



A MODEST FARMER

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Show us how we can twist our MP's ear ...

I was pleased when a group of my farmer friends approached me last week as an unofficial deputation.

It is a long while since anyone has asked my advice about anything so I was ready to give my milk down on any subject.

And when Fred said that they wanted me to tell them how to conduct a powerful campaign about the damage done to farmers by high tariffs, I became quite excited.

I immediately embarked on one of the lectures that Eccles had prepared for me, about how tariffs impose burdens on export industries and so on, but Fred interrupted me rather rudely by saying that Eccles had stayed at Fred's place over the weekend and they had got all the facts and theories about tariffs straight from the horse's mouth, as it were.

In fact, Eccles had even written out a series of speaker's notes so they were all set to go.

"It's not the facts about tariffs we want from you, Bert," Fred explained frankly. "We want you to tell us how to handle our member of Parliament so he doesn't dodge away from the issue in the way you used to do.

"If the going got tough at a political meeting, if we were closing in on you, as it were, your fast footwork would get you out of trouble.

"We want you to tell us how to conduct our campaign so that our new MP can't get away.

"Teach us how to do the ear twisting trick with our member, as we used to do with our horses years ago."

I saw immediately what my mean role was to be. Fred wasn't talking about catching the politician's ear in the usual way.

When Fred and I were young we kidded ourselves on our ability to handle rough horses but we were more cautious than the rough-riders you see at rodeos or on films.

Not for us the flamboyant flourish of the hat or the heavy work with the spurs and that kind of thing.

We approached our horses with caution — some would say with cowardice — and we were not above using mean little tricks if, by so doing, we could save ourselves a broken leg.

One such trick was to get a firm grip of a bad horse's ear and to twist it savagely tight and then you could climb on board like a gentleman.

Then, unfortunately, you had to let the ear go and then the matter was resolved between the horse, your Maker and yourself, but at least you were in the saddle before the trouble really started, and that is more important than city people know.

I was disappointed to find myself cast in such a lowly role, but I have become painfully aware of the weight of the tariff burden since I have had to wring a reluctant living from the land, so I agreed to their request.

But I warned them that my knowledge on how to evade issues was rather extensive and so it would take more than one lesson.

“I told the others you would make a great thing of it,” Fred said sourly, “but at least let’s get started today.”

So then and there began the first lesson. I don’t think they liked it much because the first thing I told them they must do was that they must not only join, but they must continue to take an active interest in the local branch of their political party, even if it meant going to branch meetings several times a year.

This caused a howl of protest; they all complained that political meetings were always so boring.

I admitted that I, too, had noticed this when other people were speaking but I pressed the point that members of any party were inclined to look sideways at “blow-ins” who suddenly appeared at meetings and then as suddenly disappeared when interest in that particular subject was satisfied.

I got a good deal of pleasure telling Fred that he should be more regular in his attendance at branch meetings because he often used to tell me how he hated going to them, particularly if I was speaking. Serve the sod right.

Then I told them that, if they wanted tariffs discussed at branch meetings, they should go to some trouble to cultivate the chairman and the secretary.

Both would probably be gratified to find someone taking an interest in something, so they would probably listen attentively, and would almost certainly ask the local member along to talk about tariffs.

And if they could arrange this they would have to think about what they would do with him when they got him there — how to twist his ear so he couldn’t evade the issue. But this must wait till next week.