

Le Socialisme sans Doctrines – Charles Harper and the Foundation of Co-operative Agriculture in Western Australia

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Abstract: *Agricultural co-operation was one of the most important movements in the development of the economy of Western Australia. The establishment of some of the State's most significant commercial concerns, including Westfarmers Ltd and CBH Ltd, emerged from this movement in the early decades of the 20th century. After World War Two, in promoting the interests of such organisations during a period in which laissez faire principles were on the wane, those in control sought to link their commercial concerns with the more socially acceptable philosophical principles of Co-operative Socialism as they were described by Robert Owen and practiced by groups such as the Rochdale Pioneers. Drawing upon such principles to pursue commercial concerns allowed these promoters to emphasise the opportunity for social advancement and economic opportunity inherent in the co-operative model. Promoters could de-emphasise the underlying commercial nature of the organisation together with the material advantages sought by the members of the organisation, the leaders in the State Government who saw these creations as a means by which to promote growth, and the prominent Perth men of capital and finance who were actively involved in the creation of these enterprises. This analysis is undertaken by considering the life of Charles Harper, the founding father of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia. I will demonstrate that the co-operative form of agricultural organisation was introduced into Western Australia as a pragmatic response to economic issues that were singular to the Australian environment rather than simply as a result of considered social or economic philosophising imported from abroad.*

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I. Introduction

Agricultural co-operation has been very important in the economic development of Western Australia. As a model for bringing together dispirit agricultural interests and providers of capital in order to achieve access to markets, the various co-operative societies established in Western Australia during the period from 1890 – but particularly from 1902 – to the early 1920s in Western Australia played an important role in the development of agriculture. Together with the mining of gold, agricultural expansion after 1890 was fundamental to the wealth of Western Australia, giving it the economic foundation that had eluded it since colonisation in 1829. The co-operative societies established after the turn of the twentieth century successfully channelled government support and the combined interests of their members toward eroding the natural impediments to agricultural expansion. These impediments were, essentially, related to a lack of capital available for the development of transport infrastructure to support the bulk handling of produce. The difficulty of producing goods in isolated, low yield regions and then delivering produce to very distant markets created a desperate need for public logistical and transport infrastructure. The capacity for farmers and pastoralists to achieve satisfactory prices for their produce was weakened further by a lack of joint marketing capacity once goods had been delivered to those distant markets. This need for the provision of public goods was identified early in the Colony's history, but the lack of economic development up until the 1890's served to ensure that the local government, as a natural conduit for the raising of funds and the provision of cheap loans, did not have the funds to meet the ambitions of the settlers nor the capacity to raise funds. The slow growth in the population combined with the distances involved in terms of transport requirements – both from widely dispersed farms to ports and from ports to very distant markets - ensured that the high rate of investment required was beyond the capacity of the government until the last decade of the nineteenth century. This capacity was finally realised when economic development from the exploitation of gold deposits saw the government become recognised by London financiers as a good investment opportunity. Overall, these impediments effectively ensured return for effort experienced by farmers was unsatisfactory and that those with money and skills would prefer to migrate elsewhere to ensure an adequate rate of return and better lifestyle. Harper, a natural collaborator, considered that co-operative enterprise was the ideal solution to these problems as it brought farmers together and allowed them to pool their efforts and focus their political interests toward influencing a government that was increasingly able to invest capital toward the establishment of required public goods. Indeed, he demonstrated this in practice by establishing the Western Australian Producers Union in 1902.

Organisations established via the co-operative movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century in Western Australia include such iconic Western Australian companies as Wesfarmers Ltd and CBH Ltd. These organisations were extremely important in resolving the joint problems of transporting and marketing produce. They achieved these outcomes through a combination of agitating successfully for government financial and legislative support and bringing together agricultural interests to ensure uniformity of quality and packaging. Using members' support and commissions from marketing, such organisations were able to establish markets in distant London as well as other parts of the Empire and around the world. As the agricultural sector matured over the decades that

