



## A MODEST MEMBER

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### **Fred puts his sole into new 'Blue Poles'**

Fred has been wearing his cunning look lately so I know he has been cooking up something.

When we meet he still grizzles about the rust in his wheat and what the Government is doing to him and so on.

But every now and again he has been asking quite off-beat questions, in an off-hand way, about the Government's interest in cultural matters.

For a while I thought he was considering breaking into print and probing to see if the Government would be likely to give him a literary grant.

But then he started to delve into the Government's interest in art — particularly he has been sniffing around the Blue Poles painting.

He wanted me to verify whether this great work of art had really been executed by an artist with his feet and was it true that he was a little tiddly at the time? And did the Government really pay \$1.3 million for it?

I told him that I understood that the Government did indeed pay this sum but I doubted whether the method of the execution of the painting was quite accurate.

He received this information with studied indifference and I forgot the matter.

But the other morning I called at Fred's home and his wife said that he was down at the woolshed; she didn't know what he was doing there but she had a feeling that he was up to something.

So I went quietly to the woolshed and peered in and Fred indeed was up to something.

He had nailed a great piece of tarpaulin to the floor on which he emptied several tins of paint of various colours.

And there he was, with a bottle of whisky in one hand, morosely plodding out a picture for the nation.

#### **Whisky helps**

He was a bit embarrassed when he saw me. He said that he had hoped it would be a surprise for Mr Whitlam.

"But now you are here, you might as well make yourself useful for once," he growled.

“Take your shoes and socks off, roll your trousers up and get stuck into it.”

And get stuck into it indeed I did, or nearly so.

It is surprising how sticky paint is to walk on and how it squirms between your toes.

It is really hard to pick up your feet, and that’s where the whisky helps.

So round and round we went and it is certainly a satisfying feeling.

At least you can see where you’ve been, which is more than most politicians can say.

Fred masterminded the whole business and was most fussy about what he called “Working out the headlands.” There was no skimping anything.

“You’ve got to put your soul into it,” he urged. I replied I was putting both soles into it.

We put in a steady three hours plodding round and round and the picture was coming up nicely. But you had to keep going.

All the time the paint was getting stickier and it became even harder to pick the feet up and the whisky was running low.

It became clear that we had to disengage soon or we would be stuck there forever.

I certainly didn’t want to become an integral part of a work of art and be handed down to posterity.

And Fred said that he didn’t want me to either, because he thought I would spoil its value.

So with infinite care we worked ourselves clear. Fred fortunately had kerosene handy and eventually we got the paint off our legs.

Then we had some more whisky and sat down to admire our footwork.

The longer we watched it the more certain we were that we had created something really notable.

As the paint hardened the details came into sharper relief, the colours become deeper and so on.

Fred kept the flies off while I went home for more whisky.

By the time the sun was low in the sky the whole masterpiece was fairly glowing and Fred was doing sums in his head about its value.

He pointed out that it was bigger than Blue Poles so it would certainly be worth more.

“I’ll let it go for \$2 million but not a cent less,” he said as we finished the last of the whisky.

“It’s your job to see that I get the money and proper recognition. It’s all my idea. You only did a bit of the foot work.

“You see Gough and tell him he could use it for his next year’s Christmas cards. That’ll fetch him.”

So we went home, treading on air.

But when we inspected it in the morning, Mavis sniffed and said that she thought it looked pretty ordinary.

But perhaps Gough will buy it.

I’m sure he’d be the first to admit that he’s a man of vision.