

4

VARIETIES OF AUSTRALIAN AGRARIAN MYTH

If it is accepted that it is a characteristic of myth that many believable versions will exist at any one time, it becomes irrelevant to attempt to gauge which mythical accounts are 'true' and which are 'false'. As the last chapter indicated, arcadian and pessimistic versions of rural myth have existed simultaneously in Australia since the first European settlement. Depending on the context, one or other of the accounts have been used and have appeared convincing. In similar fashion, the mythical protagonist varies according to need and context. For example, if the freedom and independence of country life are to be stressed, it is likely that the hero may be cast as a drover, shearer or other itinerant worker. If, on the other hand, the struggle to make a living is to be highlighted, the protagonist may be a small farmer. On occasions when a conventional romantic hero is sought in a rural setting, then the squatter may be chosen (although like the swagman, the squatter is sometimes portrayed as villain and his position in rural myth is not clearcut). When the deprivations of rural life, its distance from civilisation and the sacrifices made in order to sustain it are to be stressed, then the central character may well be a country-woman.

An approach which emphasises the plurality of myth means that both bush myth and farming myth can simply be seen as variations on Australian agrarian myth. This approach differs from Russel Ward's, whose work has been extremely influential despite criticism¹. His book, *The Australian Legend*, warrants further examination especially in the area of farmer-bushman relations.

¹ For a summary of the major critics and their views see I. A. H. Turner, 'Australian Nationalism and Australian History', *Journal Of Australian Studies*, 4, 1979, pp. 1-11.

When Russel Ward transferred Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis to the Australian milieu, he adapted it to fit the local experience. In America, the typical frontiersman had been a small individualist landholder who had, according to Turner, imbued American democracy with a strongly individualistic flavour. In Australia, on the other hand, the typical frontiersman was an itinerant worker, a wage labourer on the large pastoral properties. Ward, drawing on a radical nationalist tradition which can be traced back to W. K. Hancock, suggested that this working class frontier gave Australian democracy a collectivist, egalitarian ethos founded on the comradeship of bush workers. Both theses put the proposition that national characteristics have been forged by the frontier experience.

According to Ward, the cultural values of bush workers were transmitted from rural Australia to the city and became the foundation for the Australian legend or national mystique. Certainly it is true that many city dwelling Australians saw themselves as created by the bush and many of them drew upon it for inspiration. For example, most of the *Bulletin* contributors in the 1890s whose names are associated with agrarian myth, such as Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Bernard O'Dowd, Edward Dyson, the Lindsays and A. G. Stephens lived in or around Sydney or Melbourne. The same applies to the painters of the Heidelberg school. This does not mean, as some writers have intimated² in contradistinction to Ward, that the bush myth was predominantly a city 'creation'.

Genuine myths are not the self-conscious creations of individuals. Rather, poets and artists draw upon existing communal beliefs and adapt them to their own purposes. The bush balladists and painters of the Heidelberg school have communicated so effectively with generations of Australians because they explain collective experience in a way that makes sense. In turn, their work has been absorbed into the body of agrarian myth and has reinforced its messages. It matters little in terms of effectiveness whether interpreters and developers of bush myth come from the city or the country. It is most likely that they came from both.

² For example, see D. Aitkin, "'Country-mindedness" - The Spread Of An Idea', *Australian Cultural History*, 4, 1985, pp. 34-41.; L. Astbury, *City Bushmen*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985; G. Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: an Urban context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies*, 18, 71, 1978, pp. 191-209. Coral Lansbury, as the last chapter indicated, saw aspects of Australian agrarian myth as an English literary invention.

What is significant from the perspective of this work is that Ward specifically excludes farmers from participation in the Australian legend or bush myth. This suggests that a broadly farmer-based party such as the Country Party would be inhibited in its use of a myth that discriminates against farmers. On the other hand, if it is accepted, as Robin Gollan argues,³ that bush myth is a version of agrarian myth, then the Country Party had a flexible and varied body of beliefs on which to draw. Because Ward's contribution to the understanding of Australian mythology is so important, however, his arguments must be considered.

Ward argued that the bushman despised the impoverished 'cocky' who merely scratched a living from the soil. Unlike the large landholder, the small farmer could not issue free rations to the bush traveller or pay generous wages. 'Thus', Ward pointed out, 'by about 1890 the cocky had become, at least in the mythology of the migratory bushman, a byword for meanness and stupidity. He was mocked for his very virtues: providence and a considerable capacity for back-breaking toil'.⁴ Indeed there is some evidence for this view. For example, in 'But What's The Use' Henry Lawson links city dwellers and farmers together when he asks:

But what's the use of writing "bush" -
 Though editors demand it-
 For city folk and cockatoos?,
 They do not understand it⁵

At the same time, however, as Humphrey McQueen shows,⁶ there is considerable testimony to the fact that many itinerant workers wanted to become property owners. John Robertson's 1861 land legislation in New South Wales which was designed to give the ordinary family the opportunity to select a small parcel of land and pay it off over many years was welcomed by bush workers who embraced the opportunity to give up the wandering life and settle down. In her memoirs, Dame Mary Gilmore recalled that many selectors 'had the land-hunger of the land-starved English farm-labourer. They had seen that ownership

³ R. Gollan, 'American Populism and Australian Utopianism', *Labour History*, 9, 1965, p. 20.

⁴ R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1966, p. 199.

⁵ H. Lawson, 'But What's The Use', in *Henry Lawson: Collected Verse*, ed. C. Roderick, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1969, p. 302.

⁶ H. McQueen, *A New Britannia*, (Revised edition), Penguin, Ringwood, 1986, pp. 153-179.

gave standing and stability and ownership they must have.⁷ Given this background, it is highly likely that those who despised the 'cocky' were the envious who failed to make their dream of land ownership come true. A contemporary ballad celebrated the bushman's delight at the transition from wage worker to land owner:

Come all of you Cornstalks, the victory's won,
John Robertson's triumphed, the lean days are gone,
No more through the bush we'll go humping the drum,
For the Land Bill has passed and the good times have come.

No more through the bush with our swags need we roam,
For to ask of the squatter to give us a home,
Now the land is unfettered and we may reside
In a place of our own by the clear waterside.
We will sow our garden and till our own field,
And eat of the fruits that our labour doth yield,
And be independent, a right long denied
By those who have ruled us and robbed us beside.⁸

Large numbers of those who took up land, however, were forced by difficult economic circumstances to continue working for wages. Many bush workers were small landholders who, as Ward himself acknowledged, 'shared fully (and still do) most of the actual bushman's attitudes.'⁹ Evidence of both a literary and documentary nature for this combination of roles is easy to find.

Even that archetypal selector, Dad Rudd, was forced to follow in son Dan's footsteps and leave the selection temporarily in order to find work for wages:

When Mother was sick and Dad's time was mostly taken up nursing her, when there was hardly anything in the house, when' in fact, the wolf was at the very door, Dan came home with a pocket full of money and swag full of greasy clothes. How Dad shook him by the hand and welcomed him back! And how Dan talked of tallies, belly-wool, and ringers, and implored Dad, over and over again, to go shearing, or rolling up, or branding - *anything* rather than work and starve on the selection.¹⁰

⁷ M. Gilmore, *Old Days: Old Ways: A Book Of Recollections*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1934, p. 26.

⁸ Quoted in D. I. Stone & D. S. Garden, *Squatters and Settlers*, A. H. & A. W. Reed, Sydney, 1978, p.93. It is interesting to observe that in these verses independence is associated with land ownership rather than with the roving life of a bush worker.

⁹ R. Ward, 'The Australian Legend Re-Visited', *Historical Studies*, 18, 71, 1976, p. 183.

¹⁰ S. Rudd, 'When the Wolf Was at the Door', in *Steele Rudd Selection, Chosen by Frank Moorhouse*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1986, p. 7.

At the time, Dad elected to stay on the farm, but later, when 'the wolf was at the door' again, he left the ripening corn and went up country.¹¹ According to D. B. Waterson's history of the Darling Downs, this was the usual pattern for selectors in the region, few of whom 'could afford to work their holdings without some kind of part-time or off-season job.'¹² Anthony Trollope observed the same pattern in South Australia:

in shearing time he shears for some large squatter, or he keeps a team of bullocks and brings down wool to the railway station or to the city, or perhaps he takes a month's work at some gold-digging . . . In this way he lives and is independent:-and who will dare find fault with a man who does live, and becomes independent, and makes a property exclusively by his own industry?¹³

Typical of the bush jobs which farmers took on were those of carrier, shearer, timber getter, kangaroo shooter, runner of wild horses or fencing contractor.¹⁴ While their men were away, women and children kept the selections going. Henry Lawson's drover's wife who tends to the needs of the farm while her husband is away¹⁵ is a typical example. The combination of farm ownership with outside work continued into the twentieth century. C. E. W. Bean in his researches into the wool industry in Australia found that many shearers were farmers or farmers' sons shearing in the slack farming season.¹⁶ This pattern has continued to the present day with recent Bureau of Agricultural Economics statistics (1985-86) showing that two out of three Australian farming families surveyed supplement their farm incomes from employment off the property.¹⁷

Clearly, there has always been a considerable blurring of the boundaries between bush worker and farmer. In order to protect his thesis, Ward made a distinction

¹¹ S. Rudd, 'Our First Harvest', *ibid.*, p. 58.

¹² D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector, and Storekeeper: A History Of The Darling Downs 1859-93*, Sydney University Press, 1968, p. 164.

¹³ A. Trollope, *Australia*, ed. P. D. Edwards & R. B. Joyce, University Of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1967, p. 654.

¹⁴ R. Bromby, *op. cit.*, Lothian, Melbourne, 1989, p. 32.

¹⁵ H. Lawson, *The Drover's Wife and Other Classic Stories*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, pp. 1-8.

¹⁶ C. E. W. Bean, *On The Wool Track*, Alston Rivers, London, 1910, p. 224.

¹⁷ W. Males & D. Poulter, 'Off-farm income and rural adjustment', *Quarterly Review of the Rural Economy*, 9, 2, June, 1987, p. 163.

between the typical (ideal) bushman and the average (actual) bushman.¹⁸ According to this argument, the selector or farmer may represent the average bushman, but not the typical one.

This introduces an unnecessary complication. The bushman is but one protagonist in Australian agrarian myth. Because such myths are shaped by their environment, it is natural that one of the leading characters in Australian agrarian myth should be the bushman. Much of Australia's early settlement was pastoral, rather than agricultural. The selector or small farmer, apart from isolated pockets, was a relative latecomer. Australian agrarian myth reflects this historical sequence by giving a significant place to the rural workers who 'opened up the land'.

Despite Lawson's connection of 'cockies' with townfolk the bulk of evidence suggests that bush workers and farmers (who were often one and the same person) have long shared attitudes which distinguish them from their fellow city-dwelling Australians. The division between Sydney and the Bush is an old one based on both separate economic foundations and different cultural values. Although slight, measurable differences between urban and rural people on a range of social issues have been found.¹⁹ The long term existence of a rural-urban cleavage which has been reinforced by the existence and the ideology of the Country Party is widely acknowledged by political scientists in Australia.²⁰ Such evidence suggests a unification of various country groups in opposition to the city. Small farmers *do not* and *have not* allied themselves with city folk. Their natural allies have been other rural people who share their views on the superiority of rural life and the primacy of rural contributions to the economy.

For various reasons, the squatters' position as protagonists in agrarian myth is more ambivalent. Their vision entailed the establishment of a 'plantation' society of a small number of large land owners and many labourers rather than a society of small landholders. For this reason, they resisted the attack on their privileges which the various Selection Acts represented. They continued to place

¹⁸ R. Ward, 'The Australian Legend Re-Visited', p. 182.

¹⁹ D. Kemp, *Society and Electoral Behaviour*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1978, p. 306.

