



A MODEST MEMBER

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No pity for the poor graduates

About the only certainty in the uncertain political world is that 1972 is going to be an election year.

So during most of this year I will be describing my desperate efforts to ingratiate myself with my electors, with Mavis pushing me forward on every occasion.

I cannot quite understand why I make such desperate efforts to retain my seat in Parliament, when I spend most of the rest of the time complaining about how hard I work and how little I am paid.

Mavis says I do it for the country's good — I've got a suspicion it's because I don't know how to stop.

So Mavis and I have been desperately thinking of popular things to say. The first subject that attracted us was unemployment, so we composed a tender little speech, redolent with compassion for the poor unemployed people standing in the soup kitchen queues, and pity for the poor university graduates as they "were flung brand-new on to this harsh world's scrap heap." (This was one of our finer phrases.)

When we had finished the speech, and as we wiped the tears from our eyes, we felt that we had really laboured to some purpose.

"It's very good, dear," Mavis said, "it shows you are a man of feeling. It should get you a lot of votes. You must make sure that Eccles or Fred don't get their hooks into it."

I can see what she means. This time last year, Eccles made me write articles appealing to the Government to do something worthwhile, even if unpopular, to counter inflation.

It has done at least some of the things that Eccles was urging on it, and the economy is slowing down — a little painfully, I know — but slowing down, as had to happen if we were to dampen down the flaring fires of inflation.

Now one of the results of doing this is that the rate of unemployment has increased. But it is only a marginal increase.

At the end of November 1.53 per cent of our work force was listed as unemployed, and, if you take the school leavers out of this, the figure is 1.2 per cent. And about half of these were wives or teenagers, dependent to some extent on the father's or husband's income.

Our figure of 1.2 per cent unemployed is the envy of the world. The average rate of unemployment between 1961 and 1970 has been: Canada 5 per cent, USA 4.7 per cent, Italy

3.3 per cent, France 2.4 per cent, UK 2.1 per cent, Sweden 1.7 per cent, and Australia 1.4 per cent.

Now we are expected to go to panic stations because the figure has reached 1.53 per cent (including school leavers) and jeopardise by so doing the anti-inflation measures we painfully began during the past year.

So you can see why I hope Eccles mustn't get to hear of my speech. And, come to think of it, I hope Fred doesn't either.

Fred and I both left school during the depression and we know what unemployment really means.

But Fred knows, as I know but mustn't say, that one of the reasons why we have had so many strikes, why our productivity performance has been so lamentably low, is that so few people have been available to fill the many empty positions.

This has meant that there has been no economic discipline to encourage people to work well.

And I don't think I will try to move Fred's bowels of compassion at the picture of university graduates being unable to stroll into any particular job they fancy, just because they are able to flash a degree in the face of the employer.

In many disciplines those days are gone — at least for the moment, and Fred is glad and so am I, but I am frightened to say so.

I am really keeping the university question up my sleeve until closer to election day.

I am well aware that Fred resents the fact that many university students take it as a right that Fred and his fellow-workers should have to slog away to find the money to put them through their university courses at great expense to all concerned.

He would resent it even more if he finds that he has got to do something heroic to look after them after they are through. I wouldn't like to ask him to do that.

So I am having second thoughts about my fine, flowering speech on unemployment. I can't show it to Eccles — that doesn't worry me because Eccles lives in his ivory tower in Canberra and so doesn't vote in my electorate.

But now I find I can't show it to Fred either, and I have a lot of Freds who do. Perhaps I ought to tear it up.

But if I can't make popular, powerful speeches on unemployment, I will think of something else equally exciting. If I am going to be beaten I will go down with my mouth open!