followed – particularly after the Second World War - organisations such as Wesfarmers and CBH used their promotional literature in an *ex post* attempt to suggest a link between the establishment of Western Australian co-operative companies and the socialistic idealism of Robert Owen and the Rochdale Pioneers.¹ This link served to suggest that there was a social purpose, if not a higher ethical purpose, to the establishment and maintenance of these co-operative organisations. This suggestion was important for the maintenance of monopolistic marketing arrangements for agricultural produce and for de-emphasising the commercial nature of the undertaking. Such a social purpose implied wider social benefits arising from their operation than those that related directly to the material wellbeing of their members. It was increasingly important to make this link as prevalent economic thinking began to question the need and appropriateness of mutual organisations. In this paper I intend to show that the establishment of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia arose directly out of the pragmatic needs of those involved in agriculture with the acquiescence of government. As such, I will show that the Western Australian development of agricultural co-operation conforms to Albert Metin's view constructed during his 1899 visit to the Eastern colonies of Australia and New Zealand. As a result of that tour, Metin concluded that Australasian governments were inclined to act by introducing socialist change where it was deemed necessary without recourse to socialist doctrine. I will demonstrate that Metin's view of the Eastern colonies and New Zealand in this regard is equally applicable to the development of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia at around the same time. Via a review of the life of Charles Harper, an important instigator of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia, it will be demonstrated that co-operative organisations were established to meet real and substantial impediments to the growth of the agricultural sector and not in order to achieve some higher philosophical objective. Utilising close relationships with government and seeing the need for economic expansion, Harper sought to establish co-operative organisations in Western Australia in order to enhance his interests as well as those of the broader agricultural sector. He referred to an expected broader positive social impact only to support his ideas rather than for the purposes of seeing some socialist ideal come into fruition. However, this reference was vague and undeveloped. Building on the theme of socialism without doctrine as developed by Metin, I intend to highlight the lack of guiding principles other than an aim for economic expansion.

This paper is divided into six sections. In section two I provide a contextual review of Metin's evaluation of socialist policy in the Australasian colonies developed during his tour of the eastern Australian colonies and New Zealand in 1899. Sections three and four describe Harper's rise to prominence and political career respectively. Section five explores Harper's efforts to establish co-operative agriculture and his thinking in that regard. As indicated above, it will be shown that Harper did not seek to implement a particular economic doctrine to achieve an outcome of social advancement but, rather sought to grow the Western Australian economy via the establishment of a strong agricultural base. Section six provides concluding remarks.

¹ See, for instance, Ayers (1999, 12); Zekulich (1997, 10); Cox (1965); Smith (1984).

II. Albert Metin & Pragmatic Socialism

The establishment of co-operative agricultural organisations in Western Australia grew out of pragmatic needs and was driven by economic necessity. This pragmatic view of economic priorities is demonstrated in Metin's writings which related to the social and economic reforms implemented in the Eastern colonies of Australia and New Zealand. As shown in the following section, Harper was animated by this sense of economic pragmatism and, while he held religious beliefs and contributed in many altruistic ways to the community in which he lived and worked, he did not seek to build into his model of co-operation anything more than what was necessary to ensure a sound economic outcome for those involved in agriculture. I will now briefly review the life and work of Metin to bring into context the setting for Harper's contribution and to emphasise the framework of ideas within which he worked.

Albert Metin was born in Besancon, France in 1871². Interestingly, and perhaps foreshadowing his future contributions, Metin shared his birthplace with Charles Fourier (born in 1772) and Victor Hugo (born in 1802). His father was a public servant and the Metin family were new to the district when he was born. As a result of a poor showing in philosophy, which resulted in his failure to achieve graduation from a teachers college prior to his studies in Arts at university, he developed an antipathy toward philosophy that was to inform his thinking for the rest of his life. Perhaps it was this antipathy toward philosophy that ensured that he approved of the practical results of social policy enacted in the antipodes. In any case, Metin showed himself an able student and graduated from the Sorbonne in 1894. By the time he was 21, Metin considered himself a socialist and, while studying and writing in the mid-1890's, he was invited to England by members of the Fabian Society. This and other trips influenced Metin's life and thinking greatly and his socialist ideas began to take shape as a result. Interestingly, his radical thinking was reinforced by two tours of Germany at about the same time. These tours developed in the young Metin a horror of militarism and the feeling of confinement that this country gave him. He won a travelling scholarship in 1899. Partly as a reaction to his German experiences and partly as a result of his fondness for English Fabianism and his memories of that country, he decided to use the scholarship to study social development in the English speaking world. He set off to tour Australasia due to its advanced social development as compared to the Old World and due to his acceptance of English radicalism above other forms of social activity. Australasia led the world in terms of universal enfranchisement, social security and support as well as education. Combining these facts with Metin's love of English socialism made Australasia an obvious place to visit (Ward, ii).

