



A MODEST MEMBER

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Don't arrive late at my State funeral

Mavis has discovered that, if I were somehow to become a minister, even if only for a few weeks, I would be given a State funeral.

This is a prospect that excites her. She is attracted by the idea of all the pomp and splendour, all the big black cars, the muffled music and the long, insincere sermon and so on.

So she is desperate that I suddenly make my mark, even if it is only in the dying hours of this Parliament, in the pathetic belief that if I did, they might make me a minister for a few weeks.

On reflection, I must admit that a State funeral would be something to look forward to.

All my colleagues would be there, all trying not to be caught unawares by the cameras with smiles on the dials. And everyone looking suspiciously around to see who wasn't there.

You can imagine X and Y (two likely candidates) muttering that they noticed that Z wasn't there and perhaps he was already belting around the electorate getting ready for the preselection and they couldn't afford to give the sod such a start. I think I would enjoy this.

So I agreed that if Mavis could find a good resounding drum to thump, then I would give it a go.

So after pricking over a pile of subjects Mavis decided that I should become eloquent about the evils of ownership of our land by overseas capitalists.

It wasn't hard to get up a good head of steam about this. I prepared a powerful speech and the word "heritage" appeared frequently.

I also referred to the "rape of this fair land" and things like that. Good powerful stuff it was.

It wasn't long before I had half of Australia in the hands of evil overseas land grabbers.

Having spelt out a few general sentiments, I then concentrated on the "tropical north" and really let my head go.

I painted a poignant picture of most of the Top End in the hands of rapacious, land hungry, American exploiters.

Having finished this effusion and after giving a polish to one or two flat patches, I took it to Fred. I have learnt from sad experience not to try this kind of stuff out on Eccles.

But Fred said it was awful.

On the general question of the likelihood of Australian farms falling into the hands of large corporations, overseas-owned or not, he is emphatic that the family farmer, if he is working a property of economic size, would do the company farm like a dinner.

The incentive of the individual owner to work his tractor for 24 hours at seeding time, to go round his lambing ewes at night, to shift his cattle on Sunday — the incentive to do the things that are necessary for efficient, enthusiastic farming, disappears when companies go farming.

But Fred really got furious when he read what I had said about the agricultural land of the Top End falling into the greedy hands of overseas owners.

He knows far too much about the NT and pointed out sourly that it was covered with the bleached bones of past failures in agriculture and many of these bones came from overseas.

Fred says that the Top End of the NT is an easy subject for eloquence but it is a difficult area in which to make money from farming or intensive grazing.

Fred is not blessed with great vision or imagination and he measures the likely profitability of projects by one simple measure: whether he would put his hard-earned money into it.

He says that if he had any spare money he would not spend it in the tropical North.

He knows the area well. He knows the performance of the new tropical pastures and crops. He knows that they will be successful one day.

But he is not putting his money in yet. He wants other people to try these things out first and find out some of the pitfalls.

And he is quite content that Americans, or anybody else, should use their money in the expensive and tricky business of finding out.

So there goes my State funeral. It's a pity. It really would have been something to look forward to.