



A MODEST FARMER

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Animal lib the new scourge of the bush

When the Women's Liberation ladies first raised their lovely heads when I was in parliament, I used to get into a state of blind panic when they savaged me. This they were always likely to do because I was, and indeed still am, a dull plodding arch conservative. It did not take the liberation ladies long to find this out and before each election they used to put me at the top of their dishonour roll.

I expected that Mavis would get upset about this, but it did not seem to worry her at all. Mine was a rural electorate whose constituents were suspicious of change and she knew that my women were even more conservative than my men. Mavis admitted to me, in the privacy of our conjugal cot, that she would have been much more concerned if the WEL ladies had thought well of me.

It was for this kind of reason that I dismissed rather too light-heartedly the activities of a similar movement, the Animal Liberation Lobby. I have been told that this organisation is mainly made up of ladies from Sydney and Melbourne who haven't got enough to do. So to fill in their time and to give themselves a cause to be angry about, they have formed themselves into an association to care for animals.

I would have thought that they would have joined the RSPCA which has, for years, been caring for animals in a wise way, but evidently the animal libbers felt that the RSPCA was too timid and not pugnacious enough to care for animals in the way that the libbers yearned to do. So they broke away and formed a more radical organisation.

Not all their published objectives are foolish; indeed some are sensibly sensitive to the sufferings of animals. I admit that I sometimes need a hard slap on the wrist to keep my animal caring conscience alive and kicking. But some of the libbers' objectives are silly, so silly as to expose the organisation to ridicule. This seems to be a fate suffered by other well-meaning, misty-eyed groups. For instance, the fair cause of conservation has been greatly damaged by the activities of its more fanatical adherents. I again recommend that you read *A Voice in the Wilderness*, by Allan May.

I said that some of the Animal Liberation objectives were silly. One is that all desexing of animals must be done by a vet! Just imagine lamb marking! The vet would probably use his teeth the same as we do or would he have to use a local anaesthetic?

Another libber objective is that all transported animals must be unloaded after being carried 100 kilometres and then reloaded. It is hard to imagine anything as silly as this. I suppose they think sheep just love climbing in and out of transports!

I thought for a while that these foolishnesses would expose the libbers to so much ridicule that they would never surface again. But now I am not sure. These kinds of organisations seem to attract quite surprising support, particularly from city dwellers. Fred tells me that rats, when

closely confined in large numbers, go a bit mad and he believes that people in big cities go the same way. "The more they are together, the sillier they will be," he tells me.

Recently I attended a meeting of farmers, scientists and other interested people to discuss how to keep the animal libbers at bay. It was a one-sided discussion because speaker after speaker got stuck into the libbers who were not there to defend themselves. But the president of our State branch of the RSPCA brought a bit of balance to the meeting. He pointed out that the RSPCA had too much experience and sense to go haring off after impossible objectives, but nevertheless there were many reasons why farmers should be continually questioned on their animal care practices. Then the president said that, because the RSPCA had not joined the libbers in their sillier suggestions, it was now suddenly being regarded with more affectation and respect than it had recently received from farmers. He added, rather whimsically, that this sudden change of attitude reminded him of the way a lapsed Catholic suddenly discovers his belief in the efficacy of prayer if he is suddenly in peril in a storm at sea!

This touched many of us on the raw. It will not help us to sit back hoping that the animal libbers will go away. They may indeed be a bit queer, but there are a lot of queer people about. One thing we farmers should do would be to renew our lapsed subscriptions to the RSPCA. At least these people can hit the libbers with their halo, which is more than we can do. And from now on we will have to be on our guard. The RSL motto, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance," is something we should remember ourselves.