

PART THREE: THE POST-WAR SEARCH FOR ONE VOICE

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TWO BIG UNIONS

INTRODUCTION In 1943 two organisations were established with both aiming to give farmers a united national voice. One was the Primary Producers' Council of Australia (later named the National Farmers' Union) whose constituent members were the national commodity-based organisations such as the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation, the Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation and the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation. It has been loosely called a "federation of federations" and farmers were only linked to the PPC through their membership of state affiliates of the commodity-based federations. The new organisation held to the Australian tradition of farmers uniting under the banner of the product or products they produced, not as vocational farmers.

The other organisation was the Australian Primary Producers' Union, which broke with tradition by enrolling farmers as individuals and attempting to bring them together for the common good of the agricultural sector. This chapter will show how the APPU suffered for its idealistic stance and eventually abandoned it in the interests of achieving unity with the National Farmers' Union as a major step in its quest for one voice. When the APPU and the NFU united as the Australian Farmers' Federation in 1969, there was a vital section of rural Australia missing—the graziers.

Chapter Five covers the next unity drive which began in the late 1960s when far-sighted farm leaders realised that the dream of primary producers speaking with one voice would remain just a dream unless farmers and graziers could overcome their deep divisions. Antagonism between the two groups surfaced last century when they fought over land. Bad feelings were exacerbated in the second half of this century when the graziers stoutly resisted attempts to end the free wool auction system. When you add the differences in property size, wealth and social class which widened

the gap between the two groups, the task of unity seemed Herculean.

WHY COMMODITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS?

National unity was something farmers always talked about, but in an industry dominated by the large commodity-based groups it was a difficult concept to achieve. Government policy for agriculture was geared to particular industries like wheat, wool and dairy. In wheat, for example, the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation negotiated with the Federal Government on behalf of all wheatgrowers, whether AWF members or not. The Department of Primary Industry was divided into commodity divisions and close relations developed between the leaders of commodity organisations and the public servants who headed those commodity divisions. Campbell writes that:

Perhaps the predominant characteristic of Australian farm organisations is the fact that they are, in general, commodity-based rather than representative of farmers as a vocational group. In this they contrast markedly with the National Farmers' Union in Great Britain, the American Farm Bureau Federation in the United States and major farm organisations in other countries. With the exception of the Australian Primary Producers' Union, which is a comparative newcomer, and a few special cases like the non-political Agricultural Bureaux of New South Wales and South Australia, the interests of each of the major farm organisations are restricted to a closely related group of commodities. If wheat is under discussion, one thinks automatically of the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation in the federal sphere or the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association in

New South Wales-and similarly with other commodities and other states.¹

The reasons why the national farm lobby was dominated by commodity-based groups were varied. In earlier chapters we saw how the colonial woolgrowers united in 1890, as the Pastoralists' Federal Council of Australia, to fight the demand of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union for a "closed shop", and 30 years later, as the Graziers' Federal Council, it established the Australian Woolgrowers' Council specifically to deal with problems arising with the disposal of wool stocks accumulated during World War One. This body was re-absorbed into the Graziers' Federal Council in 1960 under the new title of 'The Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers' Council and continued the AWC's role as the federal voice of the large wool and meat producers.

We also saw how small farmers came together as the Farmers and Settlers' Association of NSW in 1893, first to demand that arable land be released from the grip of the graziers, and later to become the voice of small wheat and wool growers in NSW. Later still, as the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association, it would play a dominant role in the affairs of both the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation and the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation. The AWGC and the AWMPF respectively represented the conservative and radical wings of the wool and meat industries. The former, until it succumbed in the early 1970s and accepted a wool reserve price, maintained adherence to the free auction system and the latter was determined to end any role for the distrusted middleman and secure organised marketing under grower control.

In 1931 the AWF was established by radical wheatgrowers concerned that the existing farm organisations were not doing enough to force government to introduce controlled marketing for wheat and guaranteed prices. The AWF became the sole voice of the wheat industry at the federal level, and the state-based farm

¹K.O. Campbell, *Australian Farm Organisations and Agricultural Policy*. Current Affairs Bulletin, Vol.10, No 2. December, 1966. p.112.

organisations concerned with wheat became affiliates. After 1939, when the AWMPF was formed to give small woolgrowers their own federal voice and to end the domination of the AWGC in wool policy making, the AWF and the AWMPF shared the same state affiliates.

In the 1960s, when many NSW graziers moved into wheat to take advantage of relatively high returns compared with wool, the Graziers' Association sought, and eventually gained, affiliation with the AWF. Their traditional federal voice, the AWGC, could not get the ear of the Federal Government on wheat matters, so strong were the links between government, the Department of Primary Industry and the AWF. The Graziers' Association took four years of constant pressure to gain admission to the AWF, and then had to promise that it would never attempt to set up a rival wheatgrower organisation. The AWF was determined to preserve its role as the voice of wheatgrowers and their representative in negotiations with the Federal Government.

The consolidation of the Australian farm lobby into tight commodity groupings was a feature of the first half of the 20th. century. The Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation was formed in 1942 to represent all milk producers, most of whom had earlier left their state farm organisations because they believed their interests were not being catered for. Chislett gives the example of NSW, where during the World War One dairyfarmers were unhappy being represented by the FSA, believing it was not doing enough to protect their interests as returns for butterfat fell after price controls were introduced under the wartime Necessary Commodities Act.² In 1916, they formed another specialist group, the Primary Producers' Union of NSW, and it quickly became involved, along with dairyfarmer bodies in other states, in wartime schemes for controlling the supply and shipment of butter to Britain. This marked the beginning of the participation in national marketing arrangements by dairyfarmer organisations. Such

²G.D'a Chislett, *Primary Produce: Organisations*, Chapter 5 of *Agriculture in the Australian Economy*, edited by D.B. Williams, Sydney, 1967, 1st. Edition. p.110.

participation strengthened the pre-occupation of dairyfarmers with uniting along commodity lines.

The Australian Cane Growers' Council stands out in stark contrast to other national farm organisations in that membership of its dominant affiliate, the Queensland Cane Growers' Council, is compulsory. The QCGC, which comprises 96 per cent of all Australian cane growers, is a statutory body established under the Queensland Primary Producers and Marketing Act. This enables the State Government to "declare" a commodity and oblige farmers to pay a levy to their designated farm organisation. In Australia's most regulated rural industry, with farm quotas, mill quotas, a single selling authority and pooled prices it seems little wonder that with all that compulsion that there was also "compulsory unionism". Although the sugar industry has entered a period of gradual deregulation of production and marketing, compulsory membership of the QCGA remains in force.

The dried fruits industry was early in getting organised. In 1907, the Dried Fruits Trusts of Mildura and Renmark united to form the Australian Dried Fruits Association. This followed their success, before the turn of the century, in setting minimum prices for dried fruits. The ADFA, as a voluntary organisation, owed its success in maintaining control over its industry to the fact that membership extended beyond growers to fruit packers and marketing firms. Unlike wheatgrowers, who were determined from the early days to end the role of the middlemen by having all wheat acquired by a statutory marketing authority, the dried fruit growers joined the middlemen, mainly grower co-operatives, in the one organisation. Australia has been a land of specialised farming, in contrast to the predominantly mixed farming system of Europe. The sugar farmers of North Queensland have grown virtually little else, while the dairy farmers of coastal NSW have had pigs as a sideline because of the availability of skim milk for feed. In the drier regions of Australia the choice is often only between sheep and cattle, with cattle the best survivors in the hotter northern climates.

The ties between federal governments and commodity-based farm organisations were strengthened by several factors, including the

development of Australia into a major exporter of farm produce. Under the Australian Constitution, the Federal Government has responsibility for overseas trade. It grants or denies export licences, guarantees the quality of produce exported and negotiates trade agreements. Another factor was the demand by farmers for federal government intervention in the marketing of their products. Campbell writes:

From the appearance of the first signs of Commonwealth Government interest in rural policy in the 1920s (which was prompted in part by the rural organisations themselves), the main focus of organisational pressures has moved to the federal level. The expansion of agricultural administration in Canberra after World War Two through the medium of the Department of Commerce and Agriculture, and subsequently the Departments of Trade and Primary Industry, and more particularly the growth of Federal Government subventions and assistance to the rural industries, has naturally been reflected in the activities of the organisations.³

Farmers urged the Federal Government to become involved in their industries through demands for organised marketing, and from the early 1920s there was an official Country Party operating in the Parliament, declaring itself the true representative of farmers and the rural community. With its export powers, the Commonwealth granted export licenses. Marketing boards, with trading monopolies, were established for a variety of products including wheat, sugar, dairy products and dried fruit. To those boards were appointed a majority of grower-members and often a grower chairman from names put forward by the relevant commodity organisations. For example, all 10 grower-members of the Australian Wheat Board were from the AWF with two from the relevant affiliate in each mainland state. In the case of the Australian Wool Board, growers members were split between the two federal bodies representing wool, the AWGC and the AWMPF.

³*Op. cit.* p.114.

The 12 statutory marketing boards increased the degree of contact between federal ministers and their public service advisers and prominent members of the commodity-based farm organisations. There was formal and informal contact, assisted by the fact that many board members were both farm organisation leaders and members of the Country Party. The former Minister for Trade and Country Party leader, John McEwen, occasionally took board members on overseas trade negotiations. He said in 1964 that:

What I did as Minister in charge of the negotiations was not merely to consult with this body and every other organised body in Australia but actually to take to Brussels and to London with me representatives of the organised growers or producers. If they couldn't sit at the table they were in a room outside where I or my officials could nick out and have a word with them. This is a pretty good relationship between government and primary industry.⁴

The relationship between the leaders of the commodity organisations and the Coalition Government during its unbroken 23 year reign, between 1949 and 1972, could only be described as very close. The notable exception was the AWGC, whose major affiliate, the Graziers' Association of NSW, was, as noted in an earlier chapter, accused by McEwen of harbouring anti-Country Party conspirators. The farm leaders looked to the government to legislate programs to the benefit of producers of specific commodities and the Government, in turn, saw the support of the organisations as important for electoral success.

Not everybody was happy with the domination of the farm lobby by commodity-based organisations. One of the earliest criticisms came from S.M. Wadham, Professor of Agriculture at Melbourne University. In his dissenting comments to Chapter IX of the 10th.

⁴Address to the Australian Primary Producers Union Annual Conference, Canberra, October 27, 1964.

Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission, Wadham was cynical of the commission's call for the establishment of an all-embracing farm organisation, one that would work in the interests of the nation, as well as agriculture, and include farm workers, consumers and representatives of manufacturing, marketing bodies and local government. To be called the National Council of Farmers, it was an idealistic concept devised by a commission impressed by the work of the War Agricultural Committees under which farmers had co-operated with the wartime government to boost production of rural commodities. The commission hoped that this co-operative spirit would carry over into peace time. Wadham dissented from the opinions of his fellow commissioners, declaring that he was dubious of imposing an organisation of farmers from the outside while the idealism so admired by the commission was lacking in the existing farm organisations. He said:

The Commission took evidence from a large number of farm organisations. Certain of them were characterised by broad views and a great understanding of the problems of their industries, but these were the exceptions rather than the rule. Many of the witnesses lacked breadth of outlook on the real problems, and were often almost solely concerned with demanding a higher price for their product, without thought as to the efficiency of the producers or the fact that they have responsibilities as well as rights and that they are part of the national economic structure.⁵

Two decades later, similar views were expressed by Campbell who castigated farm organisations, with the exception of the AWGC, for ignoring the broad scene. He wrote:

The limited range of interest and activities of the Australian farm organisations as compared with

⁵*Commercial Policy in Relation to Agriculture*. Tenth Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission. Canberra, 1946. Dissenting comments to Chapter 1X. p.237.

their overseas counterparts is probably to be explained by their commodity-oriented basis, by restricted finances, the insularity of outlook of farmer members and, until the last decade at least, their employment of ill-equipped executive staff has also contributed to the situation. On the financial side, there is evidence of an attitude of parsimony towards any activity which does not promise direct benefits in the form of increased returns to the industry.⁶

Those commodity organisations, well-entrenched in stabilisation and price support schemes, directed most of their attention to negotiations with the government on price guarantees, with little real concern for the broad issues affecting the agricultural sector. To say they had a blinkered view of the world is not an understatement. Only the AWGC, among the commodity federations, took seriously the role of fighting to lower Australia's tariff walls and entered the industrial tribunals to argue against increases in national wage rates. In such a situation real unity at the federal level, in the form of a National Farmers' Federation, seemed little more than a pipe dream.

The success of some commodity-based farm organisations was obvious. Their representatives comprised the majority of members on all commodity marketing boards, they were consulted by government on industry policy and they had achieved many objectives such as stabilisation schemes, fixed domestic prices and government contributions to research and promotion. Yet, there remained unrest in the rural sector that other lobbies, notably secondary industry and the trade union movement, were attracting more government attention than they were. Established in Canberra by the 1960s were the well-resourced offices of the Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia, the Heavy Engineering Manufacturers' Association, the Australian Mining Industry Council and others. Their representatives were on hand all the time and had built up close association with ministers of state and senior

⁶Campbell, *op.cit.* p.121.

public servants, especially those in Trade Department, whose minister, McEwen, lent a receptive ear to calls for higher protection.

Most Australian farm organisations had a narrow outlook and if they at all recognised that issues like interest rates, tariff levels, taxation policy and industrial awards affected farming they failed to demonstrate it adequately to the government. They gave the impression that their only real aim was to get as much financial support out of the government as possible. However, they were no doubt inspired in this attitude by the prevailing mood of the post-World War Two era when manufacturers sought higher tariff protection and trade unions demanded higher wages and improved working conditions with no thought for the impact on other sectors of the economy. Farm organisations were no different from other pressure groups.

