

Herald Sun

Greece still in debt despair

GREECE has no option today other than to agree to the stringent austerity package its Prime Minister has agreed to. If parliament does not accept an even tougher deal than what was rejected by the Greek people when they voted no at the recent referendum, fresh elections will solve nothing.

The Greek economy will collapse without the tens of billions of euros in bailout money that is contingent on the terms of the package being accepted. This includes turning over 50 billion in Greek assets, mainly through the sale of its ports, to its eurozone creditors.

Accepting austerity measures they have already rejected means Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras faces the task of getting what may prove to be impossible through the Greek parliament.

There are many in his own party who will vote against him and he may have to rely on the votes of the conservatives as his own MPs become a divided rabble.

As always, no one can confidently predict what might happen in the maelstrom of Greek politics.

The agreement is fragile. The German finance minister, with black humour after sleepless nights, called it an "a-Greek-ment". A statement talked about "hospices" instead of "auspices". It was likely a spellcheck transposition but nevertheless accurate. Hospices are places for the terminally ill and that might be said of the Greek economy.

This time is the last time, according to the European summit leaders. But that is what they said at all the "last" times. The Greek crisis spans five years and is far from over whatever the decision is taken by its parliament.

Basically, the Greeks are refusing to confront a problem of their own

making through widespread tax evasion and too-early retirement on government pensions. Manufacturing is close to nonexistent. Tourism is Greece's main source of income, but will people want to visit a country on its knees?

The debt mountain has reached a peak of some 390 billion euros, which is the equivalent of half a trillion Australian dollars.

Greeks in Australia have done well, seamlessly assimilating into the Australian way of life and enriching the nation's culture and its economy. More Greeks may be expected to follow to escape the recession that now grips their country.

There is no question that Greece is suffering and teetering on the brink of the abyss as supermarket shelves empty and banks find that even 60 euros a day in ATM withdrawals may plummet to zero euros.

Many eurozone finance ministers fear not only the unpredictable effects of a Grexit in the case of the Greek parliament bringing about its own withdrawal by refusing to accept the terms of the bailout.

They are nervous, and rightly so, when Greece has so often failed to live up to the terms of its debt agreements.

Once again, Greece may say it cannot continue under its debt burden, where debt repayments exceed its GDP and austerity measures strangle any economic recovery.

Some say Greece has had a gun put to its head and Greeks are now expected to pull the trigger. Others say wiping off at least a third of the debt, perhaps all, is the only way the country can move forward.

Whatever is done or agreed, Greece cannot simply walk away from its economic responsibilities. This must be the last time.

Saving the Windsor

THE face of the Grand Old Lady of Spring St must be red with embarrassment. The Windsor, the 19th century hotel opposite Parliament House, is showing the ravages of time.

The Duchess of Spring St needs more than a dab of paint and plaster, and politicians and the hotel's owner are at a standoff.

A building permit for a 27-storey tower behind the hotel was granted in 2010 after a scandal that involved the office of then Labor planning minister Justin Madden.

An email was leaked suggesting a sham opinion poll that would show the public was against the tower redevelopment.

The permit was granted in the uproar that followed, but building never started and extensions to a permit that expires in January 2017 have been refused. Adi Halim, the director of owner the Halim Group, says court delays over the tower have

made an 18-month extension necessary. Otherwise, he might have to turn the Windsor into apartments. Mr Halim is meeting Planning Minister Richard Wynne today and says he needs something concrete from the Government.

Those providing finance for the \$330 million tower are nervous, he says, following Premier Daniel Andrews' decision to rip up the contracts on the East West Link.

The Government says that is a load of rubbish, but no one wants to see the virtual demolition of the Hotel Windsor by ripping out its interior to make apartments or, worse, turned into backpacker accommodation.

If the Victorian Government is refusing to issue an extension because it doesn't want a building of that height overshadowing Parliament, let it say so. Reducing the tower's height by several levels would seem the perfect compromise.

