



A MODEST MEMBER

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Should we put up with socialism?

Mavis is getting quite excited about the prospect of an early election.

She has noted the strong swing against the Government in recent by-elections in W.A., Victoria and New South Wales and the results of the opinion polls all point to the unpopularity of the Government.

“So force an election now,” she advises. “Strike while the iron is hot and the Government is unpopular. If you are to be a minister in the next Government, then there really is need for haste, dear. You aren’t getting any younger, you know.”

Mavis’ instructions were crystal clear, so I went round to talk to Eccles. He said that Mavis was talking through her hat, as usual.

He said the only way the Opposition could force an election would be for the Senate to refuse to pass the Supply Bill.

This would make it impossible for the Government to pay its civil servants and as these were unlikely to work for nothing, the business of government would grind to a stop, so there would have to be an election of the House of Representatives.

But then Eccles pointed out that although the Senate could indeed refuse to pass the Supply Bill, to do so would be an act that would have the gravest constitutional implications, that would expose the democratic system to the gravest strains.

“Governments are formed in the Lower House and any Government that has the support of the Lower House has the right to govern,” he lectured me. “Do what you can to remove this temptation from the Senate.”

When Eccles was speaking of these grave matters he did so from his ivory tower. But then he came downstairs to my level and spoke of more mundane matters. He gave me his usual lecture about inflation.

“If you think you can stop inflation if you are in government without making yourselves unpopular, you are kidding yourselves,” he advised.

“Why not let the present Government stop there and get themselves really unpopular?”

This didn’t sound a point of high principle but it seemed to be sensible.

It was obvious that Eccles was not going to give his milk down as Mavis wanted, so I went round to ask Fred what he thought.

Fred listened to me in patience while I told him of Mavis' cunning moves and of Eccles' lofty dictums thereon. Then he really opened up on me.

"I think you must be off your head, my dear chap," he growled. "I don't understand all that theoretical stuff that old Eccles is nattering about, but I do understand things at a lower level. Stop talking if you can and listen for a while."

Then he told me some of the facts of political life as he saw them.

First, he said that he, and everyone else, was sick to death of elections; there were far too many now — they filled his letterbox with literature he didn't want to read and his television screen with people whom he didn't want to hear.

"You politicians delude yourselves if you think citizens like elections," he said. "We hate them, and would hate any party that foisted an unnecessary one on us."

But his main reason for begging me not to encourage an early election was at an even lower level.

He told me how his mother, when she wanted to housetrain a cat, would rub the offending cat's nose in the mess.

"If she did this often enough, the cat soon learnt," Fred explained.

"I think you ought to let the electorate learn in the same way. It may be a nasty way of learning but it is effective."

In other words, Fred's message is that the only way the electorate will learn what socialism really means is to suffer under it, to see how it destroys the self-reliance of individuals, and the confidence and the incentive of business.

"You can tell them as often as you like about all these things, you can talk till you are hoarse, and although they say 'hear, hear' when you sit down, people will only really understand what socialism really means by suffering under socialism for even longer yet, until they have had their noses rubbed thoroughly in the socialistic mess."

I am sorry that Fred is so crude, but I think he is right, in his muddled way. We should not confuse "dissolution" with "disillusion."