



A MODEST MEMBER

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Can we judge students by the amount of hair on their heads?

Fred keeps nagging me to get stuck into the universities. He often sees, on TV, hairy, scruffy students behaving like ignorant larrikins. And he wants to know why I continue to vote for his hard-earned taxation money to be squandered to enable such people to abuse their educational opportunities.

That this feeling is common throughout the rural areas there is no doubt.

I sometimes tell me country constituents they should not judge the majority of university students by the behaviour of a sordid minority that blackens the reputation and spoils the performance of the solid, silent majority.

But they don't really listen.

I have a nephew with very long hair and I have watched him grow up with acute anxiety. But I now have to admit that, in spite of my gloomy forebodings, he has turned out to be quite a sensible young man.

So perhaps I should stop judging students by the quantity of hair on their heads. It won't be easy, but I will try.

But although I realise that I must not judge the majority by the behaviour of the stupid minority, yet there are two things that really worry me, as well as most country people, who are most acutely envious of the opportunities that these young people have.

The first is the bland assumption that everybody has what is called an "unalienable right" to free university education.

Eccles has constantly drummed it into me that there is nothing in life that is free — that someone, somewhere, somehow always has to find the money and resources.

He tells me that tertiary education costs the taxpayers of Australia about \$300 million a year, so it certainly isn't free. It is paid for by the taxpayers, most of whom seem to work a great deal harder than the university students who make all the mischief.

I suppose this is what sickens people most about the behaviour of the minority.

If those who were wasting their time were also wasting their own money instead of ours, it wouldn't be so intensely irritating.

But it is not easy to cheerfully pay taxes and see the money frittered away.

Fred says if students had to pay a greater share of their expenses, it would encourage them to appreciate their opportunities.

Even the student who pays his own fees is only meeting about 20 per cent of the total cost. And the number who pay for themselves only make up about 33 per cent of those who go to university.

Evidently, fees pay 10 per cent of university running costs. Fred says that the things you get for nothing you usually appreciate as such.

I know that some will claim that this is unfair on the poor student to have to pay a greater percentage of his fees, but most people could get through a university if they wanted to.

And then the behaviour of many students during vacations doesn't give one the impression that they are earnestly toiling to get together enough money to pay next year's fees.

The second thing that worries Fred and me is, when the minority play up and take over administrative buildings and smash things up and generally interfere with the running of the university and spoil the opportunity of the keen students to learn, why the bad ones can't be expelled. (Eccles says the proper term is "sent down.")

Surely it is not beyond the wit of the administrators to kick them out.

Obviously they do not appreciate what is being done for them at great expense. So I don't see why we should keep them there if they don't want to learn.

There is no doubt that most people in Australia are rapidly becoming disillusioned about universities and will increasingly be unwilling to go without things for themselves so that universities can flourish.

This is a pity because in an increasingly technological age I guess we need well educated people.

But I know that the quickest path to popularity in a rural constituency would be to advocate cutting down university expenditure.

It is with difficulty that I have so far resisted the temptation.

But it gets harder each week.