²⁰ See, for example, D. Jaensch, *The Australian Party System*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 67-70.

pastoral values in opposition to the bourgeois values of the middle class liberals and city and country labourers who were in favour of free selection.²¹ By the late nineteenth century, dislike between squatters, especially absentees, and selectors appeared entrenched.²² Henry Lawson, in reminiscing about his own boyhood on his parents' selection captured some of the reasons for this:

‘On *our* selection’ I tailed cows amongst the deserted shafts . . . I grubbed, ring-barked, and ploughed . . . helped fight pleuro and drought and worked on building contracts with ‘Dad’ . . . Saw selectors slaving their lives away . . . saw one or two carried home, in the end, on a sheet of bark . . . saw how the gaunt selectors’ wives lived and toiled . . . All the years miles and miles of rich black soil . . . lay idle, because of old-time grants, or because the country carried sheep-for the sake of an extra bale of wool and an unknown absentee.²³

The squatters and their successors, the graziers - ‘the big men’ - also had many more city links such as company directorships, children at boarding schools and fashionable club memberships than the small farmers²⁴ For example, the majority of the first members of the Melbourne club were squatters.²⁵ Connections such these made them less sympathetic to the anti-urban aspects of agrarian myth than other rural people.

There are situations, however, in which the squatter is seen as a protagonist in agrarian myth. In much nineteenth century literature the squatter received favourable treatment and authors such as Lawson presented accounts of both good and bad squatters.²⁶ If the squatter was a good bushman who shared the feelings of his men about the bush, then he was treated positively. Feelings of camaraderie between boss and workers overcame class antagonism.²⁷ Just as there was no clear boundary between the bushman and the selector, the

²¹ D. W. A. Baker, ‘The Origins Of Robertson’s Land Acts’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 8, November 1957-May 1959, pp. 170-171.

²² D. I. Stone & D. S. Garden, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

²³ Quoted in J. Barrett, ‘Melbourne And The Bush: Russel Ward’s Thesis and a La Trobe Survey’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, December, 1972, p. 465.

²⁴ B. D. Graham, ‘Graziers In Politics, 1917 To 1929’, *Historical Studies*, 8, 32, May, 1959, p. 391.

²⁵ R. Bromby, *op. cit.*, Lothian, Port Melbourne, 1986, p. 28.

²⁶ J. Rickard, ‘National Character And The “Typical Australian”’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 4, June, 1979, p. 15.

²⁷ J. B. Hirst, ‘The Pioneer Legend’, *Historical Studies*, October, 1978, p. 323.

boundaries between squatter, farmer and bushman were also blurred, at least among those squatters who worked their own properties. A succession of bad years could easily enforce downward social mobility upon the squatter:

the pastoral age was a fluid one in which the station owner of one day might himself be "sacked" by those two great levellers, drought and banks, and descend to the ranks of the drovers, whilst the thrifty and enterprising bushworker might rise to station manager and squatter²⁸

Clearly, it is difficult to categorically exclude any rural Australians from participation in rural mythology, although the evidence suggests that the squatter, because of his sometime absence from the land and strong city connections, may on occasions be an exception.

Depending on the circumstances, the mythical hero may be a bushman, a small farmer or even a squatter. All of these characters have strong links with that other influential Australian myth, the myth of the Anzac. It was strongly believed that good soldiers came from the country, not the cities. The Anzac myth thus reinforced one of the key beliefs of agrarian myth - that country dwellers were superior.

Agrarian Myth and the Myth of the Anzacs

So strong are the links between these two myths that '1914-18 might just as well be interpreted as an extension of the rural myth.'²⁹ A poem published in 1917 made this connection clear:

They cleared the earth, and felled the trees,
And built the towns and colonies:
Then, to their land, their sons they gave,
And reared them hardy, pure, and brave.

They made Australia's past: to them
We owe the present diadem;
For, in their sons, they fight again,
And ANZAC proved their hero strain.³⁰

Like agrarian myth, the Anzac myth has been used in attempts to define Australianness. Generations of Australians have learnt that their country achieved independence, not at federation, but at Gallipoli. The digger became a

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 326.

²⁹ J. Prest, 'Agrarian Politics In Australian History', *Historicus*, November 1970, p. 7.

³⁰ Quoted in J. B. Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

symbol of all that was good in Australian manhood. Because many of the qualities of the typical digger, such as 'comradeship and loyalty, resourcefulness and adaptability',³¹ were believed to be identical with those of the bushman³² the Anzac myth acted to reinforce and put beyond question the values of agrarian myth. So pervasive was the belief in the formative influence of the bush and the negative effect of urban life, that even if soldiers were recruited in the cities and towns, it was believed that they had all the characteristics of bushmen.³³ They ceased to be, as one Victorian parliamentarian described city dwellers, 'limp, spineless, marrowless mortals, such as we see hanging around our street corners, and who look as if they need a prop to prevent them falling down' and became, like the farmers, 'the men who help make a country great'.³⁴ When townsmen and bushmen returned from war, the grateful nation offered to settle both groups on the land in compensation for their service, a policy which will be examined in a later chapter.

Much of the responsibility for the public expression of the connection between the agrarian and Anzac myths lies with C. E. W. Bean, war correspondent and official Australian historian of World War I. As previous quotations from Bean have indicated, he had travelled extensively in the bush and had a strong sense of its importance for the Australian ethos. He believed that the struggle with the land made rural dwellers into good soldiers:

The Australian is always fighting something. In the bush it is drought, fires, unbroken horses and cattle; and not unfrequently strong men. Never was such a country for defending itself with its fists. . . but there is no doubt that having to fight for himself gives a man pluck. . . All this fighting with men and with nature, fierce as any warfare, has made of the Australian as fine a fighting man as exists.³⁵

The theme of warfare with the land as training ground for battle was a theme Bean had pursued prior to the outbreak of World War I. Australian soldiers had performed remarkable feats at Eland's River in South Africa during the Boer

³¹ R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 231.

³² *ibid.*, p. 172.

³³ D. A. Kent, 'The Anzac Book And The Anzac Legend: C. E. W. Bean As Editor And Image Maker', *Historical Studies*, 21, 84, 1985, p. 377.

³⁴ J. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 466.

³⁵ C. E. W. Bean quoted in R. White *Inventing Australia*, George, Allen & Unwn, Sydney, 1981, p.126.

War. They had been able to do this, he argued, first because they were of British stock, and second because they 'came spare and brown and wiry from the cattle runs of Queensland'. He stated quite categorically that the qualities of courage and persistence which the Australian forces showed 'were never and never will be drawn from the race by the sea beaches and soft breezes, sweet fruits and easy hours of which the advertisements speak.'³⁶

A more complex relationship between the land and the call to arms was drawn by George Johnston in his novel *My Brother Jack*. He put the view that the Australian has always been beaten by the land and 'forced to turn his back, because he must, on the invincible wilderness that lies behind him. So he has been obliged to look elsewhere for the great adventures, the necessary challenges to flesh and spirit.'³⁷ These 'necessary challenges' were found in war.

When writers like Johnston, Bean and Ward explore the connection between the agrarian and Anzac myths, it is clear that they have masculine heroes in mind. This is unsurprising given the historically subservient role of women in Australian society.³⁸ Following her researches into women's history, Miriam Dixson found that in Australia, 'women figure as pygmies in the culture of the present and are almost obliterated from the annals of the past.'³⁹ Agrarian myth is one area where this obliteration is incomplete. Although many versions of rural myth exclude women entirely, others feature her as the hero.

Women in Australian Agrarian Myth

The principal actors on the Australian mythical stage have been men; Anzacs, diggers, bushrangers, shearers, squatters, fencers, ringers and swaggies; a cast familiar to every Australian schoolchild. This is not unexpected given that from the beginning of European occupation, Australia has been a 'man's country'.

³⁶ C. E. W. Bean, *On The Wool Track*, Alston Rivers, London, 1910, p. 139.

³⁷ G. Johnston, *My Brother Jack*, Collins Fontana, London, 1967, p. 271.

³⁸ For an examination of women's place in Australian society, see M. Dixson, *The Real Matilda*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1976; A. Summers, *Damned Whores And God's Police*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1975; S. Encel, N. McKenzie & M. Tebbutt, *Women and Society*; Cheshire, Melbourne, 1974.

³⁹ M. Dixson, *op. cit.*, p.12.

Fewer than sixteen per cent of the convicts transported to eastern Australia were women. The outnumbering of women by men continued until this century, especially in rural Australia where the ratio of male to female in some districts was four to one. The pastoral industry favoured the employment of single men or at least men who left their families behind. Many landholders were reluctant to employ family men because of the extra costs involved in feeding wives and children. Another reason given for the exclusion of women was that 'men hang around the homestead too much when there is a woman to keep it comfortable, instead of getting out with the cattle.'⁴⁰ Rural society was therefore largely masculine, a state of affairs reflected in Australian agrarian myth, especially in those versions such as Ward's, which focus on the bushman to the exclusion of the farmer.

Many accounts of the 'typical' Australian which have drawn extensively on the bush have excluded women. Take for example, the following account of a mythical 'real fair-dinkum Aussie':

He was a sinewy, sun-bronzed rider from the plains, equally at home on a warragul at Bourke or a wave at Bondi, a laughing, devil-may-care, hell-or-highwater adventurer who carried everything before him in two world wars and even won the Battle of the Wasser. He had crow's feet around sun-slitted eyes, a lantern jaw and old saddle-leather skin, the neat feet of a horseman, and the flat, broad shoulders of a middleweight champion. He'd fight, out-drink or make love to anything on two legs and ride anything on four.⁴¹

For this writer, and for many others, 'Australian' and 'men' are used synonymously.⁴² Women have no place in this world. In fact many of the values they embody are diametrically opposed to it. As moderating and civilising influences⁴³ good women toned down many of the characteristics of the 'typical' Australian male - the rough and ready manners, swearing, drinking and gambling, the roving and mateship.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ E. Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, p. 132.

⁴¹ D. Whittington, *In Search of an Australian*, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1967, p. 1.

⁴² A. Summers, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 301.

⁴⁴ R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 1.

Those accounts of agrarian myth which focus on the pastoral industry find no place for women, but there is a place for female characters in accounts which emphasise small farming and the difficulty and hard work associated with it. Unlike the workers in the pastoral industry, the small farmer tended to be a family man, relying on the labour of his wife and children to maintain the farm. Even more than her male counterpart, the mythical pioneer woman exhibited characteristics of strength and stoicism which can be used to illustrate the superiority of country people. Such women showed remarkable fortitude in keeping the flame of civilisation alight in the face of the difficulties of pioneering bush life. In doing so, they obtained a prestigious place in Australian agrarian myth based on the fact that their sacrifices, like those of all rural people, were believed to be not just for personal gain, but for the national good.

Agrarian myth focuses on the lives of great hardship which many bush women endured, especially when compared with their city counterparts. Accounts of pioneering conditions describe accommodation on the first farms as typically a slab hut with glassless windows which let in the wind and rain, a dirt floor and an open fire for cooking. The bush wife cooked, cleaned, sewed and bore children in the most primitive of conditions. To the normal domestic chores, farm women usually added the raising of poultry and pigs and the management of the dairy. Some, too poor to own horses, pulled the plough themselves. They split posts, drove bullocks, sowed wheat by hand and harvested the wheat with a sickle.⁴⁵ In South Australia, the wives of German settlers carried vegetables to market on their backs.⁴⁶ Toil lasted from dawn to dusk and there were no luxuries. Their philosophy, according to one pioneer consisted of: 'Eat it up, wear it out, make it do, or go without'.⁴⁷

Such conditions naturally took their toll on country women as a correspondent from the *Argus* at the turn of the century observed :

Is it any wonder they grow lean and bronzed and hard, prematurely old, and sad? Where there is little or no capital to begin with the struggle to make both ends meet continues throughout their lives.

⁴⁵ S. Encel, N. McKenzie, M. Tebbutt, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ D. I. Stone & D. S. Garden, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ A. Hills, 'The bush making of a competent wife', *Graingrower, Farmer & Grazier*, September, 1986, p. 52.

They cannot afford to pay for labour. If they cannot manage all their domestic duties, and assist their husbands as well, their farms must fail.⁴⁸

According to rural myth, country women have sacrificed their youth, beauty and femininity in the unequal struggle with the land. Given that these qualities are the ones for which they have traditionally been admired, it is a sacrifice of no little magnitude. Sometimes the sacrifice is even greater. The primitive and solitary life of the bush made death in childbirth a strong possibility.

