



## A MODEST FARMER

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### **Is Anthony ignorant or indifferent on tariffs?**

Last September I wrote a bitchy article complaining how the National Country Party always left me like a shag on a rock when I was fighting in Parliament to get tariffs reduced.

Both Fred and Eccles were pleased with me; Fred because he knows that, as an exporter, he has to bear the tariff burden and Eccles knows that our tariff policy is an important reason why our economic progress is slow and why our ability to employ people is disappointing.

However, Mavis was cross.

She still fondles a phantasy that I might fight my way back into Parliament, and she knows the surest way to be loved by the electorate is to always have a bob each way if an issue raises its ugly head. She said with wifely wisdom:

You did yourself a lot of harm when you were in Parliament listening to that wretched Eccles.

He may well have been right, but look where fighting his battles has got you, out on your poor old ear!

If you are going to make a comeback you must learn not to take a definite stand, to sway with the wind and to make long wordy speeches saying almost nothing except how pleased you are to be present.

Then no one will be able to pin anything on you and you will be loved by all.

And you were foolish to be nasty to the Country Party.

Many of them are cross with you and that is fatal if you are going to make a political comeback.

Mavis is right, as usual.

That article certainly got me into trouble with the Country Party. I received many critical letters expressing disappointment with what I had said.

They usually began by saying the authors had read my column for years and agreed with me about tariffs.

But they would follow an explanation similar to Mavis', saying the Country Party could not afford to stand on principle because this might get them into trouble with the manufacturers who paid for McEwen House.

Besides, some Country Party members had factories in their electorates so they had to run with the hares and hunts with the hounds.

But some Country Party disciples were more specific and said there were many Liberal Ministers and members representing rural electorates who also had a bob each way and they thought this was an excuse for Country Party members to do likewise.

That there are chicken-hearted Liberal Ministers and backbenchers I admit with shame, but at least they do not pose as specialists who fight for farmers as do Country Party members.

My point of view was put more poignantly in a letter to a complaining Country Party disciple who thought I had been too tough with the Country Party. To quote:

All the time I was battling for a more sensible tariff policy I used to look first hopefully, then hopelessly, towards the Country Party benches for help, but never once did I get any. But I got help from many Liberals, such as Street, Hyde, Connolly and others. I still stand by what I wrote in the article. It seems to me it must be ignorance, indifference or cowardice that makes Country Party backbenchers sit meekly in their corner while others go down fighting farmers' battles. And if you do not think these are the reasons, can you tell me what they are?

I have not had an answer nor do I expect one.

So that you can see it is not petty vindictiveness on my part I quote from a speech given by Mr Anthony, the leader of the Country Party, in Parliament.

The debate was provoked by Lionel Bowen in a pathetic attempt to criticise the Government for not telling the country the outcome of recent trade organisations.

In his reply, Mr Anthony, after disposing of Mr Bowen (which was not hard) then went on to express his quiet pride that he had been successful in extracting some trade advantages for us without being forced to reduce any industrial tariffs in return. To quote from Hansard:

Not one single tariff will be reduced ... There has been no reduction at all in industrial tariffs ... Honourable members must acclaim we have done a magnificent job on our negotiations when we have come out of them without have to pay anything more than making a binding on industrial tariffs.

So there speaks the leader of the Country Party, preening himself he has been able to conclude some trade negotiations with other country without having to reduce tariffs.

Perhaps he does not know that tariff reductions are what farmers want. Or, if he think we are wrong, why does he not tell us so?

As I said in my letter, behaviour of this kind can only be explained by ignorance, indifference or cowardice. I rule out the last with Mr Anthony, but what about the other two?