Metin's book, *Le Socialisme sans Doctrines*, was the ultimate literary outcome of this travel. After his return to France and subsequent entry into the French public service, the Labour Bureau published the report that he had written based on his findings in the Australian colonies and New Zealand. Not satisfied with the presentation of the report, he

² A brief description of Metin's life is provided in the 1977 translated edition of *Le Socialisme sans Doctrines*. This description was written by Camille Vallaux and originally published in the *Revue du Moi* in December 1919. The overview of Metin's life provided here is drawn from the English translation of that article.

subsequently refashioned it into book form and re-published it under the title *Le Socialisme sans Doctrines* – Socialism without Doctrine. In the Translator's Foreword to Russel Ward's 1977 translation of Albert Metin's *Le Socialisme sans Doctrines*, Ward provides a brief but comprehensive review of the importance of Metin's work to Australian history (1977, i-vi). Importantly, he describes the time of Metin's visit as being a point when Australasia "...with very little theoretical guidance, had in practice..." implemented more social reform than any other country (1977, ii). The book documented the results of Metin's investigations into a number of social initiatives established in the eastern colonies of Australia and New Zealand. These included areas such as working conditions, social security, the extent of suffrage and efforts to deal with social evils such as unemployment. To reinforce his position that socialism needed to be enacted and the Continental socialists talked too much, Metin described the failed models of co-operation that were implemented in the Australian context but in accordance with the Continental model. Of particular interest in the context of this paper, is Metin's description of the 1890's failure of Owenite co-operative villages established in South Australia. The book also marks Metin's break with theoretical socialism. The work was of such a substantial nature that Shann is said to have relied on it extensively for his seminal *Economic History of Australia* (1977, iv).

As a result of his writings and his productive capacity, Metin became chief secretary of the Department of Labour in 1906 and from then on his thoughts turned to the French Parliament. He became a member in 1909 at a by-election and was confirmed at a general election in 1910. He was briefly minister for labour in 1913 and then served with a regiment at the front from December 1914 until October 1915, when he was appointed minister for labour once again. He held several cabinet posts in the French government until he was appointed to lead a cultural and economic mission to Australia in July, 1918. In August of that year, Metin suffered a stroke in San Francisco en route to Australia and died prematurely at the age of forty-seven.

It is suggested by his biographer that Metin had significantly more important contributions to make than he had made up until his death (Vallaux, 1977 Translation of *Les Socialisme sans Doctrine*). Importantly for us, his major contribution toward our understanding of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia is constituted by *Les Socialisme sans Doctrine* and the notion that the Australian brand of socialism was based on action and outcomes with limited reference to philosophical socialism of the Continental variety. Socialism without doctrine is a suitable framework to understand the development of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia, and to explain the contribution of Charles Harper to this movement. Harper was a pragmatic agriculturist seeking to exploit any system or process that would advance the development of the agricultural sector and suggested that such advancement would lead to increased migration and economic security for the West. He was less interested in the philosophical aspects of co-operation, as represented by the ideas of co-operators such as Owen, than he was in the economic and political outcomes such a form of organisation might generate.

Owen sought higher order outcomes from his co-operative efforts than mere economic wellbeing. Although he considered that an essential element in the road to the betterment of man was the development of a sound economic base, he focused on the development of mutable man to a higher plain rather than simply serving his material needs. As such, he sought to develop a program of co-operation that would see man have the best chance of achieving a higher form of existence. For Owen, co-operation was a model of organisation that allowed men to come together in mutual assistance to establish communities where their families could be raised above the vulgar existence that they were currently enduring. As such, the way they organised, worked and interrelated was as important as the economic outcome itself. The extinction of religion combined with the provision of education, social housing and other social reforms were considered essential in Owen's program. Further, independence from government was also a fundamental requirement to fulfilling man's potential. Owen's faithful adherents, the Rochedale Pioneers, represented, at least in the short term, a practical manifestation of Owen's ideas. As we shall soon see, Harper was not animated by these considerations at all and a suggestion that the origins of major co-operative enterprises in Western Australia were based on these ideas is not supportable.

