



A MODEST MEMBER

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The Government's helping hand often hurts

Governments are well meaning but ham-handed institutions. They always mean so well and usually do so disappointingly. Let me give some illustrations.

At the end of last year the Commonwealth Government made a grant of money for the relief of unemployment in rural areas.

It was paid to the State Government and these in turn passed it on to local councils or shires, so that unemployed people could do the work that the councils wanted done but could not afford.

The announcement of this scheme was received with gratification, particularly by rural MPs.

Indeed, one would have been justified in thinking that it was our own money we were giving away instead of the taxpayers', we were so loud in our praise.

In some cases the money was well used, but in other districts there was difficulty in finding the unemployed to do the work.

In these cases there were many needed improvements, such as kerbing and guttering, that could not be constructed just because there were no unemployed in the district.

Now councillors are people with considerable resource.

They reckoned that the Commonwealth cow was in the bail and they were not going to let her go without getting their share of milk out of the old girl, just because they didn't have any unemployed handy to do the milking.

So they set about finding them. Some they imported at considerable expense; often they induced farmers' sons to register, even though there were countless jobs to be done on their father's farms.

It became a matter of honour to find the unemployed in order to get their hands on Commonwealth money, so that the kerb and guttering could be done.

Of course, this kind of thing did not happen in my electorate, but it did in other places.

The fact is, if the Government is supplying money for any particular project, the usual standards of responsibility do not apply. The motto then is "let's get in for our cut."

Let me give another illustration of the Government meaning well but doing badly.

In February it announced an increase in the unemployment benefit, from \$10 to \$17 a week for a single person, with \$8 a week for a dependent spouse, plus \$4.50 for each child under 16 remaining unchanged.

There were good reasons for this increase but although well meant, it did not always work well.

Soon after this announcement, I visited an Aboriginal settlement in my area.

Usually I am received here with dull indifference; I do not complain about this because I have never done much to justify a better reception.

But on this occasion I received a very hearty welcome indeed, so I asked the superintendent the reason for the change. He explained that I had received the credit for the increased unemployment payment.

He pointed out that he had previously great difficulty in getting his people to really look for work, but now that the unemployment benefit had been increased to \$17 for a single man, no one would even have to pretend to look for work ever again.

I have never been able to put forward any worthwhile ideas about solving the Aboriginal problem so I suppose I should not be critical.

But this action (for which I got the credit, don't forget) will, I think, make the future of the people on the settlement worse instead of better.

Yet what an outcry there would have been from the nicest people if we had paid unemployed Aboriginal people less than whites.

We would have been branded as "racists" and so on. So we took action that will hurt people when we really meant to help them.

One of the reasons for the Government meaning so well and doing so badly is that it is usually unable to tailor its decisions to individual cases and, more than that, our determination to appear generous often makes us act unwisely, well meaning though we be.

But the main trouble is that most people think it is only right and proper to do the Government in the eye, if possible.

Doctors do it, pensioners do it, even MPs do it — all except my constituents who are models of virtue, particularly in election year.