



## **A MODEST FARMER**

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### **MPs don't always behave like yahoos and larrikins**

Since I have ceased to be an MP, I have been appalled at how awful Parliament sounds on the radio.

For a while I tried to delude myself that the standard of behaviour and debate fell when I left the place, but Fred was quick to say that he thought my departure had improved the standard rather than lowered it.

Evidently something in the Canberra air or the shape of the chamber makes members behave like yahoos — even well balanced people like me.

This is a pity because Parliamentarians can be quite sensible people, really.

If you talk them quietly and alone, or see them at work on a committee when they do not think they are being watched, they frequently behave quite normally.

And sometimes they even behave like that in Parliament, or some of them do. But if they are not being thrown out, or are not assassinating someone's character, the media do not report them because they are thought to be dull.

It is not surprising, then, if MPs behave like larrikins if they think this is the only way to be noticed by the press.

So I ask you to read a speech made by Senator David Hamer in the Senate on September 26 and which was not reported because it was only a sensible, simple speech without any personal attacks and smart political footwork. It was just packed full of facts and so was not newsworthy.

I was not surprised to see the standard set by Senator Hamer because he used to be in the Reps and even there he talked a lot of sense.

He used to represent a Melbourne constituency and we used to argue a lot about tariffs.

For a while I was hopeful of unloading Eccles on to him and Eccles said that he would be glad to be dealing with someone with more basic intelligence than the poor material with which he was then working. (I think he meant me.)

So Eccles went off happily to instruct Mr Hamer as he then was, but he soon returned with a flea in his ear.

“It's no good Bert,” he complained, “He's got a mind of his own. I can't do anything with him.”

And David Hamer obviously still has a mind of his own and it has taken him a long way along the road to economic understanding.

He never used to be one of the tariff troglodytes who believe in protecting everything that moves; he was far too sensible for that.

But I never really hoped to hear him talk so much sense about tariffs as he did in the Senate the other day.

Senators often claim that their Chamber encourages cerebral activity. If this is so, it doesn't seem to be helping the others as it does Senator Hamer. I quote from his speech:

Tariffs are not effective in the long run in protecting jobs. In this role in the long run they always do more harm than good. Unfortunately, this is the way in which very largely they are being used at the moment.

But it is not only in the long term that tariffs are damaging. I will give the Senate an example that came to my notice recently.

It concerns a product called vinyl record compound. The problem is this: Australian produced vinyl is inferior in quality and, if used, produces records which discriminating buyers reject in favour of imported records.

For the same reason we cannot export locally produced records to what otherwise would be a good market.

Only very small quantities are produced in Australia and it is not worthwhile for manufacturers to install new equipment to produce a world class product.

There is a substantial tariff on imported vinyl so it cannot be used economically by local companies if they wish to compete with imported records.

So we have this crazy situation in order to protect the handful of jobs of people producing this vinyl we are losing the chance of creating many times that number of jobs in the recording and record-making industry with a chance of substantial exports as well. That is only one example.

If we look at the secondary effects of tariffs used solely as a means of protecting jobs I think we will find that they nearly always do more harm than good.

Now if I had said that even a year ago, people would have got mad with me. The winds of logic and change are certainly blowing through the tariff world.

Senator Hamer said many other sensible things in that speech. You should ask him for a copy and so encourage him to continue being so sensible.