



A MODEST MEMBER

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That economist may be right, but ...

I have been a Member of Parliament for quite a few years now, and represent a rural constituency. I won't say which party I belong to, not yet anyway. I always seem to get re-elected and I suppose that is something these days.

My wife, Mavis, says I am not pushing enough and that I take too much notice of what people tell me, and take them at their own evaluation.

She said once that she thought I ought to be in the Ministry; and I was inclined to agree with her, until I found out it wasn't the Church she meant.

Actually, I would be terrified if they made me a Minister, because I would have to make too many decisions; and although I wouldn't like my constituents to know this, I hate making decisions.

It takes me a long while to puzzle things out, and I like agreeing with people. They like me when I do that, and I love being popular. I suppose that's how I get re-elected.

You will often hear Members of Parliament pay a public tribute to their wives. I am certain that this is a wise thing to do because it gives a nice picture of domestic bliss, and the ladies of the constituency lap it up.

And Mavis is really a great help to me. But she keeps worrying me about my "image" and she is now trying to get me to grow sideboards.

I have had to tell her that it would take too much out of me.

A character who will come up in this column fairly frequently is Mr Eccles, an economist who lives in a kind of ivory tower in Canberra.

I don't know why he fastened on to me, but he is always coming to see me to point out where my duty lies.

It always seems so easy when he explains things, and quite often I get the nervous feeling that what he says is right. But he hasn't got to live with constituents like I have.

He is always nattering about tariffs and he says I ought to take an interest in the subject. I suppose I ought to because I know some of my constituents are angry about tariffs but I am not sure why, and to understand the subject I gather that you have to read dull Tariff Board reports and that kind of mental exercise I find difficult.

Besides that, Mr McEwen would get cross with me and I wouldn't like that. They tell me it hurts.

The constituent who will appear most frequently is my neighbour, Fred the farmer. We have lived alongside one another for years now so he knows rather too much about me.

I can make quite good speeches at meetings, but am nervous if Fred is present because he is always inclined to tell me that I talk too much or am dodging the issue, or something.

And he is always moaning about going broke, and he has a banker who is rather severe on him.

He is quite sure about almost everything, even when he is wrong, but what he is absolutely certain about is that all Members of Parliament are grossly overpaid. Particularly me.

In future columns I will look at the problems that face me as a politician, when I am trying to make up my mind about what I ought to do about governing the country.

I suppose this seems pretty easy for you. I know it did to me before I became a member. But now that I have to make decisions for myself I find it very difficult, particularly when my colleagues always seem so very sure that they are right.

Next week we will start worrying about the wheat industry as my constituents are pretty cross with me about wheat and I know I ought to do something but I really don't know what.

It would be a lot easier if Mr Eccles would leave me alone.