Henry Lawson was adept in his short stories at capturing the sacrifices women made in their efforts to bring civilisation to the bush. Mary, in 'No place For A Woman', dies in childbirth unaided, a victim of the isolation and rough conditions of the bush. While alive she had struggled to impose some tokens of civilisation on her surroundings. These are fragile and poignant - a clean tablecloth, some polished tins, a whitewashed wall.⁴⁹

In 'Water Them Geraniums'⁵⁰, Lawson used a recurrent symbol of woman's urge to civilise the bush - her attempt to establish a garden by bringing exotic plants to her hut or homestead. As soon as women arrived in the bush, gardening became a matter of importance. Even before utilitarian needs were properly satisfied 'flower seeds were planted and cherished until they bloomed in the wilderness.'⁵¹ Roses, lupins, wallflowers, larkspurs and hollyhocks were a reminder of other more civilised places. In Lawson's story, Mrs. Spicer's geraniums, dirty and greasy with dish water are a touching reminder of a past gentility almost totally eradicated by the barbarism of the bush.

In similar fashion, Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife'⁵² depends for its poignancy on the counterposing of the traditionally feminine against the rigours of bush life. His hero battles to run the family property whilst her husband is away droving. She is a 'gaunt and sun-browned' woman, worn out from a life of struggle against

⁴⁸ 'Lino', 'Women Who Work: Hard Lot of Farmers' Wives', in Teale, R. (ed.) *Colonial Eve*, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 235.

⁴⁹ H. Lawson, *The Bush Undertaker and Other Stories*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1975, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁰ H. Lawson, *ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵¹ M. Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday*, Melbourne University Press, 1967, p. 297.

⁵² H. Lawson, *The Drover's Wife and Other Classic Stories*, pp. 1-8.

poverty, bushfires, floods, dying cattle, a mad bullock, predatory crows, and even more predatory swagmen. 'Her surroundings are not favourable to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature.' There are, however, touching indications of her womanly nature, which life on a primitive bush farm is erasing. Her attempts at civilisation are heartbreaking. On Sundays, she dresses herself and her children in their best clothes and takes them for a walk through the bush. 'She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city. There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet.' She reads the *Young Ladies' Journal*. Lawson's story is a moving one, made so by the contrasting of pioneering, rural life with the typically feminine.

It is possible, however, to imagine the story being told in a different way; of a woman relishing life on the land, proud of the skills acquired, triumphant in the killing of the snake and happy to be free of the strictures of the *Young Ladies' Journal*. If this were done, though, the story would be deprived of pathos, for it depends for its impact on the acceptance of certain stereotyped feminine characteristics which are being *sacrificed* in the struggle with the land.

A similar pattern of sacrifice can be found in George Essex Evan's sentimental poem, 'The Women of the West', who for love gave up the pleasures of the city and faced the wilderness. In the process:

The red sun robs their beauty, and, in weariness and pain.
The slow years shed the nameless grace that never comes again:⁵³

In the poem, Essex Evans also made a connection with the Anzac myth and one of the central beliefs of rural myth, that the good of the country is dependent on rural enterprise. The women of the west sacrifice not only their youth and beauty, but their sons, in order that a nation might be created:

Well have we held our father's creed. No call has passed us by.
We faced and fought the wilderness, we sent our sons to die.
And yet we have hearts to do and dare, and yet, o'er all the rest,
The hearts that made the nation were the Women of the West.

'The Women Of The West' is typical of much agrarian myth in its suggestion that pioneer women were not just working for themselves and their families, but

⁵³ G. Essex Evans, *Collected Verse*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1928, p. 2.

for future generations and the nation as a whole.⁵⁴ The official song of the Country Women's Association which pays tribute to the 'Heroines of great Australia, Golden hearted pioneers' also recognises the nation's debt to pioneer women. The song connects the women's personal struggle with Australia's greatness:

In Australia's fame they have blazed their name,
Thro' drought and fire and flood.⁵⁵

As new land was opened for settlement and 'pioneering' continued, rural women's domestic contribution continued to be interpreted patriotically. Writing in 1940 of women in the Northern Territory, and ignoring the presence of an aboriginal population, Ernestine Hill paid tribute to the women who, in 'making home for their children in the health and freedom of the bush, are holding the North for us, which without them must slip back, ever and again, to a haunted, homeless loneliness.'⁵⁶

The connection between personal sacrifice and the national good is a politically significant strand of rural mythology, because the notion of national indebtedness to the pioneer can be carried over to contemporary times. Although household equipment and farm machinery have made a rural existence more comfortable, the land, climate and markets have not become any more benign. The aura of the pioneer still clings to country people and especially to the country woman, on account of the sacrifices she is perceived to have made. For example, in a recent *Australian Magazine* feature on pioneer women entitled 'The Women Who Made Australia', historical and contemporary photographs of rural women were mixed. A recent *Land* article about farm women echoed the pioneer experience in order to emphasise farm women's contribution to the community:

Rural Australia's ability to survive its crisis and thrive again was demonstrated by two women, typifying the spirit of the country, when they spoke at a seminar at Hillston.

⁵⁴ J. B. Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

⁵⁵ M. McLean, 'Forward Ever Forward', in K. McIntyre, *The Queensland Country Women's association: Fifty Years 1922-1972*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ E. Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

Kay Horneman and Denise Kingston, wives of battling Hillson district farmers, expressed optimism about the future of farming, in spite of the hardships endured by them and thousands of others.⁵⁷

Articles like this imply that in the struggle to derive a living from the land, rural women are displaying a national and patriotic spirit in a way that their city sisters are not. Such claims are not usually made on behalf of women who earn their living in the typing pool or by engaging in a struggle together with their husbands to keep a small urban business afloat. The cost borne by rural women and its linkage to the national interest make a forceful addition to rural myth.

The various protagonists examined in this chapter are all used to tell the story of rural life in this country. Although sometimes these characters feature in stories which portray Arcadian versions of rural life, they more often appear in accounts which tell of a relentless struggle against difficult odds. All are familiar characters to Australians. They are a collective national possession, especially as many of them are believed to exhibit 'typically' Australian traits. All of them have their origins in the pioneering past, yet for many twentieth century Australians, the stories they tell have retained the ring of truth. Country life and country people have seemed genuinely superior and the countryside has appeared far more productive than the cities. For their part, rural dwellers have been able to identify with the protagonists in agrarian myth and to see themselves as different from city people. They have also been helped to make sense of their efforts to farm the land through reference to rural myth. It has also given them a sense of kinship with others like them and taught them that because of their contributions and sacrifices they are more deserving than urban dwellers.

By itself, however, agrarian myth was unable to achieve results beyond uniting people around a set of ideas which explained their experiences in terms which made sense. It provided psychological, rather than material rewards. If rural people were to procure the material advantages they thought they deserved, myth needed to be transformed into an ideology. This transformation was achieved by the Australian Country Party. Agrarian myth, resonant with images accumulated over two thousand years in Europe America and Australia, was crucial to the ideology of the Australian Country Party.

⁵⁷ I. McPhedran, 'Women display the spirit of rural Australia', *Land Magazine*, 14 August, 1986, p.8.

5

THE AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY PARTY

Feelings of rural separateness created and maintained the Australian Country Party.¹ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the strong conviction that country people throughout Australia shared a community of interests and values which were being overwhelmed by city concerns led protesting farmers and settlers to come together to form agrarian pressure groups. These ultimately led to the creation of state and federal Country Parties. Both the early pressure groups and the Country Party itself were marked by that mixture of pragmatism and myth which has so confused observers as to the real nature of the party.

That the party had an ideology based strongly on agrarian myth was obscured for some commentators by the vigour with which it sought to serve the special interests which it represented. The fact that country people and their representatives tend to be pragmatists in every day life masked the importance of mythical belief and led to claims that the party was epitomised by 'the philosophy of mindless action',² with 'no doctrine or ideology of any consequence'.³ Its successor, the National Party, was seen to have 'few

¹ To be precise, and to reiterate Don Aitkin's caveats, (see 'The Australian Country Party', in H. Mayer & H. Nelson, *Australian Politics; A Third Reader*, Cheshire, Melbourne, n. p. 424.) there was not a single Country Party. Parties were formed separately in the states at the federal level. Their alliance was always loose. However, shared feelings of rural disaffection created the parties and their aims and philosophies have been sufficiently similar to warrant giving them the generic title of the Australian Country Party.

² H. McQueen, 'The Suckling Society', in H. Mayer & H. Nelson, *Australian Politics : A Fourth Reader*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1976, p. 8.

³ Anon., Country Party - Fortunes and Options, *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 42, 8, September 9, 1968, p. 115.

ideological pretensions'.⁴

Sorel, however, had noted that the fact that English and American sectarians were believers in apocalyptic myths did not prevent them from being, at the same time very practical men,⁵ and this was true of Country Party supporters. In fact, it has been proposed by B. D. Graham that country people are particularly susceptible to myth-based argument. He put the view that because farmers could not understand the complexities of the economic system, they were particularly vulnerable to symbolic argument.⁶ Although he does not say why farmers should be more prone to this lack of understanding than city workers, it may be that isolation, paucity of alternative information sources, exposure to provincial newspapers and lack of travel and education opportunities have combined to make farmers' beliefs in agrarian myth especially persistent.

Don Aitkin was another who recognised that the party was more than an economic pressure group. He argued that it was a much more ideological party than the Liberal Party.⁷ Katherine West also observed the mixture of the spiritual and the material in the Country Party:

With its talk of agrarian virtue and nobility, the Country Party's spiritualism had, nonetheless, right from the start a very material base, reflecting a hard headed conviction that rural people were being exploited and deprived by city greed and domination. The ideology of the Country Party has always been intertwined with this economic sectionalism - 'countrymindedness' both reinforcing and legitimising all material demands.⁸

Agrarian myth lay at the heart of Country Party ideology. It was combined with a range of conventionally conservative beliefs about the importance of the family, religion and the crown, opposition to communism and to any relaxing of society's sexual mores. There was also a decidedly un-Burkean enthusiasm for

⁴ R. Smith, 'The Party System', in R. Smith & L. Watson, *Politics in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 116.

⁵ G. Sorel, *Reflections On Violence*, tr. T. E. Hulme, Peter Smith, New York, 1941, p. 134.

⁶ B. D. Graham, *The Formation Of the Australian Country Parties*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1966, p. 31.

⁷ D. Aitken, *op cit.*, p. 416.

⁸ K. West, 'From Movement to Party: the NCP and the Australian Democrats', in H. Mayer and H. Nelson, *Australian Politics; A Fifth Reader*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980, p. 340.

'development' and 'progress' which can be better understood if Hofstadter's point about farmers being small businessmen is taken into account. Although these are important aspects of Country Party ideology, the focus in this work is on the role of agrarian myth, which, with its veneration of the pioneer past is consistent both with conservative moral beliefs and a passion for material progress.

To ignore myth's role as some writers have and simply focus on country people's very practical demands for assistance is to see less than half the picture. It is agrarian myth which unites country people and which either explicitly or implicitly justifies their demands for assistance. The fact that every demand may not be accompanied by an explanation couched in mythical terms does not mean that myth is not operating. In fact myth is at its most effective when its assumptions are taken for granted and widely shared. There are, however, occasions when the mythical foundations of Country Party demands have been made explicit. By examining these instances, the relationship between myth and practical demands can be seen.

From Pressure Groups To Political Party

In the frontispiece of his book *The Formation Of The Australian Country Parties*, B. D. Graham featured a cartoon taken from a 1913 edition of *Pastoral Review*. In it, a country man bearing numerous burdens, none of them of his own making, looks hopefully towards a rising sun emblazoned with the words 'A Country Party'. Among his burdens are; land tax, high railway rates, duties on meat wrapping, duties on machinery, income tax, day labour, shortage of labour, duties on implements, bad roads, weeds, rabbits, foxes, crows, flies, rust, worms, smut, and over-government; impositions of both human and divine manufacture. The message is clear. The only way for country people to lighten their load is to undertake collective action and form a specifically rural political party.

