



DAVE'S DAIRY

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Why our MP is no longer prone to a good sob story

Before Clarkson became a Member of Parliament he was a typically dull, astringent person not given to emotional outbursts. Country people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves, so in this regard, as in most others, Clarkson was very much the same as the rest of us.

But after his election we noticed a gradual change in his behaviour. He began to give his milk down much more readily if he was either patted or threatened by a constituent. He always seemed to have a handkerchief handy if someone came to him with a tale of woe.

When we remarked on this startling change in his behaviour Clarkson explained that he had now become more interested in the problems of people in his electorate than he was before. "Once upon a time I used to see things only in economic terms," he explained, "but now I realise that economics must give way to human sympathy and understanding. From now on I am interested in people." Then he would reach for his hanky (we noticed that he always came equipped with clean one these days) and we all marvelled at the change in the man.

But gradually, as the years and the elections rolled by, Clarkson has drifted back to his old ways. His eyes do not now quickly moisten with each harrowing tale of woe. His opinion is again more likely to be determined by economic logic rather than by pangs of personal involvement. When some of us tackled him about this second significant change in his behaviour he admitted it and explained why.

When he first became a Member of Parliament there was a Dairy Bounty Bill before the House and he foolishly supported it on the grounds that many of his dairy farmers were producing butter at well below the cost of production and so they needed more money because many of them were going broke. Because of his determination to be nice to everyone and to be loved by all, he voted to continue the bounty and so encouraged his dairy farmers to continue dairying.

Many of them did so, to their great disadvantage. Now some of them are just leaving the industry which they would have been far better to have left 15 years ago. "I realise now," Clarkson said, "that we should never blanket the market signals. We should let people see them even if they don't like them."

The next episode in Clarkson's conversion back to the path of economic rectitude occurred when some constituents (and I was one) were pressuring Clarkson to increase the amount of wheat covered by the stabilisation plans from 150m. to 200m. bushels. We told Clarkson many poignant stories (and some lies) about how we needed more money to cover the cost of production.

But he didn't seem as amenable to pressures as we thought he should be, so we leant on him more heavily. "Your duty is to do what your electors require of you," we pointed out with threatening undertones. "We are the people who put you in Parliament, so you should do

what we say.” Then remembering how susceptible Clarkson had become to personal pleasure, we put in some sob stuff about our poor little children not getting enough to eat and how we soon would be walking off our farms and that kind of thing.

Clarkson protested that he thought if we got what we wanted it would do us harm because it would encourage us to produce more wheat when world demand was falling and if we weren’t careful we would be facing quota restrictions on wheat production.

But we brushed this argument aside. “That’s our business, Clarkson,” we said. “Your duty is to help your poor constituents. Don’t look at the economics of everything — it’s people you are supposed to care about, not arid economics.”

So Clarkson, poor silly mutt, did what we demanded and voted for an extension of the Wheat Stabilisation Plan and so encouraged me to grow more wheat when demand was falling, so making wheat quotas inevitable with all the injustices and the black and grey markets inherent in the scheme.

So now, when people appeal to Clarkson to give his milk down and demonstrate his compassion, he goes away and thinks things out. He has learnt the hard way that although he can easily win a reputation for being a pleasant and popular politician, it is often better for his people that their problems be looked at from an economic as well as a personal viewpoint.