



## **A MODEST MEMBER**

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### **Under Labor, is working hard foolish?**

It is not easy for Fred to change his way of looking at things. When the new Government was elected in December, Fred was quite off-hand about my gloomy forebodings as to what would happen.

“Things will go on much the same, you wait and see,” he said.

“You may try to frighten me about the damage the new Government will do, but I’m not really worried, she’ll be apples.”

That was some months ago. The other day I called in to see Fred. He had just finished seeding and his hands were harder and hornier than ever.

He was obviously unhappy so I asked him whether he was worrying about the season or the prices or other simple things about which Fred is usually angry.

Indeed, I was about to make my usual helpful statement that would take these matters up with those on high, but he explained that he had a different cause for anxiety.

“It’s this Government you’ve allowed in,” he complained. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself. They are making me rethink my attitude to life and it hurts.”

The idea of Fred getting down to this basic kind of thinking did indeed present a poignant picture.

I had expected him to be angry about the Government’s encouragement of the 35-hour week, its failure to curb strikes or its indifference to inflation and that kind of thing.

“No, it’s not these matters that are worrying me, though they are bad enough in all conscience,” he explained. “It goes deeper than that.”

Then he unburdened himself.

He explained that he had been brought up to believe in the old-fashioned virtues — that you worked hard and looked after your family and yourself if you could, and if you couldn’t, only then did you ask help from the State.

“But all that kind of thing is sneered at now,” he grizzled.

“All you have to do is sit in a heap, looking needy, and making moaning noises and the Government comes along and looks after you. A man is a fool if he works hard now. He only pays extra taxes so bludgers can sit on their tails scratching themselves, being paid by mugs like me for doing nothing.”

Then he told me about two friends of his. The first has four kids and an old-fashioned belief that it was his duty to care for them. He works hard and well, pays his taxes and his way.

The second lives in the same town, also has four kids but has a different outlook on life.

He's a clever sod and he has worked it out that by doing nothing he can collect \$55.50 a week, make quite a bit on the side, pay no taxes and do reasonably well.

It's not much encouragement for the first chap to look after himself or his own.

But what really got under Fred's skin was the Government action on schools. Fred went to a good school in the city by great sacrifice by his parents.

His kids are going to the same school at even greater sacrifice to Fred.

But the parents of both generations had the old-fashioned belief that it was their duty to make sacrifices to give their kids as good an education as possible, and with a religious component.

A little while ago Fred's school had a big appeal and all the "school family" dobbed in because they had this old-fashioned belief that it was their duty to look after their own.

But because Fred's school has been looked after by its own, and because it has been businesslike in its affairs, it is not now going to attract any per capita grants from the Government.

Fred now finds that he will be paying taxes to support other schools while paying full cost to support his own. He doesn't think it is much encouragement to look after his own.

I tried to comfort Fred by saying that what was happening to Australia was nothing new, that it happens in all Welfare States and that we hadn't yet become as bad as Britain.

But Fred wasn't worrying about Britain, or Australia for that matter. He was simply worrying about himself, as he had been trained to do.

"I'll just have to learn to sit in a heap, and the Government can look after me and mine," he said.

When I saw him last, he was sitting in an armchair with his feet up, practising.