



## **A MODEST FARMER**

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### **He'd soon have his feet in a bucket of champagne**

It is not surprising that the ordinary citizen gets confused and then angry about politics.

Everything used to seem plain enough to me when I was up to my ears in it but it isn't now, and I find that I am getting as confused as everyone else.

The Labor Party used to believe in socialism but some right wingers now express some doubts even about this.

The Country Party used to believe in protecting farmers but then they went in for protecting manufacturing industry instead.

I think they found it easier to collect funds that way. So McEwen House was built and they changed their name and now they have only one firm conviction, which is that no one is going to pinch their seats, no matter what principles have to be sacrificed to that end.

The Liberal Party used to believe in free enterprise and whenever we had a meeting we used to worship at that shrine. Indeed, we still do but the incantations now sound rather hollow.

The easy way in which principles are so effortlessly sacrificed was seen recently when the Government announced its decision to have a much bigger say about the price at which mining companies could sell their export minerals.

This was a considerable departure from the Government's previous policy yet it was not even thought necessary to discuss the change with the backbenchers, who were expected to quietly agree.

There are many reasons for being critical about the way the new policy was announced, but much more serious was the nature of the policy change.

Yet another sector of the economy has fallen under the control of the Government. No wonder the Labor Party hailed the change with such enthusiasm.

"It's what Rex Connor would have wanted," they crowed with delight. "This is what we have been telling you to do all the time."

I know that a case can be made out for government intervention in this matter. We are told:

The Japanese are playing off one mining company against the others, so the price for minerals is unnecessarily low and our export income is diminished. If the Government could control the negotiations this would not happen.

I agree that the Japanese may have been successfully playing one company off against the others, though this is a lot easier to say than to prove. But even if this is so, surely enlightened self-interest would eventually bring the miners together to present a unified front.

Why it was thought necessary for the Government to get into the act in a bigger way I do not know. But governments now seem determined to try to save fools and firms from their folly, yet it is the weeding out of the weak and foolish ones that made capitalism the dynamic engine it once was.

But I fear that Liberals are now somewhat ashamed of capitalism.

And we see again the pathetic belief that the Government must know best.

Politicians should have burnt on their breasts or on some broader part of their anatomy, the message that any servant of the government who can correctly foretell the supply and demand situation for any mineral for even one year ahead is not for long working for the government; he is shortly sitting in the south of France with his feet in a bucket of champagne.

I have said this many times but it doesn't seem to have sunk in.

Sad though it is to see how easily political parties can jettison their principles, it is even sadder to see the pathetic attitude of many of the miners.

Far too many seem to have a deep longing to feel around themselves the everlasting arms of the government, bearing them up lest they dash their footing against a stone or something.

But these comforting arms have a habit in the end of strangling initiative and enthusiasm, let alone investment. It won't be long before these companies come whining to us complaining about government domination.

When I was discussing this question with Fred, he said he thought that too many mining companies seemed ashamed of being miners.

They may have been listening too attentively to these queer people who see something sordid about digging holes in the ground and extracting minerals.

This makes the companies nervous and inclined to be subservient to governments. He says that he would behave as they do if he was ashamed of being a farmer.

He thinks that many of the miners deserve to be treated as they are. That is not a nice thing for Fred to say.