



## A MODEST MEMBER

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### **The problem of principles v popularity**

One of the awkward decisions that an MP has to face is, should he do what his constituents want, even if he thinks they are wrong.

I heard Mavis discussing this question with the wives of other MPs. She didn't see it as a problem, but as an opportunity. I heard her say:

I always tell him [that's me] that he should regard himself as a servant of the people in his constituency. If they want something, it is his duty to try to get it for them, even if it is bad for them, or bad for the country.

So there is no doubt in Mavis' mind as to where my duty lies. She regards such an occasion as an opportunity to demonstrate my attentiveness and flexibility.

But it isn't quite as easy as all that. First, it's not so easy for an MP to find out what his constituents really want. On most questions his electorate is usually divided, if not equally, at least significantly.

If he is a rural MP he soon learns that the leaders of the rural industry groups do not always reflect the majority opinions of farmers.

The example of the wool marketing referendum in December, 1965, comes readily to mind. Most of the industry leaders were in favour of the reserve price scheme, yet it was decisively defeated by the vote of the rank-and-file wool-growers.

I have never subscribed to the principle that if an industry puts forward, say, a marketing scheme for a product that has been generally approved by the industry, the Government should adopt that scheme even if it is wrong.

Certainly the Government should listen to, and respect, the accepted voice of industry but I would go no further than that.

At first I thought Fred would resent this show of independence, that he would agree with Mavis. But, to my relief, he now agrees that I should make up my own mind.

He recognises that some of the things that industry groups have asked for, and obtained, have been bad for them in the long term, and he is now rather angry with me for giving in to the pressures of the time.

Let me give an example of my problem. Fred has a small wheat quota and so he advocates the abolition of quotas so that he can supply more of the wheat the world now wants.

I pointed out to him that if quotas were lifted altogether there may very well be a surge forward in production which may lead to the supply of more wheat than we could sell; that he himself may be tempted to sow half his farm with wheat this year and the other half the next, and this would be bad for his soil and for his pocket in the long run.

But Fred argues that one of the inducements to do this would disappear if the first advance on wheat were reduced, that it is the temptation of a considerable first advance that would encourage him to treat his farm in that way.

He pointed out that he gets the same (or almost the same) return for his wheat in the final washup if he gets a large or small first advance, that he pays (with all the other wheat farmers) the interest on the first advance.

So he gets the same (or almost the same) monetary return in the end.

Fred says that if he had a choice between a bigger first advance and continuation of quotas on the one hand, or a smaller first advance and no quotas on the other, he would vote for no quotas. And he says that the present price of wool would lessen the temptation to grow an unmanageable amount of wheat.

The industry leaders want wheat quotas continued in order to limit wheat production. At the same time they are asking for an increased first advance; this is needed, they say, so that wheat production can be increased. It is all rather puzzling.

Eccles is very keen, if quotas are to continue, that they be made transferable between farmers in all States. However, the industry leaders do not seem keen on this idea, either.

I wish someone would give me something popular to do!