



A MODEST FARMER

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Why leading businessmen carry black briefcases

Fred usually lives a simple life. Indeed he has to — he cannot afford to live any other way.

But recently the banker let him off the chain for a while and he had a long trip in an aeroplane. He returned to his farm full of excitement and eager to fill in any gaps in his recently acquired knowledge.

“You spent a great deal of your time and even more of the taxpayer’s money gadding around in aeroplanes when you were a Member of Parliament,” he said truculently. “You ought to be able to explain why plane travellers behave as they do.”

I humbly replied that I would be glad to do what I could to oblige.

His first question was: “Is the Government continuing to supply services to the airline operators at less than cost?”

I have been made well aware that Fred has, in the past, resented having to subsidise, as a taxpayer, the travelling expenses of businessmen and holidaymakers while he stayed home working like a beaver to make a crust, on which he needed to pay tax, so that these people could fly at less than cost.

So I was glad to be able to tell Fred that from now on the Government expected to recover full costs incurred in the provision of airfield services.

We both adhere to the general principle that the user of a service should pay for it, and not the chap who doesn’t use it.

Fred was interested in the difference between first class and economy passengers and why some travelled first class when it was so much more expensive.

This wasn’t hard to answer. The people travelling first class were almost always travelling at someone else’s expense, while the economy passengers were paying for themselves.

Then Fred said that he was interested in the luggage that men carried on aircraft, particularly what he called their handbags.

I hurriedly told him that the proper name was briefcases and certainly not handbags.

“Now you needn’t get in a state, Bert,” he said sourly. “Just tell me why most of the men, particularly those travelling first class, were carrying flat, thin, sober-looking little cases. They all looked the same, as if they had been issued with them as soon as they got a certain distance up the promotion ladder.”

I then told him something that has been a well-kept secret for many years. Those black and flat briefcases are that shape because they are designed to carry haloes.

That is why they are so flat. There is a pouch in the lid into which the halo fits like a young kangaroo into its mother's pouch.

Captains of industry carry their haloes to business seminars and when they come to that part of the proceedings where obeisance is made to their belief in free enterprise they quickly get their haloes out of their black briefcases, give them a quick polish with their sleeves, and hurriedly put them on.

Fred wanted to know why they didn't wear their haloes all the time. Then they wouldn't have the worry of carrying them around all the time.

So I told him that after they had paraded their devotion to free enterprise for a few days these seminars dragged to a close.

But instead of hurrying back to the bosoms of their families or their businesses, many of them, while they were in Canberra, usually took the opportunity of waiting on a minister or two.

They usually did this to beg for some more tariff protection for their product. "And they can't really do that convincingly wearing their free enterprise haloes, can they, Fred?" I said.

He had to agree that it would look a bit odd.

So if you happen to go into a minister's waiting room after a big seminar in Canberra you will find the room full of important and earnest captains of industry, all looking rather embarrassed in the company they are in and all firmly clutching their small, flat, black briefcases containing their free enterprise haloes — hidden away.