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HEWAT FOR



BREAKFAST

Too much too soon

STOMACH ulcers are not quite the thing to talk about over breakfast.

But this morning we must make an exception. For ulcers are no longer the preserve of the managing director running in the rat race.

They are now the affliction of school children.

A general practitioner in Malvern is talking: "In the last six months, three teenagers have come to me with duodenal ulcers caused by stress.

"They were responding to pressure they are under to pass exams. The ulcers flared up as exams approached, and died down when they were over."

A general practitioner in Mt. Waverley is talking: "I now get between five and 10 school children a year suffering from an anxiety state induced by examination fears."

Now I am not going into the whole examination argument here. For I think it is now widely agreed that a one-shot series of exams packed into a few days at the end of one's schooling is a most inefficient method of assessing ability.

The days of the Matriculation or Higher Certificate exams are numbered.

What concerns me — and the doctors and responsible teachers — is the workload heaped on children in the Fifth and Sixth forms; a load which nobody in authority has talked about reducing even when the actual examination trauma has been removed.

It came as a surprise to nearly all the parents there when, a couple of years ago, Ruth Maguire, the Headmistress of St Margaret's, said at the Speech Day meeting:

"I wonder how many adults in this audience are aware that many of our older students work longer hours than they do. When we realise this, perhaps we shall also begin to understand some of the root causes of dissent."

The position is now worse. A quick telephone survey of five schools, indicates a minimum working week for Sixth Formers of about 45 hours (25 hours in class, 15 hours of homework spread over the week nights and at least 5 hours weekend work).

At one school a teacher was attacked by pupils and parents for saying that matric. required 80 hours' work a week; he has since joined some of his pupils in having a nervous breakdown.

To find the reason, one need look no further than Higher Certificate English. When I did my matric in 1945, two books were set: C.E.W. Bean's "War Aims of a Plain Australian" and a Shakespearean play.

This year there are 20 set books of which the student must acquire a deep knowledge of seven.

They range from the late Robin Gerard Penleigh Boyd's "The Australian Ugliness" through Dickens' "Hard Times" through Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" through William Shakespeare's "Henry V" through Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" to Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman".

A very good selection. But surely far too much.

And the load has grown similarly in all other subjects.

We all know that much of our education system is a mess. But surely the one clear job of the secondary school is to teach children how to think, how to inquire, how to find answers.

To complete that role, it is not necessary to cram kids with a mighty volume of actual knowledge.

As the Third Term, now beginning, grinds to its examinations climax and the Sixth Formers swallow their pills or head for the doctors' surgeries, it is time to call a halt.

The 35-hour week for adults is on the way.

It is a scandal that the 35-hour-week worker's children are being made the

sweated labour of our times, slaving through a week of 50, 60, 70 and even 80 hours a week.

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EXTRAORDINARY have been the affairs of the rulers of Berwick — the attractive township on the Princes Highway 28 miles east of Melbourne, the home among some 4,000 others of Richard Gardiner Casey, the first Baron; not that he would be so silly as to have anything to do with them.

They concern the Shire Councillors, not least Ian Marshall Baillieu — of the Clan Baillieu — who in just over a year on the Council has become the go-go young man of the place, applauded by some and derided by others.

It would appear that Baillieu was making an elementary play in power politics.

It happened thus:

Back on August 26, retiring Councillor Trevor Basil Kilvington's term as Shire President ran out.

The Law requires that Council meet the following Wednesday at 10 in the morning to elect his successor.

Most Councils hold no such meeting because it is formerly adjourned by the Clerk until the next scheduled meeting.

But at the appointed hour, Baillieu and five other Councillors turned up. It was their intention, one gathers, to stampede the election of the President.

Their candidate was a young solicitor, Barry Douglas Simon, who quite recently put his plate up in Berwick.

In the party were also Councillors Sydney Herbert Pargeter, Janice Gwendolyn Bateman, Keith Robert Wishart and Graham Patrick Sweeney.

Unfortunately for them, six was not a quorum; eight was required. So they adjourned until the next day, hoping no doubt to recruit two more.

But again they numbered only six.

So Shire Secretary Barry Wallis, as the law required, issued a "call of the Council" which makes it obligatory for all 15 Councillors to attend on pain of losing their seats.

The appointed time was unprecedented in the history of staid and secure Berwick: Last Saturday night.

All 15 turned up. And so did a goodly number of ratepayers.

It must be realised that the young turks wanted Simon for President; the older members were determined it should go under the old pals' after you act — to George Frederick Rae, a splendid old fellow of nearly 80 who has served the Council for 24 years, almost since the Highway was a dirt road.

But public brawls are frowned upon in Berwick. So up jumped Baillieu to move that the Council go into Committee and that Press and public be thrown out.

Rae's supporters were against it — "I have nothing to hide," shouted one.

But Pargeter argued: "It would be better to go into Committee and discuss our differences like sensible people."

Which they did — much to the annoyance of the citizens in the gallery who missed the clash of the generations.

When the voters were allowed to return, they found a scene of tranquility. Simon stood up to propose his elderly rival for the job, and Rae was duly elected — with a useful increase of \$500 a year (to \$1500) in the President's Allowance; not that Rae really needs it for he has broad acres in the Shire, some of them marked down for housing development.

All this may seem like a local council scrap of the greatest triviality. But the Board of Works Master Plan forsees a population of nearly a quarter of a million in the area inside 15 or 20 years.

And even though the old chaps won this round, I suspect that Baillieu will do his homework a little more thoroughly next time and will get the President he wants.