresponsible regime, but entirely typical of their

attitude to the Empire, or Commonwealth as it was now called, and all that full-blooded Australians hold dear.

[The Minister said in a later interview that his remarks on the subject had been grossly misinterpreted by all sectors of the media. It was true, he frankly and freely admitted, that he had not been totally in favour of full metric conversion, and like many other ordinary Australians he still had a little difficulty recalling how many litres there were to a millibar and so on. Even his colleague the Minister for Passive Inculcation, he laughed, could occasionally slip up in this regard. This was taken by most commentators to refer to that Minister's recent ninefold increase in funds to western-suburbs school libraries, which most observers agree was probably meant to be a 10 per cent cut.

[However, he continued, his reference to "the worst excesses of a totally irresponsible regime" had been quoted completely out of context. Any fool knew that metric conversion had been a major initiative introduced by a previous Liberal government, he said. His reference to the discredited previous Labor government had been made in respect of an altogether separate matter entirely, and it was typical of some elements ~~in~~ in the media that this pernicious and wilful misrepresentation should be made. He intended early consultation with his colleague the Minister for Gas-Fired Telephony as to what could be done about this, especially in regard to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, whose staff of journalists, both of them, were notorious for their one-sided reporting, particularly

with respect to Ministerial comment on and as to major issues of the day.

[On a radio "talk-back" program in Sydney, a Liberal back-bencher and former Frune Minister said that during his time ~~in~~ⁱⁿ office he had been terribly concerned with this grave matter of devaluing things, especially the kilometre, which he understood had only just been introduced and deserved a fair go from every fair-minded Australian, and that he viewed last weekend's move in this direction with considerable foreboding. The honourable member declined to comment on the Frune Minister's possible reasons for the move, but said that he had every confidence in the Treasurer, whom he regarded as possibly the second best Treasurer Australia had ever had.

National

Alf. Listen, son, I don't like to ~~interrupt~~^{butt in,} but is this stuff fair dinkum?

Me. Of course it is. You don't think I'd make it up, do you?

Alf. Well, I dunno, but you're taking an awful time getting to the point.

Me. The point is I'm practising to be an in-depth and out-of-sight all-round current affairs reporter and commentator. They're paid by the word, ~~allman~~

Alf. I don't believe you. You were going to say eventually that, now the kilometre is devalued, at least Canberra is further away, and -- don't interrupt! -- then you'd say that no matter what they do, you can only see Canberra getting closer to us, one way or another.

Me. Something like that, yes.

Alf. And you'd sign it "Laurie Hoakes" or something. Pathetic.

WE ~~WERE~~ WAS WRONG

For "Prune Minister" in the above ^{in-depth report} ~~Article~~ read "Prim Monster".

The error was made by a proofreader.

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Alf. Rubbish, you did it deliberately. You don't think
the PKIU will let you get away with that, do you?

Me. Some of my best friends are proofreaders.

John Bangsund