As pointed out in an earlier chapter, some federal commodity organisations operated on a shoestring. The AWF shared a secretary with its South Australian affiliate, the South Australian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association, and the secretarial services for the AWMPF were undertaken by its NSW affiliate, the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association. In the fight for members and to retain existing members, some farm organisations kept their fees low. This meant a lack of money to employ economists and other professionals to prepare submissions of quality, or the funds to set up an office in Canberra. Only the graziers had the wealth and resources, the result of higher membership fees applied to their larger and wealthier producers and property investment, to take on the broad issues. Apart from the resources, the graziers, as primary producers operating in the free market, also had the inclination to tackle such issues. However, by the mid-1960s more farm leaders were becoming aware of the fact that if they were to match it with the large, well-established secondary industry 'lobbies' there had to be unity. By pooling resources they could put in the effort that had so far been missing.

The struggle of the more visionary of the farm leaders to establish a single farm organisation in Canberra to represent all primary producers was long and tough. Not only had some farm leaders to

be convinced that they should give up their existing empires and positions of influence but a way had to be found to overcome Australia's traditional system of commodity-based organisations that ran their own affairs with little regard to the rural community at large. Australia's experiments with the National Farmers' Union and the Australian Farmers' Federation, as part of the search for an antipodean model of the National Farmers Union of England and Wales, were not successful because the commodity-based organisations remained dominant, conceding little to the all-purpose groups but the right to talk about general matters that did not intrude on their domain. Every member body of the NFU and the AFF had the right to have any item removed from a conference agenda. The Australian Primary Producers' Union, an idealistic attempt to unite farmers as individuals, was forced to alter its own constitution to allow autonomy to its commodity divisions before it could gain representation on advisory or marketing bodies, or successfully negotiate amalgamation with the NFU.

THE TWO BIG UNIONS

Before the 1940s the only successful attempt at national unity (partial unity because grazier organisations were not included) was the Australian Farmers' Federal Organisation. It had been established by the farmers and settlers' movement in 1915 to push for wheat pooling, to combat the drive by trade unionists to extend industrial awards to the rural sector, to set guidelines for endorsing Country Party candidates and to act as the party's secretariat. It faded away after 1926 when the Federal Country Party decided it was time to set up its own secretariat.

The next effort at unity came a year after Australia hosted the 1938 Empire Producers' Conference in Sydney as one of the many events celebrating Australia's 150th. year of European settlement. That conference, sponsored by the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales, had the task of establishing an organisation that would embrace all farmers of the British Empire, and this required unity within each individual country. While the Empire dream failed to take off, the Sydney meeting inspired Australia's federal commodity organisations to consider uniting under the one banner.

Details of the meeting held in Canberra in April, 1939, are sketchy but as one conference delegate, J.L. Shute, explained four years later at a meeting of farm organisations in Sydney, only about a third of those invited to the Canberra conference had "come into line".⁷

Shute recommended that all decisions taken at Canberra be pushed aside and a fresh start be made to forming a truly national body. This was accepted by the meeting, comprising representatives of the AWF, the Graziers' Federal Council, the Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation and the Australian Wool Producers' Federation, later called the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation. The meeting's chairman, R.C. Gibson of the ADFP, said that what farmers needed was a body that could speak for them with one voice. While the Canberra and Sydney meetings were inspired by the 1938 visit to Australia of representatives of the NFU from Britain, there was definitely no intention that the new Australian body would imitate the NFU by adopting its system of accepting farmers as individual members. Most Australian farmers were too steeped in a commodity mode to seek anything other than a federation of commodity-based federations.

The minutes of the 1943 Sydney meeting made this clear, with Resolution 1 reading : *If an Australian Primary Producers' Council were to be formed it should be restricted to those primary producers' organisations which are organised on an Australian wide basis.* This was adopted along with Resolution 2 that ruled a line between what a council could say on behalf of all farmers and what had to be left to its constituent member groups. Commodity matters were to remain the prerogative of commodity federations, with the Council speaking only on matters of common interest. In other words, the commodity groups were not prepared to hand over real power to a central body, meaning that little would really change within the Australian farm lobby. When the organisations met

⁷See minutes of a *Meeting of Certain Primary Producer Bodies, organised on an Australian basis, to consider a proposal for the formation of an Australian Primary Producers' Council.* Held at History House, Sydney, June 18, 1943. Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University. N18. Box 27.

again in Sydney on October 8 they came prepared to form the Primary Producers' Council of Australia, with one exception. The AWF was missing. It advised by telegram that a motion had been carried opposing joining the PPC but the matter would be re-considered at the next AWF meeting. Soon afterwards the AWF became the fourth member of the PPC.⁸

In the same year as the PPC was born another organisation, also intent on giving farmers one voice, was established. The Australian Primary Producers' Union was formed in Warrnambool, Victoria, in September, 1943, with the principal aim of uniting into one Commonwealth-wide union all sections of primary production. According to Trebeck, the AP³U was launched in the spirit of idealism which characterised plans for post-war reconstruction in 1943. Its sponsors were influenced by the Department of War Organisation of Industry, whose views on primary industry were reflected in the Tenth Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission.⁹

As reported earlier in this chapter, the Rural Reconstruction Commission advocated the establishment of a National Council of Farmers which would subjugate group and individual interests for the common good. Farm workers, consumers and the three levels of government would be represented on the council, with everyone looking out for the national interest. When the Commission was writing its report the two big unions had been established, allowing it to see how both fitted its ideal farm organisation. The Primary Producers' Council, the commission said, was a step in the right direction, but it noted that in its short existence it "has been inclined to give more attention to what it regards as the rights of farmers than to their responsibilities".¹⁰ However, the council was imbued with "patriotic motives" and could be incorporated into the

⁸Minutes of meeting. ANU archive. N18, Box 27.

⁹D.B. Trebeck, *Farmer Organisations*. Chapter Nine of *Agriculture in the Australian Economy*, third edition, edited by D.B. Williams, Sydney, 1990. p.132.

¹⁰*Op. cit.* p.200.

commission's proposed organisation. The commission seemed to smile a little more kindly upon the Australian Primary Producers' Union, saying that while it was yet to extend outside Victoria, "it would seem that the enthusiasm and idealism of this movement also would find adequate outlet and expression in the proposed new national organisation".¹¹

Whatever the commission thought of the APPU, the PPC was far from happy with the emergence of an organisation that broke the Australian tradition by enrolling members as farmers first and playing down what commodities they produced. At the third meeting of the council in Sydney on June 26, 1944, a letter was read from the APPU inviting the PPC chairman, R.C. Gibson, to a meeting at Warrnambool in July, where a constitution for the Union would be decided. Gibson, who represented the Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation on the PPC, was not impressed with the invitation from a group that had done the bulk of its early recruiting among dairyfarmers. The PPC and the APPU were in opposition, Gibson said, as the union had individual membership. He was supported by T.W. Lilley, of the AWF, who stated that the APPU was full of energy and hoping to sweep through Australia getting people to unite in one big body, but it was on the wrong track and he urged Gibson to go to Warrnambool and "put them on the right track". The APPU was a "menace", according to Lilley, and was broadcasting across the state (Victoria) and ignoring other farm organisations.¹²

A delegate from the Graziers' Federal Council, H.R. Cowdrey, told the same meeting that there was no doubt that the APPU was a definite menace to the organised primary industries of Australia. T.C. Stott, of the AWF, said Australia already had too many farm organisations, but suggested that the APPU might cater for people beyond the scope of the PPC. Such people were entitled to a voice, he argued, but the question was "would they adopt our principles?".

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.202.

¹² ANU Archives, Z83, Box27.

Gibson re-entered the long debate on the merits of the APPU, saying that when it first called a meeting in Victoria, 800 people attended and they decided to set up an organisation, fix a fee, appoint a secretary and share an office but as yet there was no constitution. The Warrnambool meeting was to set a constitution. Gibson warned that the APPU target was 500,000 members at one pound a head and "the Government will listen to 500,000 members".

E.E. Dawes, of the ADFP, said he had already told the APPU that its individual membership concept was wrong and pointed them to the trade union movement as an example to follow. The unions had failed, he said, until they had formed a council of trade unions. Dawes' message to the APPU was that only a federation-style organisation could succeed. The PPC was more than a federation, it was a federation of federations and initially only commodity federations could join. The thought of an organisation within which individuals might have something to say about a product they were not producing could not be countenanced. The bulk of the minutes of the July, 1944, meeting are taken up with attacks on the APPU. This was followed by a motion requesting all PPC members to advise farmers of the council's existence.

The APPU quest for 500,000 fee-paying members obviously worried the PPC, which at the time was claiming to represent 18,000 members of the GFC, 37,700 in the AWMPF, 48,000 in the AWF and 50,000 in the ADFP. That made a grand total of 153,700 after ignoring cross-membership and the rubbery figures that made most membership estimates by farm organisations less than exact. The APPU target of 500,000 paid-up members should have been dismissed by the PPC as fanciful in the extreme, being well beyond the total number of Australian farmers.¹³

¹³Farm organisations exaggerated membership not only to impress politicians but to gain a stronger hand in negotiations on amalgamations. In 1993, the executive officer of the NSW Farmers' Association, John White, told the author that during the spate of farm amalgamations in the 1970s no

Despite the PPC's animosity towards its rival, there were, by the 1950s, feelers going out from both organisations on the question of amalgamation. Both were struggling for recognition by the Government and the wider community, were achieving little, and lacked money and skilled staff. The PPC, which in February, 1950, changed its name to the National Farmers' Union, was hamstrung by its own constituents. The federal commodity organisations gave away very little to the body they created. They maintained their right to speak exclusively on their commodity, to negotiate with the government of the day on commodity matters and held a veto on agenda items at NFU conferences. The NFU was left to speak only on matters of common interest. Some farmers must have wondered why the NFU was created in the first place if its constituents were not prepared to give it real responsibility, or even the resources to carry out the limited functions it had.

By 1957, however, the NFU had three new federal members; the Australian Cane Growers' Council, The Australian Vegetable Growers' Federation and the Federated Flax Growers' Committee. It also included four state peak organisations, the Council of Agriculture (Queensland), the Primary Producers' Council of NSW, the Chamber of Agriculture of Victoria and the New Guinea Highlands Farmers and Settlers' Association. The state bodies represented organisations confined to their respective states. The NSW council represented some 14 primary producer organisations ranging from the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association to the Associated Poultry Farmers. It was estimated that the NFU represented more than 200,000 at that stage, or some two-thirds of all primary producers.¹⁴ However, it is difficult to account for duplication of membership.

organisation trusted the others' membership claims. There will be more on this in a later chapter.

¹⁴Confidential Paper, *National Farmers' Union of Australia: Background and Appraisal*. Dated December 6, 1957. Initialled by G.D'a Chislett. ANU Archives, E266/207.

In 1965, the Australian Banana Growers' Council had joined the NFU, along with the Australian Canning Fruitgrowers' Association and the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia, and there were more state peak bodies. However, growth in membership meant little other than more paperwork, bigger conferences and a greater dispersal of material on Government policies to constituents. Long-serving NFU secretary, Alex Norquay, described part of his duties as being "a letter box for the outside world".¹⁵ It was one thing for the NFU constitution to list 23 areas of responsibility, ranging from taxation, tariffs, defence and meteorological services to animal health and noxious plants, but without adequate resources and sufficient finances it was unlikely to make much of an impact. A full time secretariat was not established until 1959 and it was 1967 before it moved its office from Sydney to Canberra.

Chislett wrote in 1967 that the NFU had been recognised by the Federal Government as a convenient medium for some purposes but in terms of influence on government policies it had not yet proved itself as influential as some of its constituent members. It had some status because it represented a combination of primary producers, but this was generally limited to including NFU representatives in Government-farmer consultations, NFU appointments to certain boards and committees and speeches by government ministers in opening NFU conferences.¹⁶ Chislett, in his December, 1957, confidential paper, said the NFU had failed to win wide recognition not just because it was inactive on national issues affecting primary industry but because "rather than having a positive status of its own it is regarded as an alternative to the Australian Primary Producers Union".¹⁷

¹⁵Quoted by J.B. Hodsdon. *Two Case Studies of Primary Industry Organisations: The National Farmers' Union of Australia and the Australian Wool Industry Conference*. Unpublished B.Ag. Ec. undergraduate thesis. University of New England. December 1965.

¹⁶In Williams (ed.) op. cit. p.115.

¹⁷p.2.

He was making the point that there was the strong feeling that Australia should have a national single voice for agriculture, and better that it be the commodity-oriented NFU rather than the APPU, where farmers joined as individuals. It was possible that without the establishment of the APPU with its missionary-like zeal for converts and commitment to unity that the NFU may have crumbled through lack of interest and financial support. The commodity federations and their state affiliates were constantly on guard against intrusions by the APPU into areas they regarded as their preserves. We shall see later how the APPU was denied representation of the Australian Wool Industry Conference, the so-called wool parliament, for some years despite its claim to have thousands of woolgrowers on its books. This was mainly due to the hostility of the AWMPF and its powerful NSW affiliate, the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association. Similarly, there were many thousands of meat producers in the APPU, but they were denied a voice in meat marketing forums.

GRAZIERS DESERT THE NFU

The NFU was severely handicapped by the ease with which constituents could withdraw, by merely giving six months notice. Being such a loosely-knit federation made the NFU extremely wary of upsetting its members, especially the powerful commodity federations. They provided the bulk of the NFU budget. Hodsdon reports that in 1964 the AWMPF, the AWF and the AWGC each contributed 2000 pounds, with the total making up 60 per cent of NFU subscriptions. He had no doubt that the large commodity organisations "subsidised" the fees of the small organisations.¹⁸ When the AWGC left the NFU in 1965 it meant a loss of about 20 per cent in annual funding, which was unlikely to be made up in other areas.

Trebeck has summarised the AWGC's departure as due to two specific reasons.¹⁹ First there was the considerable conflict between

¹⁸*Op. cit.* p.32.

