



A MODEST FARMER

The Australian Financial Review, 7 September 1979

Country Party policies may not help farmers but do save seats

There has been some nasty scenes in the Modest Farmer's family lately.

They began when Mr Anthony, the leader of the National Country Party (NCP), made some testy remarks about the "bone-headed behaviour" of some Liberal Party leaders who had the temerity to suggest opposing NCP candidates at forthcoming elections.

Both Eccles and Fred were up in arms about what Mr Anthony said.

They do not often agree about things, because Fred lives with his nose pretty close to the economic grindstone while Eccles spends most of his time in his ivory tower in Canberra, so their paths do not often cross.

I was startled then to find them in agreement on this issue.

I know from bitter experience that Fred feels no particular loyalty to the Liberal Party.

The burden of Fred and Eccles' complaints about the Country Party was that, though its members were people of the highest personal morality, they were lacking in political principles.

Eccles said bitterly:

They will do anything for votes, even when they know what they are doing is wrong.

Look at their stand on tariffs.

Your mob (I do wish he would be more respectful) are not anything to write home about as far as tariffs are concerned, though I admit your precious Mr Fraser seems to be talking more sense now that he has had his nose rubbed in the economic facts of life since he went overseas and realised the international implications of the nonsense he used to talk about tariffs.

But at least some of his Liberal backbenchers speak out quite loudly and bravely against our present tariff policies.

I suppose Eccles is right about this.

But you never hear a Country Party member say one word in opposition to policies which they must have known were very damaging to their farmers they were pledged to help.

So I suppose I can understand why Eccles is so savage with the backbenchers in the Country Party.

Eccles said sourly:

I don't think they even care about their farmers.

It's either that or they haven't the guts.

I said severely:

It's all very well for you to spout your economic theories, Eccles, but poor Mr Anthony lives in the rough, cruel political world and not on your ivory tower.

He knows that the Country Party is running out of wind and, if they are to continue to exist, they just have to cling to their seats.

And to do this they just have to have money, Eccles. So Mr Anthony has to keep in with the manufacturers to get the sinews of war to fight the next election.

After all, it was they who provided most of the money to build the Country Party headquarters, McEwen House.

You should give Mr Anthony your sympathy, not your criticism.

I am still regarded as the authority on politics in this neck of the woods so I expected that my opinion would carry the day.

And when Mavis came in to support me I thought we had it in the bag.

"Listen to him for once," she said severely.

"He mightn't have many brains but he knows the importance of political footwork. At least he knows what makes political animals tick."

I couldn't help thinking that Mavis might have expressed herself in a nicer manner but I was glad to have her help. It is all very well for Fred and Eccles to go round criticising Mr Anthony because he feels that he has to do things that he knows are bad for the farmers he was elected to support, to continue to clobber them with a tariff burden weighing at least \$5,000 million a year.

But they are only poor simple farmers without any political experience.

How can they be expected to understand the finer points of political footwork?

It may be true that Country Party policies are harming farmers, but they are being pursued for the best of all political reasons, that is, holding Country Party seats.

That is what politics is all about, as Mavis so rightly says.

But it is pretty hard on us farmers.