



A MODEST FARMER

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They'll be stroking their platitudes till they purr

When I was elected to Parliament I quickly learnt not to say anything that would get me into trouble.

I would perhaps have picked this up myself in time if left to my own devices, but of course this did not happen.

Mavis was on me in a flash. "You must learn to behave like a real Member of Parliament, dear," she said sternly. "Keep your head down. It won't matter if you seldom say anything worth saying, just keep out of trouble."

So that is what I did for 19 years. I got quite skilled at side stepping awkward situations and when I retired from politics it was very difficult to pin anything on me, good or bad.

And the habit of evading the unpopularity that follows making definite statements became so deeply ingrained that I still find it hard to get out on the end of a limb and proclaim an idea of my own.

So when Fred demanded that I take a definite attitude about the forthcoming conference on unemployment, you should have seen my footwork.

I gave the conference my general blessing in an eloquent statement of great length but was careful not to say anything that would enable my critics to brand me as a "union basher" or a "bosses' man."

But I said quite a lot about the benefit of everyone loving one another and I ended my oration with an appeal for peace at any price.

When I sat down (I find that I still stand up to speak) I was disappointed that Fred did not applaud. Far from it. He said sourly:

That's the kind of thinking that has got us into our present mess.

Why don't you face up to issues instead of trying to duck and weave around them all the time? Of course we can have industrial peace if we give in all the time to irresponsible union demands and accept impossible award conditions.

But doing that is one of the reasons our unemployment is so bad. Labour is simply too expensive to hire in many industries.

You know that perfectly well. Why don't you say so instead of backing away from even simple problems?

He then compared me unfavourably with Senator Hamer whom I mentioned last week.

So I read Senator Hamer's speech again and I admit that he did say some things that were worth saying and he said them simply, too.

For instance, this is what he said about the very serious problem of unemployment among our young people:

The tragedy is that our award wage policy is depriving many young people of a chance for a job. The award for young people in their first job is far too close to the adult rate so employers naturally choose experienced people, often middle-aged women re-entering the work force, in preference to juniors.

One can see the damage caused by such high award rates for young people in a recent case in the ACT.

The fast food organisation, McDonalds, recently closed two of its outlets here, claiming that it pays kids in New York \$2.60 an hour, in England \$3 an hour, in Scandinavia \$3.30 an hour but in the ACT it has to pay them \$5.36 an hour, which is the adult rate.

When the union secretary involved was asked why his union was destroying jobs for young people, he said he was not going to stand by while multi-national profiteers took advantage of the working class.

He added that the kids didn't know they were being exploited. This was given in justification of having destroyed their jobs.

It is all ominously reminiscent of the American major in Vietnam who said that in order to liberate a village it had been necessary to destroy it.

Senator Hamer then dealt with the devastating effect of our absurdly high penalty rates, which were recently described by the South Australian Industrial Commission as a cancerous growth.

There are endless examples of the damage done by excessively high penalty rates but I suppose the tourist industry is hit the hardest.

I have been told that, if you are poor, you now go to Singapore, if moderately well off, to the UK, but if you are filthy rich you travel round Australia, staying in hotels.

That would explain why employment in the hotel and motel industries fell by 7.6 per cent last year. And now that domestic air fares have gone through the roof, there will be even more reasons for going abroad rather than staying here for holidays.

If the forthcoming conference is going to deal with these kinds of problems it will be worth holding. But I guess all the politicians will do will be to stroke their platitudes till they purr.

Our book, *One More Nail*, is to be launched on November 15. Fred says that it will sink immediately.

"That's what you would expect a nail to do," he added with his usual logic.