¹⁹*Op. cit.* p.132.

the two organisations in the 1960s when the AWGC, through the NFU, sought to resist the use of higher tariffs as a partial substitute for import controls, which were being abandoned. Although the AWGC had been a foundation member of the NFU, it began to seriously question its value as a vehicle for tariff reform. The graziers were a lone voice amid an NFU membership that was dominated by farmers enjoying their own brand of protection and less willing to criticise a government that was providing it.

The second point of disagreement concerned a rebate on death duty. The AWGC had sought a rebate, regardless of the value of the property. However, it got little support inside the NFU where there was strong opposition to a flat rate exemption because other organisations wanted to restrict any rebate to the "small man". The age-old animosity between squatters and farmers could not be resolved because of NFU membership. Just as the Farmers and Settlers' Association arose last century to demand the break-up of the squatters' sheep runs so, in the 1960s, the wheat-sheep farmers were happy to see hefty death duties force the sale and subdivision of large grazing properties. This was a stark reminder to the advocates of a single voice for agriculture that ingrained class antagonism was a significant hurdle in the path to unity.

Chislett puts the AWGC resignation in simple terms, saying it was due to the fact that "the interests of the unprotected wool and meat producers had proved to be not sufficiently in harmony with those of other members to warrant the expense of maintaining membership".²⁰ The AWGC was a loner inside the NFU, and was particularly irked by the weight of representation given to each member group and each commodity. Restrictions on the number of delegates at conferences usually meant the under-representation of the large organisations and an over-representation of smaller groups such as vegetable growers, grape growers and pig producers. At the same time, the graziers saw an inequitable balance of delegates on the basis of major and minor commodities. The progress made in the 1960s towards the amalgamation of the

²⁰*Op. cit.* p.115.

APPU and the NFU increased the concern of the AWGC about its future role in farm unity. Such an amalgamation would add to the influence of small farmers because of the APPU's adopted role of absorbing groups of farmers who could not find a place in the larger commodity-based organisations. Campbell saw the proposed merger of the APPU and the NFU into an Australian Farmers' Federation "as one of the reasons motivating the AWGC to withdraw from the NFU".²¹ Hodsdon takes this a bit further, claiming that "the AWGC was troubled by the possible modification of the vital veto provision in the proposed AFF constitution", adding that the grounds for this belief seems to lie in the antipathy of the AWGC to the APPU. The AWGC, he claims, was plagued by the spectre of a general purpose organisation, the APPU, strengthening the cause of protected commodity interests inside the proposed AFF.²²

The AWGC's NSW affiliate had actually warned the NFU two years earlier of its concern over the unity talks between it and the APPU. The general secretary of the Graziers' Association, S.S. Ick-Hewins, wrote to the NFU's Unity Study Group pointing out what the graziers saw as the difficulties involved in achieving unity. Ick-Hewins' concern centred around decision-making that had to involve the myriad of small farm industries then attached to the APPU. That body, he said, sought unity through the machinery of a unitarian organisation and the Graziers' Association held that unity had a better chance of prospering through a federal organisation. Ick-Hewins believed there was nothing to prevent amalgamation as long as the APPU "accepts the idea of federalism".²³

Former NFU secretary, Alex Norquay, put the AWGC position on unity a little more bluntly, telling the author that the AWGC

²¹K.O. Campbell, *Australian Farm Organisations and Agricultural Policy*. Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics. Vol.10, No.2, December 1966. p.116.

²²*Op. cit.* p.27.

²³The text of the Ick-Hewins letter was distributed to AWGC affiliates on January 24, 1963, under the authority of AWGC executive officer, W.P. Nicholas. ANU Archives Z83, box 16.

regarded the APPU as "a mob of hicks" and class-conscious young graziers thought it would be crazy for the AFF "to let banana growers have a say".²⁴ It was not only the graziers who held superior attitudes, Norquay said, because the staff of their organisations "had an enhanced picture of themselves" and had tried to run the NFU during the years when a grazier was president. NFU business was sent out on AWGC letterhead with the NFU informed later.

The reason for withdrawal presented to the public was simply the cost of membership. AWGC president, T.B.C. Walker, said the council believed services received were not commensurate with the cost of membership, and the planned move of the NFU office to Canberra would put fees up even higher.²⁵ The AWGC fears that the APPU's price for joining the AFF was a modification of the right of all NFU members to have items removed from the agenda (the so-called veto) proved unfounded because, as we will see later in this chapter, it was the APPU which was forced to give ground and water down its charter of individual membership.

APPU AND ITS STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

The APPU was up against the odds from the beginning despite the fear it engendered among the commodity-based organisations of a strong and very aggressive competitor for members and influence with government. The idealism that impressed the Rural Reconstruction Commission failed to get it the ear of Government and it had to do with the odd kind word, such as Prime Minister Robert Menzies telling its 1957 federal conference that he had watched the growth of the APPU from its early days with great interest and that "it is far better for heads of governments to talk to a group of people who represent a large mass of people".²⁶ However, it was McEwen and not Menzies who talked to farm

²⁴Interview Sydney, January 28, 1992.

²⁵See *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 30, 1965.

²⁶Reported in the *Australian Producer*, journal of the NSW Division of the APPU, November 8, 1956.

organisations and appointed their members to marketing boards and advisory committees. There was no kudos for a government favouring an organisation that saw its role as uniting farmers for the common good. The big commodity federations negotiated the headline-making deals with government. They were the ones closest to McEwen and the Country Party.

The APPU privately conceded in 1953 that its first decade had been a dour struggle for recognition. In a confidential paper circulated within its Federal Council it bemoaned the "hard core" resistance it was striking at the federal level and alleged that:

Many of the recognised organisations contribute to certain political party funds, and it is known that withdrawal of contributions has been threatened if the Union were recognised.²⁷

This allegation may have been borne out of the frustration at not being taken seriously, rather than hard facts. At that time the only farm organisation that openly admitted it made financial contributions to the Country Party was the Graziers' Association of NSW. The Association had ended official links with the NSW branch of the party in 1945 but continued to provide funds and help in distributing election campaign material. What was clear, however, was the opposition of most farm organisations to the APPU and their determination to hold on to existing privileges, including access to Cabinet ministers.

The APPU confidential minute said that Mr McEwen (then Minister for Commerce and Agriculture) "whilst not willing to take any steps to recognise the Union, and only willing to see us if pressed, is not antagonistic to the Union". But Mr Pollard (Reg Pollard, Opposition agriculture spokesman) was "violently opposed" to the APPU and this stemmed from his membership and connection with the Victorian Dairyfarmers' Association. Pollard had branded the APPU, which had enticed members from the VDA, a "disruptive force", the

²⁷Confidential minute dated August 12, 1953. ANU Archives N18/29.

minute said, but he was prepared to meet its deputations. The APPU federal council urged its state branches and individual members to work hard at gaining recognition for the APPU by seeking meetings with members of parliament, ministers and departmental officers who had sway with ministers. The meetings would bring politicians and their advisers up to date with APPU policies. The minute concluded by stating that:

If the State Ministers could be induced to bring up the question of recognition at the Aust. Agric. Council, the Commonwealth Minister is bound to take notice of the Council's (the APPU) recommendations.

After 10 years in the farm lobby business, the APPU sounded just a little pathetic in its plea for recognition, but it was paying a heavy price for departing from the norm and trying to unite Australian farmers as individuals, rather than as members of commodity federations. The APPU, however, remained true to its dream of full unity for Australian farmers and was always ready to negotiate with the NFU at the federal level, and with NFU affiliates and other bodies at the state level, on the question of unity. However, it quickly found out that it would not get very far down the unity trail unless it gave greater autonomy to its commodity divisions. After all, that was what unity, in the eyes of the traditional farm organisations, was all about. The traditionalists were federalists who favoured a system like that spelt out under the Australian Constitution, where powers were assumed to be held by the states (read, commodity organisations) unless specifically granted to the Commonwealth (read, central council).

The constituents of the NFU gave it little power and could veto the discussion of any item, while the APPU believed, at least at the start, that the majority view of members should, in the end, prevail over those of the commodity divisions. It was clear from the time both bodies emerged in 1943 that the federalists of the NFU (then called the Primary Producers' Council) were not going to give ground to the unitarians of the APPU. The APPU, however, was to

grant its commodity groups greater autonomy: first to gain representation on the Austral an Wool Industry Conference and, second, to unite with the NFU as the Australian Farmers' Federation. The pressure on the APPU to conform meant that the AFF was really no advance on the NFU when it came to establishing a "single voice" for Australian farmers and real power remained where it had always been, with the commodity-based federations.

In the 1970s the architects of the National Farmers' Federation were well aware of the problems that confronted the AFF and the NFU and put a considerable effort into devising a constitution that would put the NFF executive more "up front" and make the commodity councils less prominent. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

PUTTING MORE FIGHT IN THE DOG.

When the APPU president, S.S. Donelan, addressed the 1961 conference of the NFU, he reiterated his organisation's deep concern with farm unity and gave vent to the common view among farmers that, as a pressure group, they were no match for the industrial, trade union and professional lobbies in getting the government's attention. He said:

These groups wage a sort of economic war among themselves and usually against primary producers. The situation now, as we know, is that primary producers are not holding their own in the dogfight. As they become more efficient their numbers dwindle: consequently they exert less electoral influence than formerly. The size of the producers' dog is less. The remedy is to put more fight into the dog: to make him a better equipped and trained fighter. Greater cohesion and solidarity is required in general matters. Ultimately there must be only

one voice in each industry at both State and Federal,
if the industries are to have real power.²⁸

The NFU president, A.F. Havard, said in a radio address the same year that:

It is high time that primary producers welded themselves into a fighting force with sufficient co-ordinated know-how to gain recognition and respect as a body whose considered opinion is worth seeking.²⁹

The two organisations were both suffering a lack of recognition in an arena dominated by the commodity federations. Unity was one of the few significant topics they could freely expound upon and stir up emotions. According to Harman, the phrase "to speak with one voice" had even been adopted by farmers who did not belong to any farm organisation. Unity had become an obsession with most farmers, he said, but what exactly was meant by unity was seldom explained and the unity enthusiasts saw the people who opposed them as being "pig-headed, prejudiced or ultra-conservative".³⁰

Harman argued that the call for unity on the basis that other interests were better organised and therefore more successful was "simple almost to an extreme". Few advocates explained how one big union of farmers would secure greater political influence when government policy was more than a product of group influence or compromise solutions reached between competing groups. Perhaps, Harman states, the success of a pressure group is not just related to its membership or its finances but more to its cohesiveness, the skill of its leaders and the degree to which its policies conform to

²⁸National Farmers' Union of Australia, 1961 Annual Conference. Selected Addresses. ANU Archives Z83/36.

²⁹Quoted by Grant Harman, *To Speak with One Voice: Australian Farm Organisations and the Quest for Unity*. Work-In-Progress Seminar. Australian National University. May 10, 1967. p.2. ANU Archives Z83/36.

³⁰*Ibid.* p.1.

the prevailing political culture. It is also possible for a group to be successful in exerting influences in some areas and not in others. Few would disagree, he said, that farmers have probably been more influential than other interests with regard to marketing policies.

It appears that the APPU and the NFU were down playing the success of commodity federations when we consider that, in 1961, wheatfarmers were in the middle of their third successive five year stabilisation scheme, dairyfarmers were enjoying a \$27 million a year butterfat production bounty and margarine manufacturers were labouring under a 16,000 tons annual production quota imposed by state government at the behest of dairyfarmers. Australian consumers paid heavily for the influence of the farm lobby on Government through high domestic prices fixed by farmer-controlled marketing boards and being denied access to cheaper imported foods because of high tariffs or import embargoes. Yet, the strong feeling remained in the rural sector that it was not getting a fair go, and that speaking with one voice would change the situation. A merger of the NFU and the APPU was, to many, a major move in that direction.

However, in the 1960s, the graziers were opposed to NFU-APPU unity, rejecting the opinion that increased size meant greater power and concerned that uniting the two organisations could merely increase the voice of the protected rural industries. In his presidential address to the 1966 conference of the Graziers' Association of NSW, Bruce Wright said the catch phrase, "to speak with one voice", conjured up a vision of massed primary producers miraculously reduced to, or intimidated into, unanimity and all roaring the same thing.³¹ Wright mused that it was no wonder that politicians gave considerable support to one big farm union, never having to again choose between conflicting policies:

In my view we should not be concerned about the convenience of government or of political parties.....to force into a common organisation

³¹Quoted by Harman, Work-in-Progress Seminar. p.7.

interests which are not ideologically homogeneous must-and does-lead to the suppression of ideas, to intolerable delays in evolving policy and the emergence of watered down compromise lacking in the vigour of conviction. I fear the regimented suppression of opinion far more than I do the consequences of Government being confronted with conflicting policies.

However, a decade later, the Graziers' Association forged unity with its former arch rival, the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association of NSW, first under the banner of the Livestock and Grain Producers' Association and later as the NSW Farmers' Association. This story and the role of NSW in securing federal unity under the banner of the National Farmers' Federation in 1979 will be told in later chapters. In the 1960s, however, the AWGC and the Graziers' Association were more concerned about their bedfellows in the all-embracing farm pressure group that would follow a NFU-APPU marriage. The AWGC left the NFU because its forums were dominated by the representatives of rural industries that were well-enmeshed in McEwen's protection web and it feared that amalgamation between the NFU and the APPU into an Australian Farmers' Federation would leave it further on the outer.

Talks on amalgamation between the NFU and the APPU had been in progress more than 15 years before Bruce Wright warned his association that unity could benefit politicians more than farmers. They began, secretly, only a few years after both bodies were established in 1943. In 1960, the secretary of the APPU Federal Unity Team, Ian Serjeant, revealed in a "Briefing Report to Division Unity Teams" that the stage had been reached where much of the information and history of unity negotiations, which to that time had been "secret and confidential" to federal unity teams should be made available to division (i.e. state) unity teams.³²

³²The report headed "Strictly Confidential" is dated November 20, 1960. ANU Archives N18/27.

