



A MODEST FARMER

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How a chance to boost our exports goes up in smoke

One advantage of being a semi-retired as well as a tired old gentleman is that sometimes Mavis lets me knock off a little early. I did so on April 6 and came inside just in time to hear the Prime Minister speaking on the PM program.

I still come to attention when I hear my master's voice even though I have been out of Parliament for some time now.

I may not tremble with the same abject nervousness that used to afflict me but I always listen very respectfully when I hear those well modulated tones.

I always hope that he is not going to talk about tariffs because I know from past experience that he is likely to talk a lot of nonsense and, if he does, Eccles will try to make me clobber him.

I don't like doing that for many reasons, not the least being that it [makes] Mavis mad.

Mavis has started to come up for air, as it were, and is plotting again. One of her plans is to get me appointed to some overseas post.

I am not sure why because I have told her that State funerals are not automatically given to dead diplomats, so it isn't that.

Perhaps she wants to find some proper task for my striped pants.

Anyhow, for some reason she is desperately keen for me not to be nasty to Him — not for a while anyway.

Unfortunately the Prime Minister was talking about tariffs and, as is not unusual for Him when so doing, was talking at least some nonsense.

I heard Him say that we would not have any secondary industry at all if it wasn't for the tariff.

This is so demonstratively wrong that I suppose I ought to expose the foolishness of that statement, but I know that that would make Mavis angry so it will have to wait till a more opportune moment, at least until the Ambassador to Outer Mongolia has been appointed.

Then the Prime Minister went on to castigate people who wrote for the newspapers for encouraging divisions in the community.

He pointed out that we were all one people and we ought not mind if particular groups were given particular advantages at the expense of other groups, and that the latter should comfort themselves that they were being sacrificed for the common good.

As he said that I had the guilty feeling that he was metaphorically pointing at me because I have frequently pointed out that the exporters are being clobbered by the tariff. If indeed he was thinking of me, then I must be careful not to offend again.

So in conformity with my determination not to be divisive, from now on I will be all sweetness and light.

A few weeks ago, on the ABC midday TV program, Horizon 5, which I find very interesting, I heard the Agricultural Attaché at the US Embassy say that they would look kindly on the idea of reducing their tariff against our wool if we would reduce our barriers against the imports of US tobacco.

I had heard rumours that this was possible but on this occasion I both saw and heard the US official say it, so I know that it is a definite offer.

So I contacted Eccles in his ivory tower and asked him to find out how much it was costing the taxpayer and consolidated revenue to subsidise the growing of tobacco in Australia.

The figures he obtained were startling.

He was not able to get later figures and the position may have altered since then, but in 1970-71 the cost of subsidising each hectare of tobacco grown in Australia was \$1,628, the next year \$1,573 and in 1972-73 it was \$1,334.

If the following year's figures are of that order it certainly looks a bit odd to be jeopardising our chance of benefiting the wool industry by lowering the US wool tariff in order to protect an industry that costs the taxpayer well over \$1,000 a year to support.

There was a time when I would have advocated sacrificing the tobacco growers on the wool growers' altar.

This indeed may be the proper economic answer but, following the Prime Minister's admonition about not being divisive, I will adopt a different line.

Clearly we must do something so I suggest that we pay tobacco growers \$1,000 a hectare not to grow tobacco.

Their land could then be used for something else so they would be highly delighted.

And the woolgrowers would be rid of the US duty against our wool which has been worrying us for so long. So everyone would be happy.

If this suggestion does not get me appointed to Outer Mongolia there is no justice in the world.