As the previous chapters have illustrated, centuries of rural myth have taught that farming makes a rural community both distinctive and valuable to the society as a whole. Farming in a land such as Australia, which, with the exception of a few areas was unsuited to farming⁹ made the farmers' labours especially difficult and exaggerated their sense of worth. Their shared experiences

⁹ R. Bromby, *The Farming of Australia*, Doubleday, Sydney, 1986, p. 146.

encouraged rural communities to set themselves apart from the rest of society and to see politics as a form of warfare¹⁰ between city and country.

Such warfare was designed to reallocate material benefits from a city populace which was perceived as undeserving to a more deserving rural one. The fact that the bulk of Australia's population was clustered in a few major cities with the rest thinly distributed throughout the hinterland caused concern among rural people. They feared that despite their economic contribution, the sheer weight of city numbers would ensure that most benefits would flow to the cities. There was a strong perception that every benefit accruing to the cities was depriving country people of what was rightfully theirs. When John McEwan entered parliament in 1934 his conviction 'that people on the land could only do well if city folks were doing badly'¹¹ reflected generations of rural frustration.

This frustration was heightened by the belief which many country people held that the cities were parasites - 'great selfish consumer masses'¹² - living off the efforts of rural producers. Farmers felt disadvantaged by comparison and tended to blame this state of affairs on the vagaries of the climate, various middlemen or a conspiracy of commercial, financial and urban interests.¹³ Often rural-urban tensions led rural leaders to feel patronised by their urban counterparts.¹⁴ This seemed especially unfair in the light of the common belief that rural industries could be neglected only at the cities' peril. A *Pastoral Review* columnist gave vent to these feelings in an early tirade against city based socialism:

The producers must either control directly every Parliament, or must hold the balance of power so that they can guarantee their own interests; this is their sole hope. Their interests are really everyone's interests. You can destroy your cities, but so long as the country flourishes these cities will rise up finer than ever, but if the country production is dead, and dead it must be under socialism, grass will grow in every street in the cities and ruin must reign.¹⁵

¹⁰ B. D. Graham, *loc. cit.*

¹¹ A. Reid, 'The Next P. M.?', *The Bulletin*, 19 April, 1961, p. 14.

¹² A. J. Campbell, *Memoirs Of The Country Party In Queensland: 1920-1974*, p. 15.

¹³ K. Richmond, *Rural Politics and Emotion: The United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association of New South Wales: 1962 to 1977*, Ph. D. thesis, University of New England, 1979, p. 118.

¹⁴ A. J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Quoted in B. D. Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

This is remarkable for its similarity to parts of William Jennings Bryan's 'Cross of Gold' speech¹⁶ and reinforces B.D. Graham's researches which indicate a strong awareness on the part of Australian settlers of developments in Canadian and American agrarian movements.¹⁷ It also indicates that there are marked similarities in the agrarian mythologies of both Australia and the United States, especially as far as rural - urban relations are concerned.

The feeling that country people must unite in order to protect their interests led to their organisation into groups to press their demands upon government. Farming was a precarious business, and the most urgent need of rural groups was to obtain for their members a measure of income security.¹⁸ Unlike business groups which were often able to act together in defence of their economic interests, farmers found such concerted action impossible; hence, as V. O. Key, Jr. observed in the American context, 'they enter politics to seek through government a way to collective action by which they can be assured of their "fair" share of the national income.'¹⁹ Some of the earliest demands made by rural settlers in Australia were for the freeing up of land for small selectors, cheap railway freight rates, co-operative marketing schemes and tariff reductions.

The difficult lot of some early pioneers has been examined in other parts of this thesis, but a reminder of their tribulations can be found in Steele Rudd's yarns of early selectors on the Darling Downs in Queensland where some of the great pastoral properties had been opened up for agriculture. These stories of farmers at the mercy of the climate, middlemen and the marketplace were based on the author's boyhood. The attempt to create a self sufficient yeoman class on the Downs had not been not successful. This reflected the more general Australian pattern in which from the beginning farming was a commercial, rather than a subsistence operation.²⁰ In order to survive, selectors had either to find

¹⁶ See Chapter 3, p. 43.

¹⁷ B. D. Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ N. Marshall, 'Rural interest groups', in B. Costar & D. Woodward, *Country To National*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 23.

¹⁹ V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* 3rd ed., Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1952, p. 29.

²⁰ J. W. Freebairn, 'Natural resource industries', in R. Maddock & I. W. McLean, *The Australian Economy In The Long Run*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 135.

additional work and/or engage in commercial agriculture.²¹ This brought them into contact with the pressures of the market place and commercial, financial and urban interests which, like the land and climate, often appeared to conspire against them. The experience of Dad Rudd with a bumper crop of corn illustrates the forces driving farmers to find some co-operative solutions to their problems:

The corn shelled out a hundred bags-the best crop we had ever had. But when Dad came to sell, it seemed as though every farmer in every farming district on earth had had a heavy crop, for the market was glutted-there was too much corn in Egypt-and he could get no price for it. At last he was offered ninepence halfpenny per bushel, delivered at the railway station! Ninepence halfpenny per bushel, delivered at the railway station! Oh, my country! And fivepence per bushel out of that to a carrier to take it there! Australia, my mother!

Dad sold because he couldn't afford to await a better market. And when the letter came containing a cheque in payment, he made a calculation, then looked pitifully at Mother, and muttered, "*Seven pounds ten!*".²²

Disasters like these, especially in the marginal wheat growing areas, drove small farmers to join together in an attempt to improve conditions. These early groups were the forerunners of the Country Party but the influences are far too mixed to point with certainty to any particular organisation or faction as the forerunner of the Country Party.²³

The first farmers' movements were unstable, localised groups who waxed and waned in membership, enthusiasm and effectiveness. This is not surprising considering that farmers lived isolated lives with little social contact and that the demands of the plough and the milking shed made absence from the farm difficult. In addition, there was little spare cash available to fund farm organisations. However, the imperatives which drove farmers to first form organisations such as Farmers and Settlers Associations and dairy co-operatives also drove them eventually to seek representation in parliament. To begin with, rural politics were disorganised and characterized by regional competition for roads, bridges, railways and other facilities.

²¹ D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector, and Storekeeper*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1968, p. 105.

²² S. Rudd, *On Our Selection*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1953, p. 67.

²³ B.D. Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Initially, rural producers attempted to find a voice in parliament through the establishment of 'country' factions in the non-Labor parties in both state and federal parliaments. After a time, though, many of the farmers' groups found that faction members were insufficiently accountable to the groups which put them into parliament and that rural interests increasingly were disregarded. According to one supporter, the primary producer organisations simply could not trust groups with big city allegiances:

[They] were too easily deflected with promises, which were seldom fully honoured, by the big city parties. Cheap food is the governing 'consumer complex' for the great bulk of big city masses which are too often in complete opposition to the interests of rural industries.²⁴

The real problem for rural groups, however, was that by the second decade of the twentieth century, the alignments in Australian politics had changed. The old division between Free Traders and Protectionists had been upset by the rapid growth of the Labor Party. This led to a fusion of Free Traders and Protectionists in opposition to the perceived socialist threat of Labor. As a consequence, country groups who were concerned to see the elimination of the protective tariff, felt unrepresented. This increased the incentive to form a country party.

No longer were farmers' groups content to have others fight their battles for them 'with only indifferent success. They are now determined that the assisting of the primary producer to obtain the full amount of his labours must be undertaken through their own representatives in Parliament.'²⁵ When eight farmers' representatives were elected to the Western Australian Legislative Assembly in 1914, they joined together to form a Country Party. Other states followed suit: Queensland in 1915; Victoria in 1917; South Australia in 1918; New South Wales in 1921 (until 1925 as a rural breakaway from the Progressive Party); Tasmania in 1922. Both the South Australian and the Tasmanian parties were short lived. The Federal party, which will be the main focus of this chapter, was formed in 1920.

²⁴ A.J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, p.10.

²⁵ *The Land*, Sydney, 21 November 1919, in *Modern Australia in Documents 1901-1939*, 2 vols., Vol. 1, ed. F. K Crowley, Wren, Melbourne, 1973, p. 329.

The Country Party - Pragmatism And Myth

The Country Party was from its inception a regional and sectional party with a commission to improve the material lot of rural people. In the words of Dr. Earle Page, who led the party from 1921 to 1939, it was to be a faithful watchdog of country interests.²⁶ In this broad aim the party was consistent, but it was deflected from some of the specific goals which prompted its formation. The ease with which it accommodated differing policies gave the party its reputation as a pragmatic, even opportunistic, non-ideological party. If, as this thesis suggests, the Country Party was an ideological party, and that agrarian myth comprised a large portion of that ideology, the arguments of those who suggest otherwise must be met.

Earle Page was one of those who denied being influenced by ideological considerations. Indeed, the Bruce-Page government, in which the Country Party shared power with the Nationalists from 1923 to 1929, was motivated, he claimed:

by strict business principles and the desire to get the best results for the electors and the particular interests that were being penalized. Throughout my parliamentary career, my critics have often attributed ideological motives for my actions. But my approach has always been dictated by practical considerations.²⁷

Earle Page's denial of ideological motives does not disprove their existence. Indeed if one of the functions of ideology is, as the first chapter argued, 'to procure advantages for specific social positions', then practical considerations are essential. In its role as faithful watchdog of country interests, the Country Party combined pragmatism and an ideology based on myth. So axiomatic did agrarian myth appear to believers, however, that it was not always recognised as such, especially to those such as Page who saw ideology in a negative light. He failed to recognise that 'practical considerations' in politics have an ideological basis inasmuch as they reflect a more or less co-ordinated set of ideas, attitudes and beliefs.

The fact that this was the case was confirmed by Arthur Fadden, who led the party from 1940 to 1958. According to him, Page bequeathed a set of principles which were based on 'the importance of and need for specialized attention to

²⁶ E. Page, *Truant Surgeon*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963, p. 84.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 111.

the primary industries, on the best means of ensuring their stability and progress in the national interest and on the rights of those who conduct these industries or serve them through country towns and villages.²⁸ Demands for rural assistance which to Page and others seemed so pragmatic and commonsensical, were based unquestionably on a conviction that fostering primary industry was in the nation's best interest, a belief which lies at the heart of agrarian myth.

That this was at the core of Country Party ideology was made clear by an invitation to participants in the Queensland Party's first conference. It stated that 'the business of primary producers - which is the basis of all national well-being - needs first consideration'.²⁹ A. F. Davis's psychological study of a Country Party backbencher in federal parliament further illustrated the point that agrarian myth frequently underpinned the apparently practical considerations of Country Party parliamentarians. Although the member's speeches 'dealt very strictly either with concrete proposals for legislation, or with particular local circumstances',³⁰ certain ideas, according to Davis, were implicit in the subjects discussed. The ideas which surfaced included 'a sense of special hardship - sometimes unnecessary and unjust hardship - facing country dwellers, not understood in the administration, or in the capital generally', the precariousness of farm incomes and the fact that only the Country Party really stood for decentralization.³¹ Such ideas did not appear in self-consciously ideological discussions, but, for example, in an expression of concern over the downgrading of a country railway station.³² Thus the mythical foundations of belief were rarely acknowledged because they were unseen.

They remained unseen because, for decades many of the assumptions which guided the Country Party went virtually unchallenged. The demands which the party made for material assistance to primary producers were widely accepted as legitimate, a situation which the party saw as one of its primary functions to maintain:

²⁸ Sir Arthur Fadden, *They called me Artie*, Jacaranda, Milton, 1969, p. 158.

²⁹ A. J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Appendix.

³⁰ A. F. Davies, *Private Politics*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1966, p. 114.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*, p. 112.

As government partners, and from the corner benches, the Country Party has been able to impose its policies on the legislature. The greatest tribute to its effective role is the fact that other parties consistently appropriate Country Party policy and claim it as their own.

Since the Country Party entered the Parliament **NO** party dares ignore country aspects of policy and **ALL** other parties have felt impelled to issue Rural Policy Speeches, and court the votes of country people with promises taken from the Country Party programme.³³

The party was largely successful in its efforts to reinforce widespread community acceptance of agrarian myth. Until relatively recent times, belief in the need for government assistance for rural industry was almost universal. Extensive state and commonwealth bureaucracies were established in support of this premise.³⁴ Labor and non-Labor Parties alike believed in the necessity of rural subsidy and stabilisation schemes and in the need for closer settlement of country areas.