Serjeant stated that as early as 1951 the APPU was ready to compromise its unitary system if it increased the chances of unity with another farm organisation. In that year he personally drafted an amendment to the APPU federal constitution that "gave the Produce Sections a kind of charter and autonomy in matters domestic to a Section". After a five year trial, the amendment became part of the section 20A of the constitution. This meant that vegetable growers could alone deal with issues concerning their produce without the risk of having their views over-ridden by others in the APPU. It seems that, at this point, the APPU gave up its dream of a farm union where the common good overrode sectional interests in the cause of national farm unity. It virtually conceded defeat to the commodity federations.

Serjeant explained in his briefing report, that "very early" attempts to achieve unity had broken down because the produce sections of the APPU did not have a clear charter of rights, "because of the ideological differences on individual membership" and on the binding of minorities to decisions taken by a majority. What he was saying was that the NFU had serious problems negotiating with an organisation in which the commodity sections, such as wheat, wool and dairy, appeared subordinate to the individual membership and had no right to veto items up for discussion.

The 1951 draft amendment brought renewed interest from the NFU with the idea surfacing, according to Serjeant, that a united body could have an APPU structure for deciding matters of general interest to farmers with an NFU set-up catering for commodity matters. Talks continued in the following year and remained "highly private and confidential right up to the present time" (November, 1960). In 1958, the NFU, according to Serjeant, gave some ground in accepting that discussion of a topic could no longer be vetoed although decisions could. But that was about all the NFU gave away. The NFU was bargaining from the strongest position. While under its own name it had little power and few resources (it was 1959 before it had its own small secretariat), the NFU had powerful affiliates, notably the AWMPF, the AWF and, until it resigned, the AWGC. These were "the big three" of the Australian

farm lobby, with close links with federal and state governments and, from the very beginning, displaying hostility towards the APPU concept of individual membership.

The NFU was not only beholden to the big commodity federations for operational finance but was saddled with a constitution that allowed easy departure. This was demonstrated by the AWGC when it left in 1965, having to give only six months notice to enable the NFU to re-organise its expenses. The ease of departure of its large and wealthier affiliates made the NFU subservient to them and unwilling to demand increased central power. This meant that it could not bend very far in the direction of the APPU and, if anyone gave ground, it had to be the APPU.

The APPU found itself embattled throughout its 26 years as Australia's only unitary federal farm organisation. The fact that it made little impact on agricultural policy making had a lot to do with the hostility it met from the commodity-based federations. It suffered a major setback in 1951 when it applied for registration as an organisation of employers under the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Act. Chislett records that registration was opposed by other primary producer organisations, already registered, on the grounds that the APPU "failed to specify the industry in connection with which it was formed and because of deficiencies in its rules which, at that time, permitted *inter alia* the enrolment of persons who were not usually employers".³³ In effect, the APPU was being punished, and denied a place in the arbitration system, because it did not fit the norm of an Australian farm organisation.

The APPU had another fight for recognition in 1963 when it applied for representation on the Australian Wool Industry Conference, the so-called "wool parliament", established to iron out differences between the AWGC and the AWMPF. The 1962 Report of the Wool Marketing Committee of Enquiry recommended that the AWIC should comprise 49 members: 20 from the AWGC, 20 from the AWMPF and nine from sheep breed societies. The committee's

³³Chislett in Williams (ed.). p.117.

concept of a third group within the AWIC was rejected and this was not surprising because the breed societies tended to be affiliated with the AWGC and this could have disadvantaged the AWMPF.³⁴ Eventually it was agreed between the two organisations that each side would have 25 members on the AWIC with the Government appointing an independent chairman. Each organisation selected its representatives and the AWGC's 25 included five from breed societies. There were to be no places on the AWIC for the APPU, despite claiming to represent some 22,000 woolgrowers, about half the 46,000 claimed by AWMFF but close to the membership of the AWGC.³⁵

Repeated attempts by the APPU to gain seats on the AWIC in the early 1960s failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority vote for admission. The main reason given was that the Wool Section of the APPU lacked sufficient autonomy. The barriers went up against APPU entry despite the Minister for Primary Industry, Charles Adermann, telling Parliament that the Government noted "with approval" that the AWIC constitution made provision for the inclusion of other organisations.³⁶ However, it was not only a matter of existing AWIC members fearing that the APPU's wool policy could be influenced by the opinions of potato growers and others, but there was also continuing resentment towards the APPU. Daw refers to fears that the APPU could act as a "third force" and hold the balance of power. This, he wrote, was unlikely as the AWIC rarely voted on strict organisational lines, but there was resentment against the intrusion of a third body in their territory.³⁷

³⁴Hodsdon, *op.cit.* provides details of the role and structure of the AWIC and the debate surrounding APPU membership, pp.46-75.

³⁵Figures taken from E.D. Daw, *Woolgrowers and Wool Marketing*, the Australian Quarterly, Vol.37, No.3, September, 1965. pp.12-13. As noted earlier, membership data tended to be "elastic" in those times. The Graziers' Association of Victoria kept its membership books closed to outside scrutiny. Many woolgrowers in the AWMPF and the APPU were small sideline producers.

³⁶House of Representatives, *Hansard*, November 29, 1962. pp.2728-32.

³⁷*Op.cit.* p.14..

UFWA, the AWMPF's most powerful affiliate, had a blunter approach to denying APPU membership. In an interview with Hodsdon on August 29, 1965, the general secretary of UFWA, A.R. Johnston, revealed that the earlier hostility to the APPU's aggressive recruitment drives remained. He charged it with adopting tactics that were akin to barnstorming a certain area and signing up members. Johnston, who was also the general secretary of AWMPF, argued that the APPU was not a true federal organisation, as required by the AWIC constitution, in that it had no links with Western Australia and its Queensland membership was slight.³⁸

A membership survey commissioned by the APPU in 1963-64 estimated that 22,021 of total APPU members were woolgrowers, with 10,489 of these in Victoria, 4,848 in NSW, 4,441 in South Australia, 2,029 in Tasmania and 214 in Queensland. There were 3,574 members in Queensland, more than Johnston suggested and, while the APPU had no branches in Western Australia, the AWMPF had none in Tasmania.³⁹ In addition, Hodsdon estimated that APPU members contributed about 20 per cent of the national wool clip and claimed that this should have warranted a voice in the wool parliament.⁴⁰

When the APPU was finally admitted to the AWIC in October, 1965, and given five seats on an enlarged body of 55 seats, it was not an act of charity on behalf of the AWGC and the AWMPF, but because the APPU agreed to crook the knee once again to the commodity federations and grant its wool division full autonomy. The change to the APPU constitution, which Serjeant claimed gave its produce divisions a "kind of charter and autonomy", was not considered strong enough by the AWIC. The situation is succinctly described by Chislett:

³⁸*Op. cit.* p.56.

³⁹J.L. Dillon and F.G. Jarrett, *Report on Wool Industry Aspects of an APPU Membership Survey*, 1963. pp. 2-5.

⁴⁰*Op. cit.* p.59.

In order to gain admission of the Wool Section of the APPU to the Conference in 1965 some substantial changes were made to the Union's constitution. Produce sections were made autonomous in the conduct of their respective commodity business so that their policy decisions automatically became Union policy.⁴¹

This was the final capitulation of the APPU and it had now remoulded itself in the image of the NFU. The produce sections of the APPU now had the official and final say on all matters concerning their respective commodities. They were therefore similar to the commodity-based federations which were affiliated with the NFU. No more could the APPU pretend to be an organisation in which all farmers had a say on all matters affecting their calling. Many who applauded the APPU concept saw overall farm unity as more important than a single minded interest in a particular commodity. One sound reason for this is that policies introduced to benefit one commodity can have a detrimental impact on another. For example, in the 1960s, generous price support for wheat sent the price of land in the wheat-sheep zones soaring to the detriment of graziers wanting to expand their wool and beef enterprises. Wool and beef producers had no say on wheat policy. However, the unitarians had been fighting a lost cause.

The executive officer of the APPU, A.A. Dawson, denied that the APPU had swallowed its principles to gain AWIC entry. As a reviewer of Chislett's article he commented that:

The AWIC may take credit for the re-drafting of a clause of the APPU Constitution, but this only meant that the Constitution was brought into line with the practice which has been in operation for many years.⁴²

⁴¹*Op.cit.* p.118.

⁴²Quoted by Chislett in a footnote, *op.cit.* p.118.

This seems to be an admission that the APPU was a unitary organisation in name only, and not in practise. In others words, the APPU was an NFU in disguise, but a disguise that was dropped when it sought to merge with the NFU and to gain admission to the AWIC. The APPU's main advantage to the rural community was its willingness to cater for the producers of small commodities, such as potatoes, poultry and oats, who lacked the resources to set up their own farm organisations. The APPU was an organisation waiting to disappear. From its inception in 1943 it sought national farm unity and willingly amended its constitution to facilitate this. It also suffered from a lack of acceptance from Liberal-Country Party Government in Canberra and the national commodity federations. The Government had developed strong connections with the federations and they played pre-eminent roles as representatives of the rural community. The AWGC leadership saw the APPU as an organisation holding back its quest for a less regulated economy and the AWMPF saw it as an over-aggressive competitor for members.

THE AFF EMERGES

Negotiations began between the APPU, the AWMPF and the AWF on state unity began in the mid-1960s, as a prelude to the establishment of the AFF. Although the new organisation was little different from the ineffectual two it replaced, the fact that the APPU and NFU state affiliates united in 1969 as the AFF was an important step towards real national unity, still a decade away. The farmers had united and the only the graziers remained outside.

By mid-1966, the South Australian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association (affiliated with both the AWMPF and the AWF) united with that state's division of the APPU to become the United Farmers and Graziers' of South Australia. Victoria followed a year later when unity was achieved between the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association and the state division of the APPU to become the Victorian Farmers' Union. The VFU, in line with the trend set in South Australia, agreed to join the AWF and the AWMPF and be

represented federally by those organisations on grain and pastoral issues. Farmers producing other commodities would be represented by the existing federal produce committees of the APPU. Degrees of harmony were reached between APPU divisions and other farm organisations in NSW and Queensland, but this matter did not arise in Western Australia and Tasmania where state unity already existed for all farmers apart from the graziers. In NSW, the united body continued to be called UFWA.

The AWGC and its affiliates were not involved in this drive for national farm unity. The president of the APPU, Jim Heffernan, said in 1967 that the pending merger of his organisation with the AWF and the AWMPF would "be an historic step forward for all Australian primary producers and at long last, after years of fighting, we may be able to speak with a strong united voice".⁴³ Heffernan then bemoaned the fact that the AWGC, which represented all grazier organisations throughout Australia and about 22,000 woolgrowers, had indicated that it was not interested in unity. If unity were achieved by the APPU, the AWF and the AWMPF, he said, then "its up to other organisations to decide if they are acting in the best interests of the Australian primary producer".

A different view was put by the NSW Graziers' Association on the unity issue. Association research officer, K.P. Baxter, in a letter to association member, A.M. Clark of Boggabilla, NSW, said "the AWF did not wish to include either this association or the Australian Woolgrowers' and Graziers' Council in the discussions".⁴⁴ Baxter suggested that Clark might write to the general secretary of the AWF, T.C. Stott, to enquire about unity progress, but warned that "I am not anticipating that Mr Stott will be particularly helpful, on the contrary, I am expecting him to be very stubborn and reluctant". Baxter said that if Clark wrote, rather than an association staff member, it "would raise less ire from Mr Stott". Stott had been a dominant figure in the the AWF since its inception in 1931 and his

⁴³APPU press statement, Canberra, October 27, 1967.

⁴⁴Letter dated November 8, 1966. ANU Archives, N92/1374.

high public profile, as a servant of the AWF rather than an elected official, was testimony to his aggressive watchdog approach to AWF interests. It was also a demonstration of how a strong personality could dominate an ill-resourced farm organisation.

Stott and the AWF were never close to the graziers and denied the NSW association representation on the AWF for several years despite the heavy shift of graziers into wheat in the 1960s.

However, Baxter cannot place all the blame on Stott for the AWGC being excluded from unity discussion. The AWGC had made it clear that one of the reasons for leaving the NFU in 1965 was that organisation's pending amalgamation with the APPU. The graziers saw this as increasing the voice of producers of protected commodities and they, having been critical of the NFU as a forum to attack excessive protection levels, viewed the AWF as even less suitable. Even if the AWGC had been interested in national unity in those days, their cause would have been hampered by the fact that in February, 1966, the representatives of the Graziers' Association of Victoria walked out of a meeting called to unite the four big farm unions in that state—the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association, the State Division of the APPU, the Victorian Dairyfarmers' Association and the graziers.⁴⁵ The differences between the VWWGA (an affiliate of the AWMPF) and the Victorian Graziers' Association (AWGC) over wool marketing were too intense at that time to raise real hopes of unity. The VDA also withdrew from the talks, leaving the VV/WGA and the APPU division to eventually merge into the Victorian Farmers' Union. The official signing of the VFU unity agreement, at the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne on July 12, 1968, was witnessed by the Leader of the Country Party and Deputy Prime Minister, John McEwen, and the Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, who represented the Prime Minister, John Gorton. Mitchell claimed that the largest grower industrial organisation of the day was born with more than 27,000 members, after allowing for dual membership.⁴⁶

⁴⁵George Mitchell, *Official History of the Victorian Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association, 1927-1968*, Melbourne 1969. p.334.

⁴⁶*Op. cit.* pp.344-5.