Real change is taking far too long

WHEN he pioneered the intervention order 33 years ago, trailblazing Victorian

policeman Reg Baker was full of optimism. He wanted to make a real dint in the family violence damage.

"The time is right to change," he said in 1982. Fast-forward to yesterday and at two landmark events within a couple city blocks you could get a picture of how we've been faring since.

There was emotion in the voice of Assistant Commissioner Dean McWhirter, head of the country's first family voice command, as, up at the State Library, he read a shameful roll call of our family violence statistics.

Speaking at VicHealth's People, Policy Prevention: Ending Violence Against Women in Victoria conference, he said wanted us to "hear and understand" what we're dealing with. Last year during 68,000 family violence incidents Victoria Police responded to — resulting in 29 deaths, 7000 injuries, 400 abduction offences and 900 child sexual assaults — there were 40,000 children present.

McWhirter said he worries even reducing that "untold anguish" to a set of numbers may "normalise" the problem. But at the Royal Commission into Family Violence, you could sense the personal impact of this toxic scourge.

Human Services social worker Dr Robyn Miller explained how children living in domestic violence "can smell" their parents' fear.



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Unborn babies can have their brain development affected, little children of abused parents experience their fear "literally through the skin".

Though mothers try to shield their children from their own abuse, sometimes they are so traumatised as to "become overwhelmed and shut down emotionally". Some turn against their mothers, coached by the perpetrator into disrespectful

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behaviour: "It's a type of brainwashing," said Dr Miller.

What has gone wrong or not happened, despite the best intentions of the earliest family violence responses and prevention efforts, to enable such continued widespread and vile abuse?

What is it about the way our society regards violence against

family members, particularly women and children, that enables this epidemic not just to be tolerated but to be claiming an increasing number of women's lives?

"For two women to have been murdered by an intimate partner every week (this year), up from one last year — unspeakable," Elizabeth Broderick, Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, told VicHealth's audience of key policy, justice, community and welfare sector influencers.

Given the statistics, she said, you could "lose faith in the possibility of change sometimes it feels so slow".

As other activists have stated: such is the entrenched nature of the violence-tolerant status quo that change can accelerate if real, "disruptive", action is taken by influential men to challenge what she calls "resistance" to improving things for women.

Even the fact we tolerate women having so little access to the highest levels of economic power in Australia is part of the problem: "The closer women get to the levers of economic power, the greater the forces of exclusion," she said.

Heads you lose as Akubra

HATS are made out of rabbits. At least mine are because they're felt.

Some of the fancy phantasms the ladies wear to the Melbourne Cup are constructed out of anything from straw to peacocks to gold woven with rubies and sprinkled with fairy dust.

But your basic bloke's hat is rabbit. They get the rabbit fur and squish it and squelch it (sorry to get so technical but it's unavoidable in a highly scientific article like this).

The famous Aussie company Akubra has made hats since around the turn of the century (the last one, not this one) and continues to do so.

But they recently decided to stop using mostly Australian



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rabbits. They are planning to get bunnies from Europe, claiming their Australian suppliers can't keep up with demand.

That is surprising, seeing the Great Southern Land is overrun with cottontails. Head 100km from any major city and you have to watch your step not to tread on one. Myxo and calicivirus have made a dent but those critters just

keep breeding. I remember my father talking of the Depression days when children would be given sticks and told to go out and bash a rabbit for dinner.

They were so thick on the ground, that you would miss 100 but eventually conk one.

"Voila! Lapin a la Cocotte!" (Or something similar in a more rustic Aussie fashion — maybe "Bewdy, rabbit stew".)

As a magazine reporter, I was once sent to a rabbit festival out in the bush. The aim of the day was to wipe out as many rabbits as possible. There were prizes for the most rabbits caught, there were skinning competitions and ferret races (ferrets being the rabbit's sworn enemy).