

A MODEST FARMER

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Why should Mavis want me to learn to draw?

[AFR] Editor's note:

*This is the final column for the **Financial Review** by our Modest Farmer. The author, Bert Kelly, who has contributed more than 500 columns to this paper, will continue to write for the rural press.*

Mavis has been trying to teach me to draw and the results have been disastrous. I think my fingers are too thick or something; perhaps I milked too many cows when I was a kid. Mavis's determination started when I showed her two cartoons by Pryor in the *Canberra Times*. She got quite excited when she saw them. For a while I thought that the reason for this was because they were both about babies and so appealed to her maternal instincts. "No," she said, "this was not so"; it was because they made things plain to her in a way that "my wretched writings," as she calls them, did not.

The first cartoon shows a big bloated bloke labelled "Protected Industry" sitting sucking his thumb on Malcolm Fraser's lap, with Malcolm patting the infant's back to bring up the wind. Malcolm's head peeps out from under the infant's ample armpit and says to a partially disabled widowed pensioner in a wheel chair, "You've got to learn to stand on your own two feet!"



I suppose the cartoon was not really fair in a way. I do not think the government has been mean with its welfare money though it has often been wasteful and unwise. The drawing does show how the heavily protected sectors of secondary industry appear to us, though it often feels that they are sitting on our heads, not on Malcolm's lap. I have to admit that the cartoon gives a clearer picture than my essays of the government's priorities in these matters.

There are many lessons crammed into the second little drawing. First there is the infant industry argument. I was a little disappointed that the overgrown infant was not labelled B.H.P. because this great company is always held up as the justification for the policy of protecting secondary industry. But the B.H.P. infant has now grown so big that it looks just like that big baby in the pram, but it still demands to have its tariff bottle to suck at.



The \$6,000 million label on the milk bottle is interesting. The I.A.C. has recently brought out a working paper in which they measure what tariff protection is costing us each year. The figure used to be \$4,000 million, or that was the figure that Mr Henderson, then the Secretary of the Chamber of Manufacturers, used to admit to. That was some time ago and inflation and carelessly awarded protection has increased the cost to \$6,000 million. The poignant picture of the bloated infant sucking away at that \$6,000 million work of milk supplied first by the consumers, then by the exporters, farmers, miners and our better manufacturers, really hit home. The tragedy is that it is the really sick sector of our secondary industry that consumers most of the milk, the textile, clothing and footwear group and our wretched over-fragmented car industry.

Malcolm was justified in being scathing about Labor's job creation programme. We all know now, if we take money from taxpayers to create employment, then that is that much less money that they will not have to spend for themselves to create employment. If the government gets its job creation money either by borrowing it or printing it, either course will lead to more

inflation and so to lower employment. But the government's policy of over-protection does the same thing. It may sometimes increase employment in the protected industry though frequently this does not happen. It always ends up damaging some other industry, usually an export industry.

Looking at the two cartoons together, I can see why Mavis wishes I could draw. "Now that I have seen these, I can now see what you are always writing about, dear," she explained kindly. "Your trouble is that you use such long words and that wretched Eccles always makes everything so complicated. You must learn to draw instead."

But so far the results of my efforts have been awful!

[Note: Below is an image reproduced on the front cover of the 1982 edition of *Economics Made Easy* that seems appropriate here.]