The round of state amalgamations between the affiliates of the AWMPF and the AWF and the state divisions of the APPU was the precursor to national unity between the APPU and the NFU. It had been stressed at a unity meeting in Melbourne on August 4, 1967 that the existing commodity federations would remain in complete control of matters of specific interest. As Stott rather quaintly put it in his press release following this meeting:

It would be appreciated that in the event of agreement being reached between the AWF, AWMPF and APPU that all wheat questions should be channelled though the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation, and all wool questions through the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation.⁴⁷

This view of an AFF as just a bigger NFU prevailed, and the commodity-based farm organisations had won another victory over the vocational organisation, the APPU, but this time the victory was complete. The APPU vanished from sight and the NFU continued under a new name. The AFF constitution specifies 25 areas of interest, ranging from taxation, tariffs, defence and meteorological services to research, co-operation with other farm organisations, rural electrification and industrial issues. It had no say in commodity matters and, once again, as in the case of the NFU, there were two constitutional clauses which kept a firm brake on an AFF executive attempting to flex its muscles. First, membership could be terminated by giving six months' notice and, as demonstrated when the AWGC left the NFU, departures could leave a big financial hole. Second, organisations had the right to have motions withdrawn

⁴⁷The press release was dated October 16, 1967 and headed *Statement on the Question of Unity Emerging from the Unity Conference between APPU, AWF and AWMPF. Held in Melbourne on 4/8/67*. The two months delay in releasing this statement is not explained. ANU Archives Z83/36.

from the agenda of AFF conferences as long as they were supported in this action by a majority of their members.⁴⁸

When the AFF opened its doors in Canberra in late 1969 it was the culmination of over 20 years of negotiations, but it was doomed to a life of half that time. To many, especially those of the APPU who saw full farm unity as a mission in life, the AFF was a major step to unity with the AWGC, the last farm organisation of national influence to remain outside the fold. Even Stott, who had little time for the graziers, said of the AFF that:

This means one voice for wheat all over Australia and a much stronger voice on wool for the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation, but it will also be a very strong influence in bringing the AWGC to unity in one Federation for wool. We feel that we have no power at this stage over the last point- this is a matter for future negotiation when we get our own house in order first.⁴⁹

The move for true national unity actually got under way in NSW, before the AFF was established, when the old rivals, UFWA and the Graziers' Association, the two most powerful state-based farm organisations, stepped up their search for unity. The farm lobby understood that unity in NSW virtually ensured federal unity because the personnel in the state organisations were dominant in their respective federations and had financial clout. The AFF was not the model many primary producers wanted for a single voice for Australian agriculture. Farmers and graziers in all other states, except Western Australia and Queensland, were ready to follow the NSW lead. The UFWA-Graziers' Association merger is the subject of the next chapter.

⁴⁸Released by the NFU during 1959, but no precise date given. ANU Archives N18/4.

⁴⁹Press statement of October 16, 1967.

As mention earlier, APPU president Donelan, wanted a united farm voice to put "more fight" into the producers' dog. The dog, however, would remain toothless until the graziers joined the quest for a single voice for Australian agriculture.

CHAPTER FIVE

FARMERS AND GRAZIERS

INTRODUCTION The amalgamation of the APPU and the NFU into the Australian Farmers' Federation was not a giant step towards the one "farm voice" many primary producers were seeking. However, it did represent some progress in that farmers, ranging from wheat and wool producers to banana growers and small orchardists, were represented on the AFF. The graziers who decided to leave the NFU in advance of the amalgamation would have at least conceded that, when the time eventually arrived to seriously debate a true "one voice" for agriculture, there was one less federal organisation to deal with. The graziers had a strong sense of their own importance as the major producers of Australia's major export commodity and had an agenda that promoted a deregulated economy, in sharp contrast to the small farmers of the APPU who saw regulation as vital for their survival. At least the graziers had one thing in common with the farmers of the AWF and the AWMPF: they welcomed the demise of the APPU as a failed experiment which had attempted to break the historical links between producers and commodity-based organisations. The insignificance of the AFF in the quest for one voice will be demonstrated in the following chapter. It was given no role in the vital negotiations between farmer and grazier organisations and, in fact, was virtually ignored.

True unity depended upon the traditional protagonists of Australian agriculture burying their differences. Many pressure groups would have envied the easy access of the AWGC and the AWMPF to the ear of the Federal Government, but when the Government listened it heard two distinct voices. This was frustrating for the Country Party which defined its prime role as carrying out the wishes of farmers. This meant that pressure on primary producers to unite came from two sources: from within their own organisations and from the Country Party. The Country Party, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, worked hard at getting the graziers entangled in its protection web, especially through their acceptance of a reserve price scheme for wool, thereby

removing a great barrier to unity. Pressure groups are supposed to demand benefits from Government but, in post-war Australia, we saw a government putting pressure on a pressure group, the AWGC, to accept a benefit many of its members did not want. The irony of this was that, while the reserve price scheme for wool brought only short term benefits and had long term costs, its acceptance by graziers was a catalyst for unity. However, before that acceptance, the divisions between farmers and graziers seemed insurmountable.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Antagonism between farmers and graziers goes back to last century and covers much more than rivalry over controlled versus free markets. They first fought over land. This left bitter scars that were aggravated by differences in wealth, property size, social status, lifestyles and method of farming, with graziers usually employing full-time staff as well as casual shearers, with farmers far more reliant on family labour. Many graziers belonged to the employer class and had off-farm investments and social links with the city. The wealthier graziers sent their children to expensive private schools and shopped for a range of household items in the city in preference to country towns. Some had city residences. Their votes were cast for Country Party and Liberal candidates. Farmers generally had more modest lifestyles, employing only outside labour during busy seasonal periods, making greater use of local schools and stores and, while graziers supported the free market and had close ties with woolbrokers (grazier associations accepted broker membership), farmers had an in-built fear of middlemen and wanted the marketing of farm produce taken out of their hands.

Farmers tended to be solid Country Party supporters with a sprinkling of Labor Party voters, some of them Irish Catholic families who came on to the land under farm settlement schemes.¹

¹For example, in 1974 the executive of the Crookwell (NSW) branch of the Australian Labor Party was dominated by the Kennedy family which farmed in the area, (observation by the author who visited Crookwell during the

Farmers were not known as Liberal voters but Gruen concluded, after a study of NSW and federal elections between 1930 and 1962, that primary producers (farmers and graziers) were consistent in voting for conservative candidates. The average second preference vote of Country Party supporters went 85 per cent to the Liberal candidate in three corner contests. In those electorates held by Liberals the rural non-Labor vote was as high as in seats held by Country Party members.² A more recent study by Clive Bean concluded that, while primary producers remained solid supporters of the Coalition, many deserted the National Party for the Liberal Party during the 1980s while their support for Labor remained consistently low.³ Bean noted that farmers constituted only about three to four per cent of the total electorate, but were an extremely important constituency for the National Party.

The NSW Graziers' Association, in an apparent eagerness to keep a distance between it and farmer organisations, noted that "the wheat and woolgrower unions which arose about the time of the Great Depression had a Labor Party flavour".⁴ This was basically due to dissatisfaction with the ruling conservative parties, especially over their reluctance to introduce compulsory wheat pools. In NSW, it was the Wheatgrowers' Union that split from the Farmers and Settlers' Association in the 1920s. Its ALP "flavour" was a factor in the FSA breaking formal links with the Country Party in 1944 in case it harmed the prospects of the two bodies amalgamating. The Graziers' Association's report had one simple answer as to why

1974 federal election campaign). In state and federal parliaments there has often been a small number of farmers on the Labor side. Notables include Peter Walsh and John Kerin, respectively Ministers for Finance and Primary Industry in the Hawke Labor Government, and Jack Hallam, Minister for Agriculture in the Wran Government in NSW.

²F.H. Gruen, *Rural Australia*, chapter 12 in *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*, edited by A.F. Davies and S. Encel, second edition, Melbourne, 1970. p.345.

³*The Coalition and the Electorate 1983-1993*. Chapter 7 of *For Better or For Worse: The Federal Coalition*. Edited by Brian Costar, Melbourne, 1994. p.88

⁴*The Graziers' Association of New South Wales: Report of the Unity Study Committee*. April 2, 1968. p.21. ANU Archives N92/1374.

some small farmers supported the ALP. They were less dependent on farm labour and, unlike graziers, less vulnerable to industrial unrest and therefore more inclined to identify themselves with workers rather than employers.⁵

It was not simply a matter of the farmers feeling close to workers. The Wheatgrowers' Union (later the Wheat and Woolgrowers' Union) had links with the Labor Party and was accused by its detractors of being politically partisan. The Labor Party in NSW had improved its standing with small farmers in the late 1920s by endorsing compulsory wheat pools at a time when the Country Party and the FSA opposed them. The Wheatgrowers' Union was established by small growers in response to the conservatism of the FSA and the Country Party on marketing, with some growers objecting to the political link between the two bodies.

Smith records that J.C. Chanter resigned as Union president in 1936 to contest a Labor preselection ballot for the federal seat of Riverina and that, in 1944, T.P. Gleeson, a regional ALP official, was elected Union president.⁶ ALP leaders were frequent guests at Union conferences and Smith claims that the party patronised the union after it gained office federally in 1941 by appointing some of its members to marketing boards. The Government was keen, he said, to foster the Union as a rival to the much larger FSA, an organisation that was officially linked to the Country Party and had always been hostile to Labor. Long before it joined with the Graziers' Association in 1919 to form a "country party", the FSA had endorsed conservative candidates for parliament. Smith noted that while the Union often complained bitterly against Labor's wheat policies it was considered by Labor Governments as "the lesser of two evils".⁷

NSW provides a ripe field for study of divisions between farmers and the graziers. Australia's two most powerful state farm

⁵*Ibid.* p.20.

⁶R.F.I. Smith, *Organise or be Damned*, pp.348-9.

⁷p. 351.

organisations emerged within a few years of each other in the last decade of the 19th Century, but for very different reasons. The Pastoralists' Union of NSW began life, as did its federal counterpart, the Pastoralists' Federal Council, as an industrial organisation to combat the increasing demands of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union for a "closed shop". It was an organisation of employers which arose not only to resist organised labour but to oppose the new Labor parties which wanted to spread industrial awards to all rural workers and preferred leasehold to freehold land. While the ASU suffered a demoralising defeat in the strikes of the early 1890s, it later merged with the General Labourers' Union into the Australian Workers' Union, and bush unionism made a strong comeback early in the new century. From its beginning the AWU had close ties with the Labor Party and, according to Harman, the pastoralists regarded the majority Labor Governments which came to power in NSW and the Commonwealth in 1910 as creatures of the AWU and expected them to pass discriminatory legislation.⁸ The AWU-ALP links were a major factor in convincing the graziers that it was time to take a closer interest in politics and Harman sees this as a good illustration of the way pressure groups often model themselves on their rivals and on institutions they see as posing a threat to their security:

The AWU's links with the Labor Party gave GA (Graziers' Association) members the idea of working to secure more direct and effective representation in the parliament. When the FSA in 1919 invited the Association to participate in founding a new political party, many members immediately called to mind the fact of the AWU's links with the Labor Party, and reasoned that a similar relationship with a new producers' party could only be to the GA's advantage. Inspired by the AWU's amalgamation with smaller unions, and later by the "one big union" movement, the GA during the first world war and immediately after also experimented with

⁸Grant Harman, *Graziers in Politics*. p.151.

various schemes to unite primary producers for political purposes in a single organisation.⁹

The FSA arose when regional organisations of settlers in NSW united to protest against the state's land laws. The FSA's official historian, W.A. Bayley, describes the small settlers of late last century as keen observers of "the growth of the great trade unions and the unions of the big squatters and employers".¹⁰ The settlers, he said, fell outside the classification of large station owners and, being self-employed, they had no one to appeal to for shorter hours, better pay or improved working conditions. The settlers were on their own, with their incomes determined by the whim of the local market. No wheat was exported from NSW before the 1890s, and the settlers blamed the squatters who tied up large tracts of arable land for wool production. The greatest worry of the settlers was land. They wanted enough land to return them an adequate income, and for their sons to follow in their footsteps. Bayley writes:

Beside their own farms they often saw, across the boundary fences, areas which were vitally necessary to increase their own farms to living areas, tree-strewn and unused by either a freeholder or leaseholder. The large landholders contributed nothing to the public purse and nothing to the growing wheat industry and were a retarding influence on what was within the half century to grow side by side with wool growing to one of Australia's two greatest primary industries.¹¹

The Graziers' Association report noted that :

Whereas the pastoralists were on guard against subversion from one direction (i.e. labour) the

⁹*Ibid.* p.151.

¹⁰W.A. Bayley, *History of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales.* p.30.

¹¹*Ibid.* p.31

others were fighting a quite different battle: against exploitation by big landholders, business and authority. Thus, the FSA, which had begun three years after our own Association, for different reasons and with a most dissimilar membership, was in the early twenties sitting with the graziers' Association on the only national body for woolgrowers.¹²

When the Graziers' Association decided in the late 1960s that it was time to seriously explore the question of state and federal farm unity it set up committee of senior and respected officials.¹³ Unlike the farmers' organisations, the graziers did not have a distrust of professionals or academics and co-opted Grant Harman, of the Australian National University, to assist with the report. Harman, by that stage, had completed his Ph.D thesis on the Graziers' Association and he prefaced it with high praise for the officials and staff of the Association who provided him with access to all its records, with no limits placed on their use.¹⁴ He was invited to attend meetings, as an observer, from annual conferences down to local branch gatherings. Interviews with leaders and staff were freely given.

In stark contrast, Keith Richmond complains in the preface to his study of the United Farmers and Woolgrowers' Association of NSW that, as an academic and non-UFWA member, he was regarded by many with suspicion. Some members of the executive refused to

¹²*Report of the Unity Study Committee.* p.3. The woolgrower body referred to was the Australian Woolgrowers' Council. However, in 1939 the FSA and its counterparts in other states broke away to form the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation to fight for a reserve price for wool.