The acceptance of aspects of agrarian myth by the Labor Party can be seen in the many statements made by party officials in support of agriculture. In its early days the party anticipated receiving the votes of many smallholders plenty of whom had previously been labourers. In 1902, *The Worker* claimed that 'if there is one class more than another in this state [Queensland] from which the Labor Party has the right to expect support it is the farming class. As the land is the basis of life so agrarian reform. . . is a fundamental principle of the gospel of Labor.'³⁵ The Labor leader of the Opposition in Victoria in 1916 felt that 'the whole future of Victoria if it is to continue to be a first class State and a proper place for people to live in, rests upon the development of [its] agricultural resources.'³⁶ In Western Australia, Labor Senator P. J. Lynch argued that 'the prosperity of this country depends upon the farmer' and quoted Thomas Jefferson in order to argue that Australia's population be 'induced to leave . . . "the festering sores of civilisation"',³⁷ a reference to the nation's cities. In a similar

³³ Australian Country Party, *We're Telling You*, Sydney, 1960, p. 15.

³⁴ In this they were undoubtedly helped by the Australian tendency 'to look upon the State as a vast public utility.' W.K.Hancock, *Australia*, Ernest Benn, London, 1930, p. 65. Encel compared the proliferation of bureaucratic agencies to help the farmers during the depression with the Canadian farmers' greater reliance on self-help. See S. Encel, *Equality and Authority: A Study Of Class State and Power in Australia*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1972, p. 59.)

³⁵ Quoted in H. McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1986, p. 5.

³⁶ Quoted in M. Lake, *The Limits Of Hope*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987, p. 23.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

vein, W. Forgan Smith, the Labor premier of Queensland during the Great Depression thought that 'primary production is the natural occupation of mankind' and that 'no one would desire for this state the industrialised type of civilisation which exists in many countries today.'³⁸ Such beliefs continued into the post World War 2 era. A speech made to the Queensland parliament in 1947 by the Labor member for Nundah argued that :

The majority of men and women in our cities and towns realise full well that notwithstanding the essential nature of their own work in our social and industrial economy, **without the basic primary producer - the man on the land-** they would not be able to enjoy the good things of this life to the extent they do.³⁹

This virtually unquestioning support for many Country Party policies which continued into the early 1970s is illustrated by the frustrations experienced by both those of an economically rational⁴⁰ cast of mind and those who felt that there was a fundamental opposition of interests between farmers and labourers. Ken Buckley puzzled over Labor's long time refusal to attack rural interests even over an issue as crucial to the worker as the eight hour working day. He hypothesised, by way of partial explanation that 'intellectuals are seemingly bemused by the legend of the pioneer, the man on the land.'⁴¹ Another analyst of Labor rural policy at this time suggested that 'the ALP has been disposed to support continued investment in irrigation and land settlement schemes on the basis of vague and emotional commitments rather than careful appraisal of the economic merits of particular proposals: Labor support for the ill-fated Ord River scheme is an outstanding example.'⁴²

The Country Party naturally applauded such commitments although it was careful to make clear that they did not signal the redundancy of the Country Party. In the same year as the member for Nundah's endorsement of the primary producer's role, the party's official journal editorialised: 'Supporters of the

³⁸ Quoted in R. Fitzgerald, *A History Of Queensland From 1915 to the 1980's*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, 1984, p. 181

³⁹ Quoted in *The Countryman*, Brisbane, 13 October , 1947, p. 3.

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that the approach which is commonly known as 'economic rationalism' is necessarily rational.

⁴¹ K. Buckley, 'The Great Rural Bludge', in *Australian Politics: A Third Reader*, p. 428.

⁴² A. S. Watson, 'Rural Policies', in *From Whitlam to Fraser*, ed. A. Patience & B. Head, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979, p. 164.

Labour Party are not and never can be true countrymen, and are unlike the great body of primary producers, without whom Australia would have been a forgotten land long ago.⁴³ The Country Party argued that neither the party of urban labour nor the party of urban capital could adequately represent country interests. Their rural members would always be outvoted by more numerous city interests. As well, according to Earle Page, who came from the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales, close to the border with Queensland, residence in the metropolis induced a kind of myopia in politicians: 'The pressure upon them of city multitudes makes it difficult for them to see the continent in its vast perspective.' He continued with the proposition that 'Australian history demonstrates that the outback people, and particularly those along the borders of the states, see national problems more clearly and are more Federal in their outlook.'⁴⁴ Arthur Fadden, drawing strongly on agrarian myth, also emphasised the urban nature of the other major parties whose support came 'either from the employer or the employee in secondary industry [who] can be regarded as representing a section of the community which, for a long time past, has participated unduly in the national income at the expense of the rural producer'.⁴⁵

For these reasons, the Country Party argued, neither party deserved the votes of country Australians. In particular, Country people could not expect adequate representation from Labor. The *Countryman* editorial made the point that 'It is fundamentally impossible for Labour members to assist country folk, as the policy of the Caucus in the interests of industrialists and workers generally in the populous areas.'⁴⁶ Rather, their loyalty belonged to the Country Party, which, incidentally, was not averse to claiming credit for policies introduced by other parties⁴⁷ if they happened to benefit rural people.

So long as the general goal of the betterment of rural conditions was espoused, it seemed to matter little to the Country Party and its supporters that what had

⁴³ *The Countryman*, Brisbane, 13 October, 1947, p. 3.

⁴⁴ E. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁵ A. Fadden in *The Countryman*, Sydney, March, 1946 in *Modern Australia in Documents, 1939-1970*, 2 vols., Vol. 2, p. 140.

⁴⁶ Editorial, *The Countryman*, Brisbane, 8 December, 1947, p. 4.

⁴⁷ B. D. Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

once been key policies fell by the roadside. In these circumstances, it is easy to see how the Country Party's reputation for pragmatism was established. Sometimes, as in the case of the protective tariff which will be examined in detail in the next chapter, the selling of wheat to communist China, and the eventual withdrawal of support for the establishment of new states, abstract principle meant little. This seeming opportunism of the party in its policy shifts, led many to believe that the party was without ideology. Yet it remained constant in its fundamental beliefs despite the abandonment of specific policies. One Country Party stalwart likened the party to a religion.⁴⁸ Like a religion, it overcame rational objections and maintained the unquestioning support of the faithful despite apparent inconsistencies and the deviations from stated policy which made it appear so pragmatic and non-ideological. This is consistent with V. O. Key's observations that remedies put forward by political movements need not be workable if they are presented to the discontented with sufficient messianic fervour.⁴⁹

The fact that the Country Party was a loose confederation of state parties with members from a range of competing producer groups added to the perception that the party was governed solely by pragmatic considerations. Because each interest vigorously pursued its own ends - grazier and oilseed grower against dairy farmer, exporter versus domestic producer- the party appeared to some to be divorced from ideological influences. The differences in interest, however, only increased the need for unifying myths which promoted the idea that country groups, whatever their differences, had much in common. Despite the fact that oilseed growers and dairyfarmers' interests were opposed, they could still share in beliefs about the primacy of rural industry and the unfair domination of country by city.

Regional and Sectional Party

In his work on the formation of the Australian Country Parties. B. D. Graham observed that rural myths

are usually based . . . on a social theory in which classes are seen

⁴⁸ C. W. Russell, *Country Crisis*, W. R. Smith & Paterson, Brisbane, 1976, p. 161.

⁴⁹ V. O. Key Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 50.

not as horizontal strata in a hierarchical society, but as independent groups of producers and entrepreneurs, separated from each other by vertical cleavages; for the farmer tends to think of class both as a socio-economic group, distinguished by its relation to a particular primary industry, and as a regional community. Thus an agrarian political movement usually presents two aspects; from one point of view it appears as a class demand for socio-economic concessions and for privilege; from another it represents the protest of a colonial region against metropolitan dominance, economic and political.⁵⁰

Both regional and sectional aspects can be found in Country Party ideology, although the two were not always completely separate nor were they always equally important. The Party itself saw its sectional role as strongly linked to the representation of regional and even national interests on the grounds that primary industries were basic to the wellbeing of rural towns and the nation as a whole. Arthur Fadden made this clear at a speech to the Federal Council of the organisation in 1947:

The Country Party, directly and specifically, represents those engaged in and dependent upon the rural industries. There are very few Australians who do not come within those categories. We represent, as no other party can, those who believe that sound Australia can be built only upon a solid foundation of the basic primary industries.⁵¹

The Party's attempts to build national support on a sectional and regional base were unsuccessful. It never managed to articulate successful policies on a range of national issues such as foreign affairs, defence, education, industrial relations and social services.⁵² Research carried out in 1972 indicated that Australians generally identified the party with sectional rather than national interests.⁵³ Even as a regional party, it never became the natural choice of all rural dwellers as it might have hoped. Sometimes the political struggle between competing economic interests eclipsed the struggle between city and country although after the Second World War, the Party's role as a representative of regional interests became more important than its sectional role.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 15

⁵¹ 'Country Party's Place', *The Countryman*, Brisbane, 13 October, 1947, p. 3.

⁵² D. Aitkin, 'The Australian Country Party', *op. cit.*, p. 419.

⁵³ P. Warrick, 'The Country Party's campaign' in H. Mayer (ed.), *Labor To Power: Australia's 1972 election*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1972, p. 63.

⁵⁴ B. D. Graham, 'The Present Standing of the Australian Country Parties', *Political Science*, Wellington, 16, 1, March, 1964, p. 52.

Both regional and sectional elements can be seen in party rhetoric, which drew upon different aspects of agrarian myth depending upon the emphasis required. When the party made sectional demands it tended to justify these on the traditional grounds that what was good for the rural producer was good for the rest of Australia - that the farmer was the backbone of the nation. Similar arguments were put forward in support of country regions too. The danger to the nation of an unpopulated heartland was a common theme. Regional arguments also assumed an anti- metropolitan bias which focused on the superior qualities of rural life. Such arguments were often used by advocates of decentralisation who ignored the fact that the decentralisation of industry and population involved bringing many of the unpalatable conditions of the city to the country.

In their extreme form, regional arguments became part of the arsenal of the various Australian New State movements which had strong links with the early Country Party. These movements were especially strong in Northern New South Wales and in the Riverina. Although there was not total agreement between the New Statists and the Country Party, most new State supporters being townspeople, both movements had in common a zeal for decentralisation and an anti- metropolitan bias. Support for new states and the necessary constitutional changes to bring them about, although eventually abandoned, were part of the Country Party's early political platform. Many of the pressures which had led to the demand for new states were the same as those which had persuaded country Australians of the need for their own political party. The greatest incentive for taking political action, however, was a sectional one. The Australian Country Party's first task, indeed its *raison d'être*, according to Earle Page, was 'to find a solution to the tariff problem.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 383.

6

POLICIES

The Country Party entered the political arena with a determination to fulfil its role as the faithful watchdog of country interests. It had mixed success, but overall its achievements were considerable. This chapter will be dealing largely with key policies in the federal arena, but it needs to be borne in mind that there are many constraints placed on policy makers, especially in the area of agriculture.¹ One of the most significant of these is section 92 of the Australian Constitution, the 'free trade' clause. This means that agricultural policy must be determined co-operatively between Federal and State governments.

The fact that so many support mechanisms for agriculture were put in place despite the problems of co-ordination, is testimony both to the influence of the Country Party and the widespread acceptance of its arguments in favour of such support. Over the years, however, there were some voices raised in criticism of this government largesse, especially in the last years of the Country Party's existence under that name. Most of the criticisms were on economic grounds. Critics argued that the support given to the Country Party cost the nation more than it received on its investment. The Country Party, as well as doubting the validity of such calculations, felt that there were other values worth preserving apart from the purely economic. They argued that social, psychological and equity considerations should be taken into account in framing rural policy. When the Country Party and its supporters advocated 'a positive commitment by governments to sustain country communities in the interest of the national welfare . . . Any sensible cost in maintaining people on the land and in the

¹ For an examination of these, see A. S. Watson, 'Rural policies', in *From Whitlam to Fraser: Reform and Reaction in Australian politics*, ed. A. Patience and B. Head, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979, pp. 157-172.

country is not an unfair charge against the cities. It is an investment in our national welfare², they were not calculating in dollar terms alone.

