



## A MODEST MEMBER

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### **Why pillory big-eared politicians?**

When people ask me why the Liberal Party lost the election, I usually blame everything on Mr McMahon.

This is a comfortable thing to do. He is not likely to be again in a position to make me a minister, so Mavis tells me to go my hardest.

Besides, he is now flat on his back and that is a convenient posture if you want to hit a man hard.

There is no doubt that the personality of the party leader is now thought to be much more important than ever.

This is due to the impact of TV which has made us much more interested in personalities. After all, you can see a leader's personality on the screen but you can't see his policy.

The impact of TV is really terrifying. Not only does it affect the public's assessment of their leaders, but there will be another more serious, though long-term, price to pay.

Eccles says that the next generation of politicians will be even worse than we have now — that we won't be able to induce good candidates to come forward because they know they are likely to be pilloried if their ears are too large or their feet too flat or something equally silly and unimportant.

And now we are going to have colour TV. Not only will the shape of a man's nose be important, but from now on its colour also will be a decisive factor in the quality of his image.

Cripes, you can imagine the pre-selection conventions of the future!

We used to listen to what candidates had to say when they came before us. Now we will spend all our time peering at them. And God help the successful candidate if he goes bald on us!

I don't deny that Mr McMahon's performance on TV was a handicap though I must admit that it was a lot better than I could do, even if Mavis doesn't think so.

But I have an uneasy feeling that it was also our policies that were to blame.

Our trouble is that we don't quite know what we believe in any more. We used to think of ourselves as a free enterprise party and we do now too, but only if this is popular.

We will help any large section that calls loudly on us for aid because we think that this will make us popular.

We used to sneer at the philosophy of the Welfare State, and tell of the bears at Yellowstone Park who were fed by tourists in spring, summer and autumn, and who starved to death in the winter, waiting for the tourists who stopped coming when the snow was thick on the ground.

But now we go charging off after each Welfare State hare that gets up, particularly if it is large and popular.

But our trouble is that we are not as good at this as the Labor Party. They really believe in the Welfare State, so they chase the hare with more enthusiasm.

And they really believe that financing it by taxing those that have and so making everyone more equal is a desirable social objective.

We don't, but we tend to do it all the same.

There was a time when defence or communism were issues which divided us. But people aren't frightened about these things now, even if they should be.

So unless we change our policies, future elections will turn into a competition to see which party is the most efficient at distributing other people's money to the most people.

Or we will have a change every three or six years, just for the sake of having a change of people to pillory.

But in the process, much money will stick to the Government's fingers, and certainly the incentive to produce a bigger economic cake will disappear.

And we will end up like Britain which makes a good living shining the boots of the tourists, but with the fire of their spirit dampened under the wet blanket of well-meaning, mediocre Governments, be they Labour or Conservative.

Eccles says that rather than blaming everything on Mr McMahon, it might be more accurate to blame myself for not having better policies; for looking for popularity rather than principle.

That's the kind of nasty bitter remark I've come to expect from Eccles!