¹³They were Davis Asimus, who later chaired the Australian Wool Commission, Michael Davidson, later Graziers' Association president and president of the National Farmers' Federation, and Dick Eldershaw, executive member of the Graziers' Association.

¹⁴Harman's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Graziers in Politics: The Pressure Group Behaviour of the Graziers' Association of NSW*, ANU, 1968, is an authoritative work on farm organisations.

accept his presence. Professional staff at UFWA head office, he said, treated him with indifference or resentment, while getting access to files was difficult and, at times, impossible. Richmond discovered that UFWA had a habit of destroying files when cabinets filled up. He found no file more than 10 years old, and material on major issues such as wheat stabilisation and wool marketing had been destroyed.¹⁵ He was told that all General Council and Executive Minutes from 1962 to 1965 were in the archives of the University of New England, but found they had not been received there. The archives at the Australian National University are replete with records of the Graziers' Association, going back to its beginning as the Pastoralists' Union in 1890, and there is no evidence of censorship. However, the archival deposits on UFWA and the FSA are, in contrast, rather meagre, and what is to be found at the ANU archives was sent there after UFWA and the Graziers' Association amalgamated in 1978. What stands out is that the graziers, usually better educated, had a sense of history and a confidence in their past performances. Their sense of self-importance prevented any embarrassment arising from revelations of their assumed superiority over farmers, as revealed in the unity report, or their blatant political partisanship.

The graziers employed more professionals than other farm organisations and felt comfortable working with them. Former Graziers' Association executive officer, John White, said the association employed double the number of university graduates than UFWA, despite having about half the membership.¹⁶ UFWA, Richmond noted, tended to control its professional employees and they worked under directions from a farmer executive. Staff drafted press releases and the president of UFWA released them in his name, but the staff of the Graziers' Association often wrote and presented statements, such was the trust between the executive

¹⁵*Rural Politics and Emotion*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of New England, 1979. R.F.I. Smith agreed with Richmond on the paucity of UFWA files but found it co-operative when researching on his thesis, *Organise or be Damned*. Telephone interview, August 15, 1993.

¹⁶Telephone interview, August 2, 1994.

and senior staff.¹⁷ During the late 1960s Graziers' Association economist, Ken Baxter, and AWGC economist, Ged Chislett, were very much in the public eye as campaigners on a number of issues, notably wool marketing and shipping reform. Chislett's fierce stance against a reserve price for wool brought him enemies, not only among the farmers but also within grazier ranks, but his job remained secure. UFWA not only employed fewer professionals but they were far less visible.¹⁸

Hylde Rolfe, who joined UFWA in the mid-1960s as its economist, is not as critical of her employer as Richmond, whose association with UFWA began after Rolfe had left. She said that UFWA was uneasy with her for a while. Some of this had to do with her being a woman professional, and the suggestion was made that she work for less money than a male economist would receive. She was also expected to act as librarian. Overall the job was "pretty good", although UFWA did not always take the advice it was offered. She had the support of the chief executive, A.R. Johnston, when UFWA president, George Hoy, argued that professionals should only work at the federal level, in organisations like the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation, to which UFWA was affiliated, and not at a state level.¹⁹

Harman observed that farmers in the 1960s still regarded experience in farming as more important in recruitment of staff than formal academic qualifications. They were suspicious of academic experts, particularly economists. They resented as unfair and uninformed attacks by theorists in universities.²⁰ The farmers sometimes fought back with personal abuse, leading Campbell to comment that if the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation employed more trained staff "it could meet public criticism of its privileged position by reasoned argument instead of personal

¹⁷*Op. cit.* p.85.

¹⁸Personal knowledge of the author as agricultural writer for the *Australian Financial Review*, 1966-72.

¹⁹Telephone interview with Rolfe, July 19, 1993.

²⁰*Graziers in Politics.* p.88

abuse, the usual form of reply currently employed".²¹ Sometimes the response took a more sinister turn. The publication in May, 1967, of a *Current Affairs Bulletin* entitled *Milking the Australian Economy* (Vol.39, No.13) so angered the Australian Dairyfarmers' Federation that threats were made to deny dairy industry research funds to both the University of Sydney, which published the journal, and the University of New England where the author, J.N. Lewis, was Professor of Agricultural Economics.²²

In its 1968 unity report, the Graziers' Association lists four factors which divided its members from the farmers of UFWA. They were based on commodities produced, the regions where they farmed and sociological and organisational differences.²³ Commodity and regional differences are fairly clear cut. While there were graziers who mixed wheat farming with wool production there were many graziers, especially those in the drier regions of the state, who were specialist woolgrowers. They sold on the unprotected world market and, unlike wheatgrowers, were not beneficiaries of price support programs, nor were they forced to deliver their produce to a marketing organisation, like the Australian Wheat Board, under risk of a heavy fine or imprisonment. The specialist woolgrower and the wheatfarmer, with wool, fat lambs or beef as a sideline enterprise, often had little in common. One adhered to the free auction system and the other resisted all attempts to weaken wheat stabilisation and demanded that wool be sold with the security of a reserve price scheme.

The wheat-sheep farmers of UFWA, basically had similar problems because they were were relatively confined geographically. To the

²¹Keith.O.Campbell, *Australian Farm Organisations and Agricultural Policy*. Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics. Vol.10. No.2. December, 1966. p.122.

²²Personal communication with Lewis during 1969. He was not named as the author but did not hide the fact. Committees nominated by farm organisations had considerable influence as to which institutions were favoured with research grants, despite the fact that research levies paid by producers were matched dollar for dollar by the Federal Government.

²³See pages 15-26.

contrary, the graziers were distributed over a much wider area of the state, so much so that three graziers' organisations were established in the early years of poor communications to represent NSW producers. The Graziers' Association of New South Wales was the senior body, with a membership estimated by the Unity Study Committee in 1968 to be "about" 11,200. The Graziers' Association of the Riverina, because of the relative closeness of the Victorian wool selling centres, was part of the Victorian Graziers' Association until 1907. After that it continued to be administered from Melbourne by a joint secretary with the Graziers' Association of Victoria. In 1968 membership was 1,400. The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling was part of the South Australian Pastoralists' Association until 1907. It was then administered from a part-time office in Broken Hill. It had a 1968 membership of about 300.²⁴ In the mid-1970s the Riverina Association united with the Graziers' Association of NSW as a prelude to its unity negotiations with UFWA, but West Darling remained apart.

SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE FARMERS

The unity report's discussion of the sociological differences between farmers and graziers is carefully phrased to avoid traces of:

snobbery, or any hint of a caste system, however oblique, to breeding or the virtue of old wealth relative to new, happily need not be reckoned with. Any traces of this that still exist are unlikely to bear on anything being discussed.²⁵

The authors had a little difficulty, however, handling a segment that, while arguing that "farmers" (the term "grazier" is largely avoided on diplomatic grounds), whether big or small, have a lot in common, points to considerable differences in social status, education levels and political attitudes. The small and large producers face rising costs of production and all want the best possible price for their produce. They work within the same

²⁴Unity report. p.5.

²⁵p.17

economic climate and, as farm enterprises grow, all farmers have opportunities for economies of scale but, according to the report, "the sociological factor was a complex problem facing those advocating unity and the more difficult to solve because emotions became involved".²⁶ The unity committee risked being accused of patronising UFWA's membership when it described "farmers" as being notoriously reluctant to appreciate intellectual qualities, and as people who held theorists in scorn. Well-educated primary producers (predominantly graziers) were those most prepared to pay the salaries of a skilled secretariat.

The small farmer has a narrow vision, the report argues. Employing little or no labour, he is immersed in the daily grind of farm work with his attention focussed on immediate problems. Without formal education he will have a limited grasp of the wider issues and this will be compounded by a lack of opportunity to read and discuss. He judges the value of membership of a farm organisation in terms of how it can help him run his farm, and he finds it difficult to see much benefit from the proportion of his annual subscription which goes into research and the writing of submissions to inquiries or to government.²⁷ The unity report appears to be raising doubts about a successful amalgamation with UFWA by implicitly questioning whether farmers and graziers can exist within the same organisation because of social and educational differences. Within rural society, it claims, the two groups seek out their own. Graziers are more likely to mix with local professionals and business groups, sometimes as fellow members of restricted clubs, while others prefer the unselected company of the wider community:

Thus the owners of two similar farms may be drawn into different sections of rural society and the diverse attitudes which will result from associating with say businessmen on the one hand

²⁶p.16.

²⁷p.18.

and wage earners on the other will separate them further.²⁸

When it comes to joining farm organisations, the report's authors have no doubt that the social-education factor generally outweighs the size of enterprise factor:

For instance, the G.P.S. educated son of a professional man, battling to make ends meet on an undersized farm, is likely to be drawn to a "Graziers" type of organisation: likewise, the "small-farmer" organisations contain many farmers of great substance.²⁹

There is no better evidence of the condescending attitude of graziers to farmers than what was written by graziers themselves in the unity report and adopted by their association. The report makes the implicit point that unity between graziers and farmers would be difficult on class grounds alone. The differences between the two groups have been noted by a number of commentators. Gruen has made use of a 1958 mail questionnaire sent by sociologist, Sol Encel, to grazier and farmer organisations to stress the differences in education level stating:

Practically all leaders of graziers associations have received some secondary education-and at private schools; a significant minority had been to a university. On the other hand, only half the leaders of farm organisations had received any secondary education and less than a quarter had attended private schools.³⁰

Nelson and Craig have noted that the high value placed on private school education by grazing families was not dented by hard times and falling farm income. They use reports of the Commission of

²⁸p.19.

²⁹p.19.

³⁰*Op.cit.* p.354. Gruen does not record his source for the Encel questionnaire.

Inquiry into Poverty and other studies to demonstrate that graziers had a "strong value orientation towards educating children for social position". One of the few factors to cause them to sell up and take a job in the city would be their inability to afford to send their children to private schools.³¹ Gruen wrote that prominent graziers were often the descendants of the large squatters of the 19th century. Their holdings had become much smaller-both in areas and sheep numbers-but still remained above average size. According to Gruen the main distinction between graziers and farmers was not so much property size or wealth, it was to be found in their mode of living and leisure activities.³² To support his claim, he quotes Jean Martin, saying:

They spend their money in characteristic ways: in sending their children to the highest-status non-government schools: in travelling to visit friends and relatives throughout their state and beyond, and to take part in the picnic races, the country shows, the city weddings and other events through which their identity as a group is maintained; they also spend their money on maintaining large establishments, sometimes in both country and city, and in observing the ritual and formality they regard as appropriate to a gracious life.³³

³¹J.S. Nalson and R.A. Craig, *Rural Australia*, chapter 8 of *Selected Readings in Australian Society: An Anthology*, edited by Sol Encel and Michael Berry. Melbourne, 1987. p.316. Nalson and Craig make references to *Rural Poverty in Northern New South Wales* (p.32), a study by the Department of Sociology, University of New England for the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. Canberra, 1974, and *Sociological implications of the Economic Depression in the Wool Industry with Particular Reference to the Occupational Retraining and Mobility of Wool Producers*, by D.G. Yates, Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management, University of New England, 1971.

³²*Op. cit.* p.534.

³³Jean I. Martin, *Marriage, the Family and Class*, in P.A. Elkin (ed.) *Marriage and the Family in Australia*, Sydney, 1957. Gruen quote is on p.355.

Farmers worried about being exploited by banks, woolbrokers and city interests and the graziers worried about bureaucratic interference in their industry and the activities of trade unions in calling on strikes and pushing for higher wages. Those who fear exploitation seek the protection of political power to fight off the exploiters and such power can be enhanced by numbers, hence the strong interest of UFWA in amalgamation. Before it got into serious negotiations with the Graziers' Association, UFWA had achieved unity with the NSW Division of the APPU, the Apple and Pear Growers' Association and the Vegetable Growers' Association. It did this while retaining its name and the leadership of the enlarged organisation. UFWA, using its size and wealth to effect, virtually took over the smaller bodies.

The Graziers' Association had never in its long history suffered a breakaway group, as happened to the FSA in the 1930s and, until the late 1960s, it had only once taken an interest in amalgamation: and that was a feeler towards the FSA in 1959-60 that was rebuffed. At a joint meeting of the Association and FSA executives in December, 1960, Association general secretary, S. Ick-Hewins, raised the question of amalgamation "in some years time" and suggested that a detailed study of the factors involved could be undertaken. The FSA said that nothing should be done until the planned FSA amalgamation with the Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association had been completed and, according to Ick-Hewins:

They made it clear to us that any idea that the F&S people had even discussed the matter with us might be anathema to the Wheat and Wool Growers and might cause a breakdown of their arrangements with them. The leader of the F&S group said that in effect if it were asked whether we discussed amalgamation at all at the meeting, the only possible answer could be that the subject of amalgamation was not even discussed.³⁴

³⁴Letter from Ick-Hewins to G.Ashton, member of the Association's General Council, January 18, 1961. ANU Archives N92/1453.

Ick-Hewins and the Graziers' executive met the FSA armed with a motion from its General Council that amalgamation be the subject of a report to the 1961 annual conference of the Association. The FSA was not impressed by Ick-Hewins' argument that "it was common knowledge that in a number of country centres there had been advocacy of the amalgamation of the two organisations" nor placated by his suggestion that it would be premature to make a decision or a public utterance on the topic. The FSA feared that its chances of bringing back the rebel Wheat and Woolgrowers' Association to the fold would be dashed by even rumours that it was contemplating unity with the Graziers, the class enemies who opposed Government intervention in commodity markets. It is little wonder that the normally unsecretive Graziers were less than forthcoming on the topic of FSA amalgamation. One of the rare public mentions was in the 1968 Report of the Unity Study Committee, which says:

As far as the Committee is aware, no organisation has ever approached the Graziers' Association of NSW with a proposal for merging or amalgamation. On the other hand, the Committee thinks it ought to be realised that, in 1960, our Executive put it to the Executive of the FSA the suggestion that preliminary talks ought to be started, and were rebuffed.³⁵

The Graziers' Association trusted the advice of its professional staff and generally agreed with their free-market philosophy, but UFWA believed that farmers were taken advantage of by more powerful interests and its staff were expected to toe the party line. The differences between the two organisations over wool marketing in the 1960s was detailed in an earlier chapter, and the bitterness and distrust left after the 1965 wool reserve price referendum campaign was seen as an almost impenetrable barrier to amalgamation. The Graziers' Association masterminded the successful "no" campaign and had the open support of woolbrokers, which added to UFWA distrust. Only when the graziers, because of intense pressure from the Country Party, low wool prices and

³⁵p. 39.

drought, succumbed in the early 1970s and agreed to a reserve price did some of that distrust recede. In fact, without a change of heart by the graziers on wool, unity may have been impossible.