The Tariff

The first of the protective tariffs, the Lyne tariff was imposed by the Commonwealth government in 1907/8 on woollen goods, iron, steel and agricultural implements. Farm groups responded by agitating for the reduction of tariffs on those imported goods which were essential for farming such as agricultural machinery and fencing wire. A lament composed at the time captured the sense of grievance which pushed many country people to take political action:

The squatter and the farmer fought
To keep their fertile soil,
The rabbit came and ate them out,
And made it a perpetual drought,
In spite of sweat and toil.

Chorus:

And now see William Lyne commence
To tax the wire-netting fence.³

Not only did farmers feel resentful that the tariff forced their costs up, but also because Australian manufacturers who sold primarily on the domestic market were sheltered from the rigours of foreign competition. On the other hand, surplus farm produce which was exported had to compete on the open world market. Rural producers also feared that countries whose exports would be adversely affected by the imposition of Australian protective tariffs would retaliate by refusing to buy Australian primary products. The fact that manufactured goods were produced largely in the cities fuelled the farmers' anti-urban prejudices which were directed not only at manufacturers, but at organised labour who supported industry protection.

Farm bodies like the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation, one of the precursors of the Country Party, put forward anti-tariff arguments which illustrated this resentment of urban forces. The A.F.F.O. maintained that national resources were being used to reinforce the strength of the cities at cost

² 'Sommerlad says', *The Land Magazine*, 23 July, 1987, p. 7.

³ 'Back To The Figleaf', in *Modern Australia In Documents, 1901-1939*, 2 vols., Vol.1, ed. F. K.Crowley, Wren, Melbourne, 1973, p. 119.

to the country.⁴ To remedy this, the organisation wanted ‘an adjustment of transport, financial, and economic machinery to meet the needs of a nation dependent on the returns from primary industry.’⁵ In Western Australia, the president of the Farmers and Settlers Association argued for the formation of ‘a strong political organisation’ so that farmers could fight the situation in which ‘profits which should have been theirs have been filched from them’ by organized manufacturers and labour. Throughout Australia there was a growing feeling among farmers that direct parliamentary representation through their own political party was needed in order to fight the pernicious effects of the tariff.⁶

Once the Country Party had been formed, party members and supporters justified their stand on the tariff by emphasising the primacy of rural industries and the dependence of city people on country endeavour. The following example from pioneer party member, Alan Campbell’s memoirs, gives a sample of typical arguments:

It was the basic primary industries that developed Australia, labouring under the severe handicaps of extensive transport to overseas markets and high internal costs of production. The sheltered secondary industries played but a minor part in our vital export trade until the late 1960s. Australia was totally dependent upon her unsheltered rural and mining industries for the necessary foreign exchange to balance her foreign trade accounts. It is remarkable how long it took our rural and mining communities to think and to act effectively in the political arena, to resist and to combat the National Policy of High Protection. It was not until after World War 1, that effective, determined political action was taken by forming the Country Party-that action was bitterly resented and resisted by the Metropolitan Conservative Party.⁷

The 1920s saw a steady escalation of both protective tariffs and rural outrage. It is therefore surprising to find that despite sharing power with the Nationalist Party led by Stanley Bruce from 1923 and having Earle Page as Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer, the party was unable to achieve the elimination of the tariff. This may have been because revenue from Customs and Excise was too difficult for a party in government to give up. It was sufficient in the years from

⁴ E. Page, *Truant Surgeon*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963, p. 52.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶ A. J. Monger, quoted in U. Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1963, p. 28.

⁷ A. J. Campbell, *Memoirs Of The Country Party In Queensland: 1920-1974*, p. 10.

1922-1925 to permit the reduction of income tax, increase expenditure on roads and abolish land tax on Crown leaseholds.⁸ Instead of fighting the tariff, Page urged another tactic. He argued that primary producers should 'break into the vicious circle' themselves.⁹

The Country Party used government support for manufacturing industries to argue for compensatory assistance to primary producers. Favoured support mechanisms included the introduction of protective tariffs for primary produce, the inauguration of home consumption price schemes whereby Australian consumers of items such as sugar and dried fruits paid more than overseas consumers, the establishment of commodity marketing boards and the provision of subsidies for farmers and agricultural research.

The tariff resurfaced as an issue for the Country Party in 1930 when the Scullin Labor Government was in power and Australia in the grip of depression. Earle Page in a speech to the House of Representatives drew parallels between the effects of the latest tariffs on primary producers and the 1828 'tariff of abomination' in the United States which provoked South Carolina to attempt secession.¹⁰ Despite this dramatic analogy, by the mid 1930s, the tariff which had been so important in gathering support for the Country Party had faded as a major issue. Some adjustments to it had been made as a consequence of the Ottawa Agreement, but more importantly, the Country Party had 'broken into the vicious circle.' It was ironic that with the collusion and support of the Country Party, Australia became one of the most highly protected of the world's industrial countries.

The disavowal by the Country Party of its old anti-protectionist stand led to its becoming, under John McEwan's leadership, the party of high protection. This involved counterbalancing the impact of secondary industry protection by securing protective treatment for primary industries.¹¹ By ceasing to oppose the tariff and seeking 'protection all round', the Country Party made common cause

⁸ B. D. Graham, *The Formation Of the Australian Country Parties*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1966, p. 230.

⁹ quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁰ Australia, House of Representatives *Debates* July, 1930, 17, p. 4250.

¹¹ Australian Country Party, *We're Telling You*, p. 6.

with city industries, a process which McEwan hoped would enable the party to broaden its support base. The renunciation by the Country Party of its earlier free trade position meant that for decades in Australia there was little questioning of the wisdom of protection and no concerted action to contain tariff costs. These became matters of some concern to those, like the Chairman of the Tariff Board and subsequently Chairman of the Industries Assistance Commission, Alf Rattigan, who favoured free trade.¹²

In hindsight, it was clear that the party had not fought the tariff as a matter of economic principle, but rather as a policy which had disadvantaged rural people. When another way round the problem was found, the Country Party was happy to embrace it. The ends - the welfare of rural people and keeping them on the land - remained the same. Only the means were different. Whatever the means, rural myth could be relied upon to provide justification. In opposing the tariff, the party argued that the most productive sector of the economy was being discriminated against in order to favour city interests. It believed that if the rural sector went into decline, the whole nation would suffer, not just economically, but morally as well, as more and more country folk were forced to shift to the cities seeking after work. Once the tariff was accepted, the Country Party argued in favour of all round protection on similar grounds. For many of the party's critics, such policy shifts were evidence of a lack of principle and showed that the Country Party was little more than a 'curious organisation of regional self-seekers'¹³ bereft of any ideological foundations. Yet for those who genuinely believed in rural myth, the party was nothing of the sort. For them regional and national interests were aligned and any policy which either directly or indirectly helped keep people on the land was justifiable on the grounds of national interest.

The Vicious Circle

Precedents for government intervention in support of primary industry had been set in World War 1, when severe drought, combined with disruptions to the marketing and shipping of Australia's products abroad, made it difficult for many

¹² See Anon. 'The Tariff', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 42, 23 September, 1968, pp. 131-144 and also, A. Rattigan, *Industry Assistance: the Inside Story*, Melbourne University Press, 1986.

¹³ F. K. Crowley, 'Truant Politician', *Westerly*, June, 1963, p. 78.

farmers to earn a living. The *Pastoral Review* in 1915 had demanded that in order to help farmers cope with the drought, State railways 'should be run for a few months at least primarily in the interests of the starving stock.'¹⁴ Although government declined to bow to rural pressures to this extent, it did step in and arrange for the transport, storage and disposal of primary produce such as wool and wheat. Often, the prices received were below peak and many farmers resented the bureaucratic interference involved. Their unhappiness with these wartime marketing schemes provided another motivation for involvement in rural politics and the eventual formation of the Country Party.

Despite rural dissatisfaction with the wartime marketing schemes, the principle of government intervention to secure farm incomes had been established.¹⁵ This principle was reinforced during the Depression along with the belief that assistance should be based on the costs of production rather than on demand for the product. Government support for rural industries extended to the provision of rural credit facilities, drought relief and other assistance measures. The Country Party argued for and won extensive producer control of the various relief schemes. The use of rural myth in justifying these measures was not lost on critics like F. W. Eggleston. He commented that 'country parties have been able to secure a good many tax concessions to primary producers on the ground that these producers are "the salt of the earth" and Country parties are the most prolific spenders of money.'¹⁶

The Country Party excelled in keeping rural policy issues on the agenda, convincing its supporters that it was the only party with their interests at heart and putting the view that assistance to rural people was not only good for them, but for the nation as a whole. On the grounds that 'in Australia, if agriculture prospers, all business is prosperous',¹⁷ Earle Page and his followers argued for substantial government expenditure on rural industries. In some quarters, there existed the firm belief that government money spent on country railways, silos and roads was productive in a way that the same money spent providing facilities

¹⁴ 'Pastoral Review', March 1915, in *Modern Australia in Documents*, p. 232.

¹⁵ Australia is by no means unique among Western countries in having provided government support for rural industries. The methods chosen vary from country to country. This section examines some Australian responses to rural pressure.

¹⁶ F. W. Eggleston, *Reflections Of An Australian Liberal*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1953, p. 131.

¹⁷ E. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

in the city was not. Sir Michael Bruxner, leader of the Country Party in New South Wales from 1922 to 1958, maintained that a bridge over the Clarence River was a productive work whereas a bridge over Sydney Harbour was not.¹⁸

In response to rural pressure, concessions were made available to farmers for costs incurred on a range of farm improvements such as the eradication of pests, the clearing of timbered land and the draining of swamps. In retrospect, it is apparent that some of these measures must have contributed substantially to environmental degradation. Money was spent on railways, roads, irrigation schemes - for which Country Party politicians had an almost cargo-cult regard - and the provision of subsidised telephones, postal services, radio, television and electricity. These were provided unstintingly until the 1960s. This was a matter of concern to those who felt that questions of economic viability and the likelihood of remunerative markets for the extra output which assistance permitted should have been considered.¹⁹ The Country Party, however, had few doubts. Apart from economic factors, it argued, equity considerations should be taken into account in the provision of services. Its view was that all Australians were entitled to the same facilities wherever they lived.

When the Country Party governed in coalition with the Liberals and their predecessors, it was customary for it to assume responsibility for primary industries. (Between 1949 and 1972, there was only one exception to this.) Under the Prime Ministership of Sir Robert Menzies, the formulation of rural policy was left to the Country Party. Liberal-led governments after the Menzies era also tended to leave *de facto* control of primary industry to the Country Party and its successors. Typically, a Country Party Minister for Primary Industry acted as a facilitator, putting into practice the policies desired by the various commodity groups. It was central to the Party's philosophy that producer groups should determine their own production and marketing arrangements. In this context, state and federal bureaucrats saw themselves as 'acting for and on behalf of rural producers.'²⁰

¹⁸ D. Aitkin, *The Colonel*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1969, p. 49.

¹⁹ R. Maddock & I. W. McLean (ed.), *The Australian Economy In The Long Run*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 152.

²⁰ K. Campbell, 'Rural Industries', in *Public Policy In Australia*, ed. R. Forward, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1974, p. 160.

