



A MODEST MEMBER

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That economist, Mr Eccles, is at it again

I find that, when making speeches about the wheat industry, the sure and certain way to get people to say “Hear, hear” is to say that you believe in safe-guarding the position of the “traditional” wheat grower.

There is something solid-sounding about the word “traditional” and, besides this, I have a great many traditional wheat growers in my electorate, and they like me when I talk like that.

In addition, I know that during the early stages of the wheat stabilisation scheme, the grower of wheat subsidised the Australian consumer of wheat by many millions of pounds, because he sold his wheat in Australia for less than the export price.

And now the boot is on the other foot, it seems only fair that the traditional grower, who subsidised the economy in the early stages of the scheme, should now be getting his own back, as it were.

So I made some pretty powerful speeches during the election campaign along these lines. It is not often you find popularity and principle coinciding so pleasantly, I used to think.

And then Mr Eccles, the wretched economist, had to shove his oar in and now I don't know where I am.

He started off by rubbishing the idea that justice was being done because the traditional wheat grower was getting his own back.

He said that, if there were anything in this argument, the debt had just about been repaid.

Then he pointed out that a great many people who lost money by selling wheat cheap to the Australian consumer over 20 years ago (i.e. the traditional wheat grower) had either sold out or died.

And when I look around my district, I must admit that this is largely true.

But then he said that there was no reason why the large land owner should not grow wheat.

Indeed, he may very well be better at it th[a]n the small wheat grower, just because he could make more economic use of large-scale farm machinery.

And, if this is so, any policy that prevents wheat being grown by the cheapest method is economically a little queer.

He went on to point out that when the industrial revolution began in Britain centuries ago, a lot of people tried to stop the labour-saving machines being used because the “traditional” weaver would be injured.

He says that trying to stop the full economic utilisation of large-scale farm machinery is economically foolish, and if persisted with will tend to prevent wheat being grown in our changed circumstances.

I wish Eccles would [stay] at home in his ivory tower.

All the other Members with wheat growing constituencies are making good fellows of themselves, making eloquent statements about protecting the “traditional” grower, and I don’t see why I shouldn’t.

It is very difficult, particularly as Fred the farmer, my neighbour, is a very traditional wheat grower, and he doesn’t like me much at the moment.

He keeps muttering unpleasant things like: “It is all right for you, with your great parliamentary salary rolling in each week. What about me? It’s your job to look after me. After all, I’m a constituent of yours.”

But Eccles says that if I seek popularity this way, I will do the industry harm in the end and really, I wouldn’t like to do that.

But I do like being popular. It’s all very difficult.