In the 1970s, UFWA was still hard at work calling for the creation of new marketing boards and pooling systems for minor commodities. Richmond records that the rash of new boards in NSW in the early 1970s was mostly instigated by UFWA and, with a majority membership on the boards, it had effective control over them.³⁶ UFWA had considerable success with the state government in not only getting marketing boards established but in having farmer representatives on those boards elected by popular vote. This gave UFWA candidates the edge because of its much larger membership. Richmond records that in the 1972 ballot for membership of the Sheepmeats Marketing Board, the graziers wanted growers to have 1000 sheep before they could register a vote. UFWA wanted 200 sheep and the Government, after nominating 500, revised it down to 350 sheep.³⁷

The UFWA adherence to grower-controlled marketing boards was unswerving. Its demands that small producers get a vote usually ensured that it both held majority positions on those boards and fulfilled its aim of looking after the interests of the small farmer. Board elections, at its request, were often conducted in zoned electorates within the state. UFWA candidates, with strong support in wheat belt electorates, won virtually all positions on the Grain Elevators Board, but only scored two out of five on the sheepmeats board when the government decided that the entire state would be one electorate and proportional representation the method of voting.³⁸

UFWA made more mention of the family than the Graziers' Association. This was a recognition that on most small farms the family pitched in to save money on hiring labour. Farm wives were often called upon to perform heavy outdoor work as well as

³⁶*Op.cit.* p.107.

³⁷p.107.

³⁸p.111.

administrative tasks, housework and child raising. The wives of graziers were more likely, especially in the good years, to be homemakers and hostesses, rather than working partners. The forerunner to UFWA, the FSA, fought to have land opened up for the small family farm, which was seen as the foundation stone of rural society and gave the support for towns and regional centres that would not exist if there were only large pastoral holdings. Richmond claims that UFWA recognised farm women in various ways such as a special column in its newspaper, the *United Farmer*. Reports of UFWA conferences always stressed the presence of women and, in many areas, they were active on branch executives. There was a long-standing bond between UFWA and the Country Women's Association.³⁹

HOW TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE

The graziers left no doubt that they felt a little superior to the farmers of UFWA. They saw themselves as the quiet, well-mannered achievers of farm politics who preferred a well-presented submission to a march on parliament. They also used an old boy network to exert influence, especially on the Liberal and Country Parties. Prominent graziers sat on the Government benches in Sydney and Canberra while others were influential in the Country Party hierarchy. A previous chapter reported how Ralph Hunt, former state president of the NSW Country Party and federal member for Gwydir, called on a fellow grazier, Ron Hunter, to organise the Moree meeting that demanded a reserve price scheme for wool. Other leading graziers who have held seats in Federal Parliament include Malcolm Fraser (Liberal Prime Minister), Ian Sinclair (former National Party leader and still member for New England), Senator T.L. Bull, (AWGC president, 1962-65) and Senator Harold Young (grazier member of the AWIC).

Graziers found dealing with Labor governments a lot harder than dealing with Coalition governments because of their open antagonism to the trade union movement. UFWA got on better with state Labor governments than the Graziers. Some of this was to do

³⁹p.117.

with a shared antagonism towards graziers that, on UFWA's side, emerged from the battles over land and wool marketing and, on Labor's side, from the long running hostility between graziers' and shearers. There was also a class element, with some farmers feeling more at ease with Labor politicians because of similar working class backgrounds, than with graziers. The Graziers' Association, according to Richmond, had retained the image of a group closely associated with the state branch of the Country Party despite breaking formal links in 1945. He saw this as beneficial to UFWA in the early 1960s when the ALP was in power and virtually excluded the graziers from many important policy-making areas. He writes that:

While Labor was not ecstatic about UFWA either, it was felt to be far preferable than the more conservative Graziers (that a leading Labor parliamentarian, Jack Renshaw, has a brother on the executive of UFWA did little to hurt UFWA's access). Certainly the public record indicates that UFWA and the Labor Government worked very closely on agricultural matters.⁴⁰

The Graziers' Association's leaders were selected by a small group of senior members who, according to Harman, sifted carefully through a list of possibles dominated by large graziers with "higher socio-economic status".⁴¹ Generally, they came from the old grazing families, were educated at the best private schools and tended to produce wool rather than wheat. They thought of themselves as graziers rather than farmers and were selected on the basis of ability, education, dependability and record of service. On the other hand UFWA used its annual conference to elect the general council, the president, vice-presidents and treasurer directly from the votes of all delegates to conference. Harman said there was a tendency to select competent, articulate conference performers or "even demagogues"⁴² and the Graziers' Association's

⁴⁰p.263.

⁴¹Op.cit. p.174.

⁴²p.175.

1968 unity report agreed, declaring that small farmers are less discriminating about the personal qualities of their leaders:

but will respond warmly to one who is seen to be putting up a battle for them. Provided the fight is carried vigorously to the opposition, their leaders can count on strong loyalty. Certain risks may accompany this attitude: one is susceptibility to a demagogue-an orator who plays on emotion and prejudice; the other is the mild form of mass hysteria typified by the UFWA Conference which unanimously supported the wool marketing proposal in 1965, while in the quiet of their own homes, many delegates knew they distrusted it.⁴³

Here the graziers were showing a little scorn for UFWA and the way it performed, and comparing it unfavourably with the patrician-like operations of the Graziers' Association where the selection of leaders was not left to chance on the floor of annual conference but was the outcome of the careful deliberations of an inner circle. The association was mindful of its image as an organisation of wealthy "graziers" and the problems this threw up in the path of farm unity, but its presidents were virtually all graziers of substance and seen as such. The name change in 1916 from Pastoralists' Union to Graziers' Association, to attract smaller woolgrowers and mixed farmers to its ranks and add to its political muscle, was successful in lifting membership, but to many farmers the term "grazier" remained as derogatory as "pastoralist". Specialist woolgrowers were referred to by other primary producers as "graziers" and their association simply called the 'Graziers'.

A good example of the concern of the association's leadership with presenting a different image can be seen in the response by D.L. McMaster, who ended his three year presidential term in 1964, to a report in the association's newspaper, *Muster*, of November, 1964. It stated that he had given 25,000 acres, a part of his Warialda property in northern NSW, to the University of New England for use

⁴³Unity report, pp.20-21.

in livestock research. Although some of McMaster's concern was due to the fact that his donation was 2,500 and not 25,000 acres, as reported, the major point, in his letter to the association's general secretary, Ick-Hewins, was that this sort of publicity was bad for an organisation that was portraying itself as a "small man's" association.⁴⁴ However, the wealth and social differences between graziers and farmers was obvious, especially when the richer grazier families were prominently displayed in the social pages of the city press and there were frequent references to the role of the pastoral industry in the economic development of Australia. Wheatgrowing had less social status than woolgrowing, and Harman recorded that graziers who went into wheatgrowing in the mid-1960s were uneasy about a possible loss of status. He refers to bush stories about graziers, moving into wheat for the first time, having their wheat combines delivered to their properties under the cover of darkness, and others who explained to their neighbours that they were rotating paddocks between wheat and grass in a pasture improvement plan. He accepts that the stories were possibly apocryphal, but this author heard them too, and they were spread by traditional wheatgrowers of the UFWA and by amused members of the Graziers' Association.⁴⁵

Harman argues that the old grazing families, along with leading commercial families and members of the higher professions, represented the main social and economic elites of Australia. But they were, in many respects, small, socially isolated from the rest of the community and often out of touch with popular sentiment. In some cases this isolation of leaders has placed the Graziers' Association at a definite political disadvantage.⁴⁶ But, whatever these disadvantages were, they must have been offset to a large extent by the willing acceptance by the Association hierarchy of the advice of professionals, their well-prepared submissions to government and its agencies and close relations with the public service. The graziers were at home with academics and senior public servants but UFWA, at times, exhibited open hostility to

⁴⁴Letter dated November 14, 1964. ANU Archives N92/1670.

⁴⁵*Op. cit.* p.51.

⁴⁶pp.85-86.

these groups, to the plaudits of its rank and file. Some UFWA executives had turned criticism into an art form and Max Ridd, former UFWA president and long-time executive member, never made any secret of the generally low regard in which he held bureaucrats and academics. *The Land* of July 17, 1977 recorded that, at that month's UFWA annual conference, Ridd told delegates that bureaucrats seemed to have a heart-burning desire to control marketing boards and that "their idea of expertise is some bearded clown who came out of a university with a degree and who would starve if put out by himself". In May that year UFWA President, Milton Taylor, blamed Canberra bureaucrats for problems on the Meat and Livestock Corporation, adding "that I can only say that if bureaucratic hands are laid on the Wheat Board, there will be hell to pay".⁴⁷

Richmond was highly critical of the UFWA style of heaping abuse on public servants and other outsiders to stir up the troops. He claimed that a failure to temper the politics of emotion with the politics of rationality was costly. The cost to UFWA was the coolness of some senior public servants in NSW and a poor opinion of its competence as a pressure group. To some officers it was an "idiot organisation" with little to offer rural policy.⁴⁸ The Graziers' Association did not feel embattled, or a need to lash out at its critics or the public servants it dealt with. It exuded confidence that reasoned arguments would eventually prevail. As demonstrated by the establishment of the unity study committee for a detailed examination of amalgamation with UFWA, the graziers did not rush in. This was also demonstrated in the careful and patient way the graziers fought and won the "no" case in the 1965 referendum on a floor price for wool. The graziers exhibited a degree of superiority and smugness that was noticed by UFWA. In a barely disguised jibe at UFWA, the Graziers' Association general secretary, S.S. Ick-Hewins, declared that:

One organisation may be convinced that strength lies
with a large number of angry farmers capable of

⁴⁷Quoted by Richmond, *op. cit.* p.303.

⁴⁸p.304.

marching on Canberra or Macquarie Street, armed with cudgels and pole-axes, and on heaping on the desk of some Arbitration Court judge with a pile of intimidatory telegrams. Another may take the view that it is better to win both government and the public by unassailable reason. The latter class must have considerable knowledge and appreciation of the national problems with which the government has to deal.

After thirty-two year's observation of the Graziers' Associations throughout the Australian states, I have no hesitation in saying they belong to the latter class.⁴⁹

FOR THE GOOD OF THE PARTY

The Graziers' Association made little effort to disguise the fact that it was politically partisan, despite breaking its formal links with the Country Party in 1945. Unlike UFWA, and many other farm organisations, the Graziers' Association did not have a non-political clause in its constitution and, until its amalgamation with UFWA in 1978, the Association not only donated large sums of money to the Country Party for electioneering but financially supported the running of the party's NSW head office. Upon amalgamation the funding ceased, and so did the distribution of election campaign material from the Association's head office. The Association's Special Purposes Fund was established in 1919, the year in which it joined the FSA in launching the NSW branch of the Country Party and, as the chief executive officer, John White, explained in a letter to Association member, L.R. Blackman, in 1974, the fund was used predominantly for political purposes and:

Without making any commitment which would embarrass the Association either now or in the future, I think it is fair to say that at no time has

⁴⁹Address to a Graziers' Association conference at Bathurst, July 30, 1960. ANU Archives N92/221.

the Association's Executive considered it desirable to support the Labor Party from this Fund.⁵⁰

In his response to Blackman's suggestion that the Association "openly declare its loyalty to the Country Party", White said there was no doubt that the vast majority of members were Liberal-Country Party supporters, that everyone would recognise in both the country and in Canberra that the Graziers' Association tends to be strongly pro-Liberal and Country Party. White advised Blackman that it would not be desirable to have the contents of his letter reported in the press. However, it was obvious where "our sympathies lie". In an obvious reference to UFWA, White said that he "had several times in recent years had serious doubts as to where the allegiance of some other rural organisations rested".

UFWA, as mentioned earlier, was closer to NSW Labor Governments than the Association for a number of reasons. One was the fact that Labor considered it less hostile. There was also a core of Labor sentiment among UFWA members, and a family connection with Jack Renshaw, one time Labor Premier, the brother of one time UFWA President, Claude Renshaw. According to Richmond, UFWA had shared a number of policy ideas, notably on land settlement and rural education, with the Askin Liberal-Country Party Government which took office in 1965 but, by 1968, there was a rift because UFWA was demanding more than the Country Party was prepared to give. The rift remained for some years and was deepened when "the leader of the UFWA (Rod Black) was seen to be advocating a pro-Labor vote before the 1972 federal elections".⁵¹ Richmond failed to provide evidence of this and Black emphatically denied it. Black said, however, that farmers of the wheat-sheep zone were angry with the Country Party but, this time, not over compulsory wheat pooling but over the allocation of wheat quotas imposed to curb over-production.⁵²

⁵⁰Letter dated May 22, 1974. ANU Archives N92/1374.

⁵¹*Op.cit.* pp.263-4.

⁵²Telephone interview with Black, August 21, 1993.