In keeping with its philosophy, the Country Party was a strong advocate of producer control of marketing boards, such as the Wheat Board. Thus, primary producers obtained a privileged position in policy making which was not shared by other key interests, such as consumers.²¹ This meant that 'in Australia the process of agricultural policy making frequently consist[ed] of deploying the powers of government to make industry policy effective, rather than of formulating policy on behalf of the Australian society as a whole.'²² This was justifiable to a party which believed that rural industry interests were synonymous with that of the nation as a whole. It was, however, open to the criticism that policy which was made on an industry by industry basis tended to be uncoordinated and to produce sometimes conflicting results. It was also formulated largely in private, in circumstances not open to public scrutiny.²³

Under the aegis of the Country Party, subsidies were granted on an industry wide basis, rather than on an individual needs basis. According to the formulas applied, this meant that those in least need usually received most benefit. Industry policy as a general rule was to keep as many farmers as possible on the land because farming, unlike other industries, was seen as more than just an economic activity. A survey of the wheat growing industry by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock in 1959 was sympathetic to this point of view:

It is not desirable to give the same weight to profitability measures as one would when considering other industries . . . It would be wrong to treat [economic] information as being the sole . . . factor in whether or not to continue farming. Economics contributes towards decision making; so do sociology, philosophy and psychology.²⁴

This approach was consistent with Country Party policy. Ian Sinclair, as Deputy Leader of the Country Party made it clear that the Liberal - Country Party coalition took considerations other than narrow 'economic motivation' into account in formulating government policy. Such factors included 'social purpose,

²¹ J. Ravenhill, 'Business and Politics' in *Politics in Australia*, ed. R. Smith & L. Watson, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 234.

²² Anon., 'Milking the Australian Economy', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 39, 13, May 22, 1967, p. 198.

²³ J. Warhurst, 'The Industries Assistance Commission And The Making Of Primary Industry Policy', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, XLI, 1, March 1982, p. 18.

²⁴ Quoted in D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector, and Storekeeper*, Sydney University Press, 1968, p. 123.

national growth concepts and the desire to develop regions and the large tracts of country in Australia which are underpopulated and which need assistance to sustain the uncertainties of international markets and climatic variations'.²⁵ Farmers produced valuable export income and close settlement stopped 'the drift to the cities', the prevention of which was an article of faith to the Country Party. For these reasons, the party argued, government support even for uneconomic farms could be justified.

The Country Party was concerned that if farmers were forced to leave uneconomic farms, taking their dependents with them, there would be a snowball effect, forcing the closure of country railway stations, schools, stores and cafes. Once thriving villages would become ghost-towns and already crowded cities would become even more crowded. Producer group pressure, electoral pressure from 'dying' areas and a sentimental attachment to closer settlement meant that the restructuring of uneconomic primary industries was constantly postponed by state and federal governments. A good example of this occurred with the dairy industry.

Despite many years of economically inefficient operation, the dairy industry fought off restructuring until the Whitlam government withdrew the dairy industry subsidy in 1973. Until this occurred, however, dairying, along with sugar and fruit farming, was one of the most highly protected of all primary industries. through co-operative arrangements between state and federal governments. Not only was the industry heavily subsidised, but it was sheltered from competition from imports and alternative products, such as margarine. Milk, which often went undrunk, was provided at government expense to all primary school children. Despite this rather lavish attention, the dairy industry remained depressed, partly because some farms were too small and partly because a number were inappropriately situated - in Queensland brigalow country, for example.

As small, low capital, labour intensive enterprises, dairy farms had been encouraged by state governments as a medium for decentralizing population²⁶ and permitting closer settlement. Dairy farms were labour intensive and were

²⁵ Australia, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 18 October, 85, 1973, p. 2374.

²⁶ Australia, Parliament, *Report of the Dairy Industry Committee Of Enquiry*, Melbourne, 1960, p. 84.

usually run by a farmer and his family, thus conforming to the yeoman ideal. A 1974 survey of dairy farmers indicated that in two-thirds of cases, wives worked with their husbands on the farm, usually full time. One respondent went so far as to claim that 'You can't run a dairy farm without a wife.'²⁷ As well as promoting closer settlement, the dairy industry was also a big export earner. To the Country Party, this meant that support for dairying could be justified on the grounds of national interest, despite the estimates of one agricultural economist that it took \$174m. worth of subsidies to the dairy industry to earn \$100m. of export income.²⁸ Such opinions, however, did not dissuade the Party and its supporters from a commitment to subsidise the dairy industry. The critics, for their part, did not realise that policies based on a range of strongly held beliefs could remain invulnerable to criticisms on purely economic grounds.

On a more modest scale, the farmers in the wheat industry were also subsidised. During World War 1 a system of compulsory wheat marketing pools had operated. These had been dismantled in some states and federally with the concurrence of the Country Party but in the late 1920s growers began trying to obtain government assistance in the form of bounties and a two price scheme. When legislation was introduced into the federal parliament in 1938 to assist the wheat industry it was pointed out by the Country Party member for the Riverina 'that the legislation would not merely benefit wheat-growers, but would benefit the whole community, and particularly the business community of the country town.'²⁹

The Second World War, like its predecessor, saw government intervention in the acquisition and marketing of primary produce. This set the stage for the federal and state governments, in response to pressure from wheatfarmers after the war, to reach agreement on a stabilisation scheme for wheat. The intention of the plan, introduced by the Chifley Labor government, was to protect growers from market fluctuations and to assure efficient growers of a good living.³⁰ Many farmers found Labor's provisions inadequate, but the fact that a Labor government saw fit to institute the scheme indicates the almost universal

²⁷ New South Wales Women's Advisory Council, *Women on the Land*, Sydney, 1986, p. 7.

²⁸ 'Milking the Australian Economy', p. 200.

²⁹ E. Page, *op cit.*, p. 239.

³⁰ R. T. Pollard, 'Wheat Industry Stabilized' in *Modern Australia In Documents 1939-1970*, 2 vols., Vol. 2, p. 193.

acceptance of the necessity of primary industry support. After the defeat of the Chifley government, the Menzies-Fadden government maintained a wheat stabilisation scheme which provided for a home consumption price and a guaranteed price for most of the export crop. These prices were tied to the cost of production, rather than the market. As a consequence, farmers were persuaded to produce more wheat, whether or not a market existed. This led to massive stockpiling of wheat and the maintenance of farmers on uneconomic farms. Many of these were in marginal districts with uncertain rainfall. When, by 1968, problems caused by oversupply were apparent, the wheatgrowers opted for a quota system rather than for structural changes which might force some growers to leave the land.

Wool, however, earned substantial export income for many years without direct subsidy, government marketing or price support, apart from acquisition schemes which operated during both world wars. Graziers generally had been satisfied with the wool marketing systems built up by firms such as Goldsbrough, Mort and Co. Ltd. and Elder Smith And Co. Ltd.³¹ As a consequence, this group remained committed to free enterprise. Unlike the dairy and wheat farmers who relied increasingly on government intervention to maintain their incomes, graziers preferred to maintain income through the keeping down of costs incurred by the tariff and wage awards.³² There were, however, some small graziers who combined graingrowing with sheep farming and were less financially secure and who had experienced the benefits of orderly marketing schemes in the grain industry. This group felt that the introduction of a reserve price would bring a measure of stability to the industry which by the 1960s was facing falling wool prices and competition from synthetics. In 1964 the Australian Wool Board proposed the introduction of a reserve price scheme, an action which triggered bitter conflict between those sections of the industry committed to free enterprise and those who advocated orderly marketing. Eventually, in 1971, a minimum 'floor price' was introduced.

Throughout the long debate the Country Party had favoured the principle of stabilised marketing. As a consequence it was perceived to be 'more of a

³¹ B.D.Graham, 'Graziers In Politics, 1917 To 1929', *Historical Studies*, 8, 32, May, 1959, p. 385.

³² G.S. Harman and R. S. I. Smith, 'To speak with One Voice', *The Australian Quarterly*, 39, 4, December, 1967, p. 69.

wheatgrowers' party than a woolgrowers'"³³ Indeed many of the large graziers were committed to the Liberal Party and its predecessors, rather than the Country Party. As masters of vast sheepwalks, they did not conform to the ideal of farmers on closely settled small properties, which was nearer to the Country Party vision. As the successors of the squatters, they had many city connections which made them unsympathetic to the anti-urban aspect of the Country Party ³⁴ and less vulnerable to the appeal of arguments based on rural myth which had been used to justify subsidisation.

These three industries illustrate the range of direct subsidisation of Australian agriculture. The dairy industry, like the sugar, fruit and rice industries was heavily subsidised. The wheat industry was subsidised at a more moderate level, and the wool industry comparatively little, although both were regulated by price stabilisation schemes and all rural industry clearly benefited from the provision by government of cross subsidised items such as railways, telephones and electricity. The extent of subsidy to the dairy industry reflects the fact that many dairy farms were established in situations which were inappropriate, but the industry, with the support of the Country Party, resisted this conclusion for many years. One of the factors causing this resistance was the fact that dairy farming, because of its small scale and labour intensive nature, encouraged closer settlement. This had dominated government land policy for more than a century and the Country Party continued to support it long after doubts had been raised about its economic worth to the nation.

Closer Settlement

There were a number of reasons given for the desire for closer settlement, which entailed the subdivision of large land holdings into smaller blocks. There was the belief that a healthy society required some sort of 'balance' between city and country. Implicit in this view was the assumption that the country was the wealth producer, the city the consumer. If, as was clearly happening in twentieth century Australia, the countryside was progressively emptying, fewer producers were supporting more and more consumers, resulting in a society that lacked the

³³ Anon., 'Wool and Politics', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 36, 12, October 25, 1965, p. 190.

³⁴ B. D. Graham, 'Graziers In Politics, 1917 To 1929', p. 391.

necessary balance. It was also believed that a city-based population, living in crowded and polluted conditions, provided a less robust foundation on which to build a nation. Former Country Party Minister in the Fraser cabinet Tom McVeigh explained why he felt it was necessary to support a rural population:

There seems to be - and I think how unfortunate, how shocking, how disastrous, an irresistible attraction to live in smog bound, traffic congested, unfriendly metropolitan cities as opposed to the quiet charm, peaceful surroundings, clear, clean air and the friendly hospitable nature of folk in the country . . . Countrymen tend to regard farming as the most ennobling of vocations and rural communities as the most natural form of association. There a man develops most fully as a human being both in labour and in daily contact with nature.³⁵

Influenced by sentiments such as these, the states, who had the constitutional responsibility for land policy, with the support and encouragement of the federal government, passed legislation to encourage closer settlement. This policy was not phased out until the 1960s. Like many rural policies up until this time, closer settlement had the support of all political parties, who accepted the premises on which it was based. Opinion moulders, like Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, added their weight to the case for closer settlement:

A strong plea for people to remain on the land and not drift to the cities was made by Archbishop Mannix, of Melbourne. It was not in the best interests of Australia, he said, that so many had turned their backs upon the country . . . The drift into the cities should be stopped. This country had undoubtedly suffered by so many turning their backs on rural life. It was necessary that Australia should increase in population. The country was really the backbone of the population. It had been truly said that a city population would wilt and die in a short while³⁶

An additional argument in favour of closer settlement was that a largely empty continent would prove too great a temptation to Australia's northern neighbours. After the First World War, this was linked to a wider Empire defence policy of settling empty spaces in all the British Dominions. Once closely settled, the Dominions were expected to concentrate on primary produce to be traded with Britain in return for manufactured goods. Long after the sun had set on the British Empire, these considerations remained pertinent. The 1950 Royal Commission on Pastoral Land Settlement (Queensland) heard economist Colin Clark put forward the view that if Queenslanders did not settle its empty lands

³⁵ T. McVeigh, *The Australian National Country Party: Its Record and Prospects*, Paper delivered at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Vacation School, May 21, 1979, pp. 1-4.

