



A MODEST FARMER

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Book shows Australia the way to the year 2000

Last week, in Sydney, I launched a book. I always wanted to do this when I was an MP, so you can imagine how excited I was to do so now that I am going down the western slopes.

It was not just an ordinary book either, like my *One More Nail*.

It is called *Australia at the Crossroads* and it discusses the paths we can take as we travel from here to the year 2000.

My crowning glory is that it was written by five noted economists, Messrs Kasper, Blandy, Freebairn, Hocking and O'Neil. Some of them are even professors.

Poor Eccles is consumed with envy. Every now and again he sidles up to me and asks whether I am quite certain the invitation was not addressed to him.

Or, more plaintively he asks, "How on earth did they ever get to hear of you?"

And as he reads the book I can hear him muttering to himself: "It's jolly good. I could not have written better myself. I would have loved to be asked to launch a book like that."

He then offered to help compose a speech worthy of such an auspicious occasion, but I had to tell him he uses such long words I would not be able to handle them.

I have had some sad experiences delivering speeches composed by Eccles.

I get flummoxed by some of his long words and then have to stand there stuttering and going red behind the ears till Eccles shouts out the proper pronunciation from the body of the hall.

Mavis strongly urged me not to accept the invitation.

"You must not do it, dear," she said earnestly.

"They are all academics living in ivory towers like Eccles, and look at the damage he has done you.

"Good Liberals must be careful not to get mixed up with university people.

"They are sure to have long hair and they will probably pelt you with eggs and tomatoes.

"Just tell them how much you appreciate their kindness but do not go," she said.

However, after I had read the book twice, I got really swelled headed because I had been asked to launch it.

I would like to pretend that I could follow every word of it but there were bits that were beyond me.

But I could follow most of it and I was somewhat startled to find they were preaching much the same message I have been trying to spell out.

However, being education men, all heavily laden with degrees, they spoke with far more authority than a poor Modest Farmer possesses.

I do not want to give the impression the book is written in the turgid prose that Eccles uses. Indeed, there are parts that are a joy to read.

How about this bit?

The induction of the Whitlam Government was the crowning moment of the festival. The bacchanalia reached its crescendo as the glittering new court unlocked the vaults and flung the coin of the realm from the palace balcony to the euphoric populace below.

Government outlays on education — double in two years. Government outlays on health — double in two years, treble in three. Government outlays on housing — quadruple in two years. Government outlays on social security and welfare — double in two years. Total outlays — up 80 per cent in two years. Total receipts up 55 per cent in the same interval. It was a wingding of a party while it lasted.

When Eccles read that paragraph he was rather shocked.

“That’s not a proper way for economists to write,” he said sourly.

“Don’t they know that ours is a dismal science?”

The message of the book is a simple one: the less government intervention we have the better off we will be.

Last week I wrote about a secondary industry spokesman thundering away at the evils of government intervention while at the same time asking for more government tariff intervention.

The authors of *Australia at the Crossroads* have too much logic to talk like that; they know that most government intervention, including tariff intervention, damages the economy they are supposed to help.

However, the book is much broader than a tirade against tariffs.

It just points out, again and again, that we will be much better off in the year 2000 if we could get out of our unhealthy habit of leaning on government every time we are weary or depressed.

In *The National Times*, Professor Aitkin recently made a pointed challenge to the Liberal Party to spell out its philosophies.

I don’t expect there will be any takers because I have a sad suspicion the only thing we believe in is keeping the socialists out of government.

That may be a desirable objective but it would make a very short essay.

But if we are going to rethink our philosophies, I suggest we use *Australia at the Crossroads* as a starting point.

At least we would have a firm base from which to work.