John White explained that typical election campaign donations from the Special Purposes Fund, from the time he became chief executive officer in the late 1960s until the 1978 amalgamation with UFWA, were \$20,00 to the Country Party (later National Party) and \$10,00 for the Liberal Party. Until 1974 no money went to the Labor Party, but then "token donations" of \$2000 to \$3000 were made to the Whitlam Government.⁵³ The Labor donations were kept a close secret but were considered important as a way to get closer to the Labor Minister for Primary Industry, Ken Wriedt, who was seen by that stage as a fair and competent minister. Unlike its federal body, the AWGC, the Graziers' Association was quick to sense the dangers of keeping aloof from the ALP. Other graziers, White said, found it hard to adjust after 23 consecutive years of Coalition Government during which they had been able to exploit the "old boys network". While the leadership of the NSW Graziers' Association was as wary of the ALP as its general membership, it was quick to realise that the political game had changed. Federal Labor Governments wielded power and had to be dealt with front on. The graziers also understood that the Labor Government of 1972-75 was a very different one from those of the distant past, and its constituency was much wider than the trade union movement and the blue collar classes.

The Whitlam Government demonstrated to NSW graziers in 1974, with its 25 per cent across-the-board tariff cut that it was more in tune with their views on protection than the Coalition. At the same time Wriedt went further than his Country Party predecessor and put a fixed annual floor price under the wool market, in place of a flexible price that was supposed to cushion price falls but not defy the market. The advent of the Whitlam Government was a spur to concerted farm unity moves, in NSW and nationally, leading in 1979 to the establishment of the National Farmers' Federation, the long sought after "one voice". It meant that the rules of rural lobbying game had been charged dramatically. It was no longer the case of influencing policy by a telephone call to a friendly Country Party minister, or getting the ear of a senior public servant. The Labor Government, with a minute farmer constituency, had to be

⁵³Telephone interview, July 26, 1993.

convinced, the Caucus rural committee had to be educated on farm policy, and farm organisations had to argue for the continuation or extension of support measures in public before the Industries Assistance Commission. All this led farm leaders to the belief that they had to unite into a stronger and more efficient organisation to not only meet the new demands placed upon them but to compete more effectively with others groups, like the ACTU and the welfare lobby, that had historical connections with Labor. We will return to farmer-Labor relations in a later chapter.

Unity moves by farm organisations in NSW put at risk not only the long and close relationship between farm organisations and the Country Party but also the generous funding the party received from the Graziers' Association. Some precise details of donations are found in the Special Purposes Fund accounts for 1972, a federal election year. The Australian Country Party received a grand total of \$28,374 of which \$11,000 went in party office administration and the rest for campaign purposes. The Liberal Party received \$3,000 for the election. As mentioned earlier, it was 1974 before any money was donated to Labor election campaign funds. Another \$22,352 went for a variety of purposes, including maintaining an Association representative in Canberra, public relations, the publication of the Association's newspaper, *Muster*, and fighting commodity board elections against UFWA candidates.⁵⁴

From 1966, the Graziers' Association conducted occasional surveys of its members on how money from the Special Purposes Fund should be spent. The information was kept confidential to the Association's Executive Committee. For the 1976 Survey, 1,663 questionnaires were posted, and 555 returned, of which 51.71 per cent were in favour of some expenditure on the Country Party, 19.45 per cent on the Liberal Party and a mere 0.90 per cent on the Labor Party. The comparable percentages from the 1970 survey, which produced 446 completed questionnaires from the 2,100 posted, were Country Party 45.40 per cent, Liberal Party 16.75 per cent and Labor 0.72 per cent. In both surveys, respondents

⁵⁴ANU Archives N92/1411.

expressed a strong acceptance of funding for research and the maintenance of a representation in Canberra.⁵⁵

The results of questionnaires were only a guide to the Executive Committee. The "confidential" letter sent to fund contributors by White along with the 1976 questionnaire said bluntly that "the Executive will continue to use its discretion from time to time but will be assisted by your completion of the attached". In his letter to members, Graziers' Association president, F.M. MacDiarmid, stressed that while funds were being directed to research and public relations areas, the other objectives would not be abandoned. These, he said, included "the securing of Liberal-Country Party Government in both Commonwealth and State spheres".⁵⁶ Members were asked to contribute to the fund an amount equal to their annual subscription, but if not prepared to go that far then half that amount. White reported to the Executive Committee in March, 1976, that 65 per cent of contributors paid an amount equal to their annual subscription, 23 per cent paid approximately half and 12 per cent less than half.⁵⁷ MacDiarmid, in his letter, assured Association members that a failure to contribute would not place a member under any disability compared with those who did contribute.

THE GRAZIERS CROSS THE RUBICON

There were many factors inhibiting unity between farmers and graziers in NSW, but none more than the different approach to marketing. In the eyes of most UFWA members the graziers were the spoilers who, in league with woolbrokers, organised the successful "no" vote at the 1965 referendum on a reserve price scheme. The farmers of UFWA had waged and won the fight for a wheat stabilisation scheme with little help from graziers. In the 1960s many graziers, hit by low wool prices, turned to wheat, attracted by its guaranteed price and high first advance payment,

⁵⁵N92/1411.

⁵⁶White's letter was dated June 11, 1976 and MacDiarmid's undated letter was sent during his term as president, 1968-73. N92/1411.

⁵⁷March 3, 1976, N92/1411.

but UFWA resisted the efforts of the Graziers' Association to get representation on the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation and campaigned against graziers seeking places on the NSW Grain Elevators Board and the Australian Wheat Board. In 1967 UFWA objected to the Graziers' Association standing a candidate, W.L. Ridley, for a vacancy on the Wheat Board. UFWA and its predecessor, the FSA, had held the two NSW seats on the Board since its inception in 1948. UFWA General Secretary, Allan Johnston, told a meeting of wheatgrowers at Temora that Ridley belonged to an organisation 'which opposed wheat stabilisation' and had traditionally opposed orderly marketing in any form.⁵⁸

However, by the end of the 1960s the situation was very different and, as MacDiarmid explained in his August, 1970, presidential letter to all members of the Graziers' Association, "policy on wool marketing was significantly changed by Annual Conference on the 14th April this year". That was not an understatement. MacDiarmid wrote:

The resolution affecting the change was in terms identical with the one passed by a meeting of woolgrowers at Moree on the 31st. of March. It called for the establishment of a single wool marketing authority, with power to administer the efficient marketing and distribution of the entire Australian clip.⁵⁹

MacDiarmid went on to outline the speed at which the wool marketing juggernaut was travelling since it left the "spontaneous" meeting at Moree the previous March. The Moree organiser, Ron Hunter, who moved the successful motion at the Graziers' Association annual conference on April 14, moved the same resolution at the Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers' Council convention on April 21. The motion was carried there, and again the following day, at the Australian Wool Industry Conference, the

⁵⁸Reported in the *Lake Cargelligo News*, September 8, 1967. Clipping held at ANU Archives, N92/1542.

⁵⁹Letter dated August 4, 1970. N92/1676.

so-called "wool parliament" where the graziers of the AWGC and the farmers of the Australian Wool and Meat Producers' Federation met to devise wool policy.

According to MacDiarmid, his association's wool industry committee expressed concern at its May 28 meeting that the details of a single marketing authority might not be finalised for its inclusion in the August Federal Budget. So the committee wrote to the Australian Wool Board asking it to set up a technical sub-committee to begin work at once to assist its Advisory Committee. The sub-committee was quickly established, and within a few weeks it had reported to the Advisory Committee which told the Wool Board what it expected to hear, that an authority should be established. The wool industry was formally advised of this on July 6th. On that very day the Graziers' Association told the AWGC that all wool should be marketed by the proposed authority. Under pressure from the Minister for Primary Industry, Doug Anthony, for a quick decision to take to Cabinet, the AWGC on July 16th. endorsed the authority. To add intellectual weight to the proposal, Anthony commissioned noted economist and Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, Sir John Crawford to assess it and he reported favourably.⁶⁰

Australian graziers had crossed the Rubicon to the land of orderly marketing for wool, ensuring Government intervention in their industry and the prospect that taxpayers funds would be used to support the market price. In one sweep the greatest barrier to farmer-grazier unity had been removed. The two old antagonists were now on the same side of the fence and amalgamation was within reach. As shown by the MacDiarmid letter, once the graziers wavered the pace of wool market reform was a little short of breathtaking. The man who chaired the Moree meeting, Ralph Hunt, began his speech to Parliament on the Australian Wool Commission Bill that October by congratulating Anthony:

⁶⁰Crawford, who was deputy chairman of the Australian Wool Board Advisory Committee, reported to Anthony in September, 1970. ANU Archives E266/329.

upon the speed with which he acted in concert with the Australian wool industry in presenting to Parliament this Bill to establish the Australian Wool Commission. Who would have thought that in a matter of a few months we would have seen the wool industry completely united and the Government acting in such time to try and meet the crisis that the industry is facing.⁶¹

The crisis Hunt referred to was real enough and played a major role, along with the quest for unity, swinging the Graziers' Association towards a wool marketing authority. Only five years before it rejected any interference in the free market and vigorously campaigning against a reserve price. Now it had a reserve price and, although it was deemed flexible and not to defy market trends, it was the foot in the door for the fixed reserve price introduced in 1974, and the acquisition of wool that did not meet that reserve. Wool and wheat were in the same boat and UFWA and the Graziers' Association were, for the first time, rowing in the same direction. Journalist, Sally Loane, reported Sir William Gunn as saying that:

After the Moree meeting Sir John (McEwen) rang me at one o'clock in the morning and said "look Bill, I have John Crawford with me and we are desperately worried about the wool industry. We have concluded that the only thing we can do is to bring in your (reserve price) plan. After the report was written McEwen told me Cabinet had accepted it in principle."⁶²

Loane, who at the time was writing a biography of Gunn, stated that even the staunch free-market NSW Graziers' Association bowed under the strain of the lowest wool prices in 30 years and, by October 1970, was calling for the immediate introduction of a fixed

⁶¹House of Representatives, *Hansard*, October 28, 1970. p.2901. Hunt was Country Party MHR for Gwydir, which included Moree.

⁶²*The Age*, Melbourne, February 15, 1991.

reserve price. Ken Baxter, who was an economist with the Graziers' Association at that time, saw the about face on wool marketing as a combination of several factors. Certainly, he said, low wool prices and drought were important, but unity discussions with UFWA were in the wind "and there was a feeling in the air that compromises should be made in the interests of unity". There was also, according to Baxter, a shift in the Association's power base towards a reserve price, with more members having received a taste of orderly marketing and price guarantees following the big swing to wheat in the 1960s.⁶³

The pressure on the NSW graziers to fall into line was intense. It came from within, from UFWA, the Wool Board and from its fellow member of the AWGC, the United Graziers' Association of Queensland, where frequent droughts in pastoral areas made many graziers keen on intervention. Wool Board chairman, Sir William Gunn, was a former UGA president and retained wide support in his home state. Another major factor was the role of the Country Party which had never wavered during the 1960s in its support of a reserve price scheme. The Sydney-based weekly, *Nation*, reported that relations between the Graziers' Association and the Country Party had "grown cool" during the latter days of the McEwen era and that, during the reserve price debate of 1965, leading personalities of the association and the party were on opposite sides of the fence:

It was an open secret that some Liberals believed that they might ultimately swing the Graziers' Association away from the Country Party and a courtship began through the Rural Committee of the Liberal Party, in which the (now) NSW Senator, Robert Cotton, played a leading role. Under Mr MacDiarmid (president, 1968-73) the Graziers' Association swung back to the Country Party. It was Mr MacDiarmid who sent out a warning pointing out that a number of Liberal rural seats would be in danger unless support for wool was forthcoming:

⁶³Telephone interview, February 5, 1993.

significantly, he names no Country Party seats in a similar danger.⁶⁴

Nation claimed that MacDiarmid, who in 1973 became a Country Party member of the NSW Legislative Council, took a leading role in mid-1971, confronting Liberals in the Federal Parliament who opposed a reserve price for wool. Whatever MacDiarmid's role in the reserve price bid, the claim by *Nation* that the Graziers' Association might "swing" from the Country Party to the Liberal Party was nonsense because the Association had ceased its affiliation with the Country Party in 1945 and, as mentioned earlier, the grazier vote was split between both parties. The vital outcome of the graziers' capitulation on wool marketing reform was the removal of a major barrier to unity with farmers. How the proponents of a "one voice" for primary producers capitalised on this is detailed in the next chapter.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS Australia's major farm organisations found it difficult to unite because they had lacked common objectives. They looked to the trade union movement, which united early this century under the ACTU banner, as an example to follow but farm organisations had more in common with the business lobby. When Trevor Matthews said that "fragmentation and the lack of organisational unity have always been the hallmarks of business and employer representation in Australia" he could have been talking about the farm lobby, at least until the 1970s.⁶⁵ Like farm organisations, a number of bodies purported to speak for business at the federal level, a plethora of state bodies vied for the attention of state governments and there were deep divisions on industry policy. Matthews noted, however, that whereas Australian farmers united federally as the NFF in 1979 the business lobby displayed such a "damaging lack of cohesion" at the 1983 National

⁶⁴July 24, 1971.

⁶⁵See *Employers' Associations, Corporatism and the Accord: The Politics of Australian Industrial Relations*. Address to the Interest Groups and Political Lobbying Conference, University of New England, June 17-18, 1993. Later published as a chapter in *State and the Economy: Australian Essays*, edited by Stephen Bell and Brian Head, Melbourne, 1994.

Economic Summit Conference in Canberra that the chief executives of Australia's largest companies established another organisation, the Business Council of Australia, to promote their cause more effectively.

By the early 1980s the farm lobby has lost its similarities with business and was looking more like its old enemy, the trade union movement. Matthews concluded that both the ACTU and the NFF had gained an organisational monopoly in their sectors by espousing collective-gain solutions to Australia's economic problems. This remarkable transformation of the farm lobby will be detailed in the following chapters.