



A MODEST MEMBER

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Still plenty of shelter behind tariff wall

On Wednesday of last week when I returned late at night from a meeting I found Mavis busy hatching plots because the Government had cut all tariffs by 25 per cent. She said:

Now's your chance, dear. Get stuck into them.

I have been listening to the comments of many of the big manufacturers and they say they will all be ruined and their employees walking the streets.

If you play your cards right there will be many generous donations at election time. You'll never get a chance like this again. Get stuck into them.

Poor Mavis! I had to tell her that because of Eccles' urging I had been advocating a reduction in tariffs ever since he started educating me.

"Having done that, dear," I pleaded, "I can't suddenly turn round and criticise the Government for doing just what I have been telling it to do, now can I?"

Her face fell a foot.

"It's all that Eccles' fault, as usual," she growled, "he has done nothing except get you into trouble ever since he started to haunt you."

I know it's tempting for me as a member of the Opposition to criticise the Government if it does things that are unpopular, though right.

But Fred soon scotched this idea. He has always been suspicious that high tariffs hurt him but he was never quite sure why.

But Eccles has been educating him also, so when I said that, as a member of the Opposition, I didn't feel like praising the Government for reducing tariffs he got quite nasty.

He said he and other non-political electors (and he thinks that's just about everyone) were sick of politicians trying to score smart political points off one another.

"You may think you are clever," he snarled, "but all you do is lose your own self-respect as well as ours. And I'll tell you this, if you now criticise the Government for reducing tariffs, the next time I see you I'll have your guts for garters."

I'm afraid Fred is a rather coarse person.

Then I saw Eccles who was polishing his halo and taking all the credit for everything. I can see why people hate him so.

If it weren't for the fact that he is usually right, I would have thrown him overboard long ago.

Eccles is sure the Government has acted wisely. He says that it is easy to lecture Governments about tackling inflation; we have all been doing this for some time.

But doing something about it is harder. Tackling inflation is always unpopular — that's why it is so seldom done.

So it was no surprise to Eccles to find that the Government's tariff action is not popular in all quarters.

He thinks that the tariff reduction will not have so many bad effects as the prophets of gloom expect.

In some industries tariffs are already so high that a 25 per cent lowering of the tariff wall will still leave plenty of shelter.

In other sections the tariff reductions will give manufacturers the kind of jolt that hurts, but is necessary.

The rural industries had this kind of jolt a while back and it hurt like hell, but we came through it and emerged more efficient as a result.

So will the good manufacturers — they will grizzle a bit as we did, and they will beat their problem if they are good at their job.

But there will certainly be some sectors that will suffer, mainly the sections that have been in trouble all along and have been the biggest burden to our economy.

Eccles is glad that the Government is prepared to help them if they have to leave. It is better for them and us to give them a golden handshake now than to have them on our backs forever.

And Eccles is glad the Government is going to help the relocation of employees who are adversely affected. But he thinks that there won't be as many as people expect.

Many industries will benefit by the tariff reductions and these will increase employment opportunities.

So Eccles gives the Government top marks for taking this unpopular but necessary step.

I suppose I can't very well agree with him in public, but I would like to.