



A MODEST MEMBER

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Can a bear be sure of a feed?

My wife Mavis is always on my wheel, urging me to make my reputation as a statesman by demanding that the Government do more for the citizens. “The government must know what is best for everyone, dear,” she is always saying, “particularly when they have got someone like you helping them.”

But I wish I was as sure of this as Mavis. I can’t help worrying about the Government’s ability to decide what is best for us all. And old farmer Fred is completely cynical about the Government’s all embracing wisdom. “You chaps will do anything you think will get you votes,” he growled.

“Look at the Ord River. The only reason you agreed to go ahead with the big dam was to get votes.”

I always get uneasy when Fred starts to go on about the Ord. I wish he would forget all about it.

But even if the Government did make the right decisions about what we ought to do and how we ought to behave, there is still something hopeless about much that Governments do. It’s not that they don’t mean well — they do, mostly. But the more Governments do for the citizens, the less the citizens are willing to do for themselves.

You remember that story about the bears in Yellowstone Park in U.S.A. Each spring, summer and autumn the bears spend most of their time sitting by the roadside being fed by the passing tourists. They grow fat and sleek. Then the snow comes with winter and the tourists stop coming; but the bears still sit there, hopefully waiting to be fed. And each year a large number die before they find out that they have to look after themselves.

So the everlasting intervention of the Government (however well-meaning) tends to sap the initiative of its citizens. And even in the country, which used to be regarded as the last bastion of personal independence, you now commonly hear the cry, “The Government ought to do something about the calamitous rural prices.”

But it is not only this effect of Government intervention that worries me. Each time the Government does something for its citizens, it does it by taking money from one chap and giving it to another. Doing this by taxation dampens down the incentive of people to work hard and take risks. But the trouble goes deeper than this. We are training, in Australia, a rapidly increasing number of people whose main effort is devoted to finding ways of evading and avoiding taxation.

Even old Fred is catching on to the idea. Fred’s father would have scorned to even consider doing anything that was even remotely dishonest. Fred started off on that path also, but now he

finds that the only way he can hope to hand on his farm, intact, to his son, is by doing something very clever and very complicated about both probate and income-tax.

He is not sure exactly what he is doing, but he knows that everyone else is doing it and his accountant says that he expects that it is going to be all right, particularly if no one looks under the stones.

And he is fortified in this attitude now finds that the Premier of South Australia says that it is all right to break laws if you don't approve of them.

Old Fred doesn't approve of laws that enforce the payment of probate. He finds that he can avoid this by being cunning and breaking the law only a little. If he gets caught, he knows that Mr Dunstan will approve. After all, it is only a little law!

But the dangers of Government interference don't end there. Probably the youth of today don't realise how difficult it is to make citizens good just by passing laws.

You remember the story of how during the war when everything was in short supply, two doctors were sitting in a hotel lounge discussing their practices. One doctor said to the other, "I've got four cases of meningitis in my area." A chap sitting just behind who wasn't supposed to hear, tapped the doctor on the shoulder and whispered in his ear, "I'll take the lot."

So Mavis may be right that the way to get on in politics is to urge the Government to do more and more about almost everything. But the more I see of Governments, the more despondent I become about them.