³⁶ 'Stick To The Land', *The Countryman*, Brisbane, 14 July, 1947, p. 1.

quickly, then someone else would do it for them. He advocated that the rural population of the time be at least trebled by the development of co-operative farming and the creation of small service towns.³⁷ This was an opinion, which, although different in detail, mirrored that of the Country Party and reflected President Theodore Roosevelt's view that 'an unmanned nation invites disaster.'³⁸ Earle Page had written on the subject:

The Bruce-Page Government knew that the Australian government depended, in the last analysis, on the settlement of an adequate population. It would be the most natural thing that neighbouring nations, especially those short of minerals and food for their growing millions, should cast envious eyes towards us. We might seek their friendship and pray that we should be saved from military attack, but unless we peopled Australia rapidly and developed our resources we should expose ourselves to physical assault and face the risk that critical neighbours might force upon us policies distasteful to popular sentiment. Yet surprisingly, bitter opponents of these views were to be found in metropolitan centres, where their parochial attitude was echoed by the city Press.³⁹

Charles Russell, a grazier and former Country Party member writing in favour of closer settlement echoed Page's opinion: 'Outside aggression against a country with a well-distributed population and profitable agricultural industry is far easier to resist than is the case where the country is sparsely populated and occupants dissatisfied.'⁴⁰ According to Russell, dissatisfaction was caused by a poorly distributed population, whose health, happiness, standard of living, and moral and ethical standards were adversely affected⁴¹ by the pollution and other unspecified evils of the cities.⁴²

In order to avert possible disaster, programmes of extensive European immigration were advocated from federation onwards. It was part of the Queensland Country Party State Policy announced in 1917 that there should be 'a vigorous immigration policy, including a more careful selection of

³⁷ C. Clark, 'Land Settlement in Queensland', *Economic News*, Brisbane, Vol.19, July -August, 1950, pp. 1-8.

³⁸ *Candelo Guardian*, May, 1907, in *Modern Australia in Documents*, Vol. 1, p. 99.

³⁹ E. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁴⁰ C. W. Russell, *Country Crisis*, W. R. Smith & Paterson, Brisbane, 1976, p.21.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 155.

immigrants, with special encouragement to small farmers, and practical agricultural labourers.⁴³ On arrival, these immigrants should not congregate in the already swollen cities, but move into the interior where the government should unlock the land and provide generously of facilities such as irrigation and railways.⁴⁴ It almost went without saying that this immigration policy should be compatible with White Australia.

As well as encouraging immigrants to take up land, Australian state and federal governments established soldier settler schemes after both world wars. The motives for doing so were mixed. There were the reasons already mentioned for closer settlement of the countryside. There was a desire on the part of the public to reward soldiers for their war service by offering them the opportunity to partake of country life. And there was a fear that unemployed soldiers might prove troublesome.

The soldier settlement schemes implemented after World War 1 proved costly, both to the taxpayer who subsidised the schemes and to the soldiers and their families.⁴⁵ They were sent, in numerous instances, without adequate capital, without experience or training, onto farms which were far too small. On top of this they faced a drop in value of primary produce. These factors meant that the key criteria for successful farming in Australia remained unmet.⁴⁶ Despite this, the enthusiasm of the advocates of soldier settlement remained undimmed. There was an irrational belief in the therapeutic powers of country life. The loss of an eye or leg did not disqualify applicants from taking up farming. In one instance the Minister for Repatriation recommended a friend as follows: 'He has been terribly knocked about and a wonder he is alive to tell the tale. He is blind in one eye and was nearly blown to atoms and he is still improving and is just the man for the land.'⁴⁷

⁴³ The Queensland Country Party, *State Policy*, Brisbane, 1917.

⁴⁴ *Candelo Guardian*, May 1907, in *ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of the struggles of soldier settlers in Victoria see M. Lake, *The Limits Of Hope: Soldier Settlement In Victoria 1915-38*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987.

⁴⁶ For an examination of the criteria for successful farming in Australia, see B. R. Davidson, *European Farming In Australia*, Elsevier Scientific, Amsterdam, 1981, p. 67.

⁴⁷ Quoted in M. Lake, *op cit.*, p. 59.

It is little wonder then that the scheme was not a resounding success. By 1927, only 26,600 of the 37,600 soldiers settled remained. According to one leading agricultural economist:

The project had simply confirmed what earlier land settlement schemes had shown, namely that it was impossible to establish farmers on the land unless they had some initial capital, and that in Australia large farms using little labour were needed if farmers were to produce commodities which could compete successfully in world markets. In addition, the scheme demonstrated that Australian policy makers were still convinced that the measure of successful land settlement was the number of people placed on the land, rather than the efficiency with which resources were used.⁴⁸

A similar, but more successful soldier settlement scheme was implemented after World War 2. Many of the mistakes of the earlier scheme were avoided, but when agricultural commodity prices dropped in the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies, it was realised that some of the soldier settlers, like numerous other farmers had been placed on farms which were too small to be viable.⁴⁹ Many borderline farms which still exist were established under government aegis in soldier settlement or irrigation areas.⁵⁰

The size of farms had been fixed to conform to a 'home maintenance' area which proved, in practice, difficult to determine. This was defined typically in the New South Wales Western Lands Act of 1949 as 'an area which when used for the purpose for which it is reasonably fitted would be sufficient for the maintenance in average seasons and circumstances of the average family.'⁵¹ No mention was made here of economic efficiency considerations⁵² so that the way was paved for the maintenance of families on farms, which for various reasons, were too small to be viable. Although some agricultural economists found the neglect of efficiency and productivity factors frustrating, such voices were in the minority. Most Australians did not question the need for closer settlement. This explains the enthusiasm of all parties for investment in irrigation which in the Australian environment was difficult to justify on economic grounds alone.

⁴⁸ B. R. Davidson, *op cit.*, p. 296.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 367.

⁵⁰ A. S. Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁵¹ K. O. Campbell, 'Land Policy', in *Agriculture in the Australian Economy*, ed. D. B. Williams, Sydney University Press, 1967, p. 227.

⁵² *ibid.*

Costly irrigation schemes which encouraged rural development such as the Ord River scheme received enthusiastic bi-partisan support despite the fact that they were built on shaky economic foundations. The Ord scheme, it was believed, had defence value in populating the North and it also contributed to decentralisation because the presence of many small farmers and their families created a multiplier effect. A large rural population required services and industries which could be located in country towns, thus stalling the drift of people to the cities. There was also a strong sentimental attachment to the vision of a yeomen farming community which could not be displaced by economic arguments.

All three major political parties accepted the need for a decentralised society, although it was especially crucial to the Country Party who relied on regional areas for electoral support. All parties also accepted the principle of government intervention in order to protect and foster rural industries. Both Labor and Liberal Parties developed rural policy committees to consider and try to solve rural problems. This widespread acceptance, did not, however signal that it was time for the Country Party to cease acting as the watchdog of rural interests. As a delegate to the 1952 conference of the New South Wales Party declared: 'many of the things for which the Country Party fought in earlier years have been achieved'. If, however, the party 'were to disappear from Australian politics . . . all the evils which country citizens suffered in the days before they became a balancing power in the public life of the Commonwealth would return in greater force than before.'⁵³ The Country Party remained the only party totally committed to rural interests and its followers were told 'you can't afford to be without a Country Party' and were exhorted to 'thank your stars there is a Country Party'.⁵⁴

Despite the fact that there was general community support for the maintenance of rural industry, gradual depopulation of the countryside persisted. Wide support for closer settlement could not prevent an increase in farm size. This was due mainly to the mechanisation of agriculture which permitted larger areas to be farmed with less labour. Tractors could plough more land than horses. On top of this, improved transport and communication reduced the need for numerous small local townships. As the country emptied, the Country Party's electoral base

⁵³ Quoted in B.D.Graham, 'The Present Standing of the Australian Country Parties', *Political Science*, Wellington, 16, 1, March, 1964, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Australian Country Party (Federal), *Platform And Policy*, 24, 25 January, 1949.

diminished. In compensation, the Country Party argued at both state and federal levels for a system of electoral weightage in order to provide adequate representation of country interests and to prevent the erosion of its power base. This was one issue on which the Country Party stood alone.

Electoral Weightage

Naturally enough, the Country Party chose not to advocate a system of rural over-representation as simply a device for maintaining its share of power. Advocacy along these lines was not unknown, at least in the ranks of the Queensland National Party where one of its ministers, Russ. Hinze made a celebrated statement suggesting to Premier Joh. Bjelke-Petersen that 'If you want the boundaries rigged, let me do it and we'll stay in power for ever.'⁵⁵ At the same time, there is no doubt that many rural people felt that they had a legitimate case for over-representation. The Country Party justified the rejection of the democratic convention of 'one vote, one value' in three major ways; that weightage was necessary to overcome the difficulties in representation posed by a small population thinly distributed over a large area; that rural people produce such a large proportion of Australia's wealth and export income - the 'backbone of the nation' argument - that they deserved significant representation in parliament; and that representation based on numerically equal electorates would deprive rural Australians of an adequate say. Without electoral weightage, the Country Party suggested, country voices would be drowned by the clamour of city voters whose interests and values were different from rural people. Not only would this be detrimental to country people, the party argued, but to the nation as a whole. According to John McEwan, Australia needed 'the voice of the man from the rural area, from the outback area, the man who is speaking for the export industries, which if they aren't sufficiently catered for will fail and drag the whole of Australia down with them.'⁵⁶

Similar arguments in favour of rural over-representation were put forward even more forcefully at the state level. Sir Michael Bruxner in New South Wales argued in favour of a zonal system with smaller quotas for country seats on the grounds that 'one man, one vote' discriminated against country people. He

⁵⁵ Quoted in D. Wells, *The Deep North*, Outback Press, Collingwood, 1979, p. 87.

⁵⁶ Quoted in T. McVeigh, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

referred to the difficulties country people had in getting to polling booths in flooded country. He raised the 'tyranny of distance problem' which country members face and to cap his arguments he put forward the view that everyone's living depends on the primary producer.⁵⁷ The Country Party in Queensland had the benefit of a zonal system which had been introduced originally by the Labor Party. Once the Country Party achieved power (later as the National Party), it refined and maintained the system in which votes cast in rural zones were worth up to three times the votes cast in the populous South East of the state.⁵⁸ Supporters found this easy to justify:

I do not see any unfairness in Western Queensland electorates having, say, 8000 electors, while city seats have 22,000. In my book anyone living west of a line drawn through Mt. Garnet and Roma deserves three votes just for living there.

Further, of the 8000 individuals of a western electorate, the greater proportion would be directly involved in the production of something eatable, wearable, or exportable. Out of 22,000 city voters, the greater would t [sic] produce anything that could be eaten, worn or exported. They spend unproductive lives sitting behind desks adding up endless columns of figures, or standing behind counters handing over goods (more than likely, imported) to other unproductive hands. And all expecting every cent of the basic wage which, ultimately, has to come from actual production.

Surely, a western man who produces 500 fat bullocks a year (droughts, fires, floods, ticks, and distance permitting) should be entitled to more representation than a man who never produced anything in his life? ⁵⁹

At the Commonwealth level, country areas acquired their electoral advantage through the failure of electoral redistribution to keep up with population movements from the country to the city. In this way, country votes over time came to be worth more than city votes. The Liberal Party attempted to remedy this in 1962 by proposing a redistribution which would have cost the Country Party at least two seats. The Country Party fought tooth and nail to maintain the *status quo*, which, when combined with preferential voting, gave it far more power and influence than its strict numerical support warranted. In fighting to

⁵⁷ D. Aitkin, *The Colonel* p. 99.

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission's *Report on Queensland Legislative Assembly Electoral System* presented in November, 1990, recommended the maintenance of a modest degree of electoral weightage in a small number of remote area electorates.

⁵⁹ 'City folk unproductive', Correspondence, *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 19 August, 1989, p. 6.

maintain their power base Country Party politicians were ruthless. John McEwan as leader of the Country Party and Deputy Prime Minister, threatened to vote with the Labor Party against the proposed amendments.

In view of the Country Party's opposition to redistribution, Sir Robert Menzies abandoned the attempt and agreed to a Country Party proposal that the Electoral Act be amended to take into account the disabilities of country voters. When the Act was redrafted in 1965, it did not directly provide for country quotas, but it asked the electoral commissioners to take into account certain factors which implied that country electorates ought to have smaller numbers than city electorates.⁶⁰ This, however, was a reprieve for the Country Party, rather than a commutation of sentence. The Whitlam government reduced the electoral tolerance from 20% to 10%. Despite Country Party protestations, Malcolm Fraser refused a return to the 20% tolerance. The inexorable drift of population from the country to the city, which the Country Party had been unable to prevent, meant that eventually some country seats were abolished. The criticism of the party became more strident and the economic rationalists began to be listened to. The political environment was changing. Recognition that this was so led to movements to broaden the appeal of the party and eventually to its change of name.

⁶⁰ D. Aitkin, 'Political Review', *Australian Quarterly*, September, 1968, p. 84.