



A MODEST FARMER

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Know your proper place if you want the quiet life

Ministers usually want one thing above all others and that is a quiet life.

I can understand this.

Usually they are almost immediately inundated in a sea of paper which it is essential that they read.

And they still have their constituencies that have to be serviced.

And they know that any little slip that they make will be magnified by the Press Gallery which is always waiting to pounce.

Also they know that their backbench colleagues are always waiting hopefully for them to stumble and fall.

So there is a great temptation for ministers to sidestep problems that, as backbenchers, they would have wanted to tackle, or to see someone else tackle.

And usually ministers are aided and abetted in this longing for a quiet life by their departments.

The departmental head has probably got where he is by not disturbing the promotion ladder as he laboriously climbed it.

And he has probably got far too much to do anyway so does not want other problems to raise their ugly heads.

And those below him in the departmental peck order are acutely aware that rocking the boat will make them unpopular and so jeopardise their chances of promotion.

So there are considerable departmental forces operating to encourage the quiet life.

And when the minister and his department meet the real world at the workplace, again there is a reasonable expectation that the people from industry that they meet will also want a quiet life.

Perhaps they may have been appointed by the minister and so will want to show a proper appreciation for his kindness and wisdom.

And indeed some of them may have been appointed because they have demonstrated their ability to keep their heads down and out of trouble as they climbed the ladder of industry politics.

So when the minister, departmental administrators and industry leaders meet together, say, in an industry council, you will frequently find that one thing on which everyone agrees is the importance of not rocking the boat, so things usually proceed with a delightful smoothness.

I have often admired the competence with which everything is arranged.

Christian names are used with a practised skill and a delightful club-like atmosphere is evident everywhere.

If perhaps a slightly discordant note might sometimes disturb this placid pool of agreement, perhaps by the representative of the consumers who probably knows little about the intimate workings of the industry, he will be quickly duced in the nicest way.

And, if that does not work, the minister may be asked to use his hammer instead of his hands.

The industry councils are notable for the smoothness of their operation with only the poor consumers getting it in the neck.

But no one worries much about these poor people in these days of pressure politics.

And the same smoothness of an efficient machine in operation is seen when some of the primary industry boards are co-operating with the Government.

Again you see the convenient arrangement between the recognised experts of the industry, those that know their proper place in the scheme of things and who have a reasonable expectation of appearing on an honours list one day if everything is done in a well-ordered way.

It may be that this will-modulated system is paid for by the poor old consumer, but, with the primary industry boards, there is another group whose interests may be sacrificed on this all important altar of agreement.

The farmer who wants to do something different.

Perhaps he is a simple man who finds it more profitable to grow a variety of wheat that complicated the Wheat Board's well-understood and accepted handling procedures.

Or perhaps the wretched man wants to grow six-row barley which the Barley Board doesn't like.

So the conventional wisdom takes control.

I know from experience that the pleasant and placid pool of agreement that often exists at the workplace between the Government and the governed frequently exists because too many people want peace at any price, their main interest is to have a quiet life.