III. Charles Harper – Rise to Prominence

Charles Harper was the third child and only son of Charles Harper Senior and Julia Harper. He was born near Toodyay (old Newcastle) east of Perth in 1842, merely 13 years after the founding of the Swan River Colony on the south-western coast of the Australian continent.³ Harper's father⁴ was a deeply religious Anglican and was made

³ Harper's life has been the subject of a biography authored by F. R. Mercer and published in 1958 by the Western Australian Farmers Co-operative Printing Works. The book is very much a salutary piece emphasizing Harper's successes and projecting him as a wholesome, family centric and Christian patriot. Given its providence, it also addresses the development of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia in social terms but in a very rudimentary, undeveloped fashion. The book is comprehensive in terms of its dealing with all aspects of Harper's life – often in considerable detail. It does, however, fail to present a balanced view of the subject. The book represents one of a number of post World War II publications that, essentially for political purposes, established, *ex post*, connections between the original establishment of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia and a broader social goal. Harper's activities and contribution to the development of Western Australia have been noted in various historical pieces. Usually, the subject of such pieces has been some social, economic or political development in which Harper had a hand. Along with Mercer's book, these pieces have been drawn upon to build a more balanced and deeper understanding of Harper's life and contribution in relation to the establishment of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia.

⁴ Charles Harper Senior arrived in the colony on Boxing Day in 1837, eight years after the arrival of the original settlers under Governor James Stirling. He was aged 38 years and was newly married. His wife, Julia Gretchen, was grand-daughter of Lionel Lukin (the name is incorrectly spelt Luskin in the obituary published in the West Australian, 13th August 1898), the inventor of the life boat. Harper Senior was unable to establish himself in his calling as a barrister due to the lack of demand in the new colony for such services and so he determined to commence farming in the Toodyay area. He was tenacious but ultimately relatively unsuccessful. His devout attitude, education and closeness to the Reverend J.R. Wollaston, Archdeacon of the colony, made him more vocationally suited to the life of a priest than a farmer. He was duly ordained in Adelaide in 1849 by Bishop Short – 12 years after arrival in the colony and in his 50th year (of this event see Harper Senior's journal of the journey to Adelaide and his time there, HFP, 1113A/1). Wollaston was Short's protégé and it was Short who appointed Wollaston to the position of Archdeacon for Western Australia in 1848. Harper Senior's closeness to Wollaston served to cement the Harper family as important members of colonial society. The Rev. Harper was duly appointed as Chaplain for York and the

Chaplain of York and the Valley of the Avon after an unsuccessful but tenacious career of 12 years as a farmer. As a youth, Harper appears to have enjoyed the life of an adventurer in the bush around the family home and farm, “Nardi”, and he also appears to have had a considerably curious frame of mind. His education, as one would expect living in an isolated corner of a very new and extremely isolated colony, took the form of private tuition and he grew up in a household in which religious observance was taken seriously.⁵ Importantly for this narrative, it was apparent to many who Harper mixed with in later life that Harper’s thinking was shaped to a considerable degree by his father’s counsel and example.⁶

Upon his arrival in the colony and continuing after his ordination, the Reverend Harper established connections to the colonial elite. His relationships with Bishop Short and Wollaston as well as references to his connections in the Legislative Council (Mercer, 1958) are all significant pointers to the incorporation of the Harper family into colonial society.⁷ The Reverend Harper’s parish included the land holdings of many influential and wealthy farmers whose sons went on to take significant roles in politics, business, agriculture and education in the colony and whose daughters were married into elite families. The family circle and contacts were extended to the benefit of all concerned.⁸ At the time of Charles Harper’s birth in 1842, the Swan River Colony was economically depressed, socially confined and trying hard to be a significant outpost of the British

Valley of the Avon. He gained considerable respect for his commitment to the parish and his capacity for fulfilling the pastoral needs of a very small but geographically dispersed flock (*The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 23rd May 1851). He died in 1872. His wife, Julia, died in 1898, having received many accolades from within the Church and the Community for her tireless efforts in supporting her husband’s ministry and also for teaching and making a social contribution in her own right (Mercer, 1958; Alexander, 1957; Sandford, 1955).

⁵ Indeed, there are many references in travel journals kept by Archdeacon Wollaston and Bishop Short reporting upon the fellowship and religious observance enjoyed at Nardie for the benefit of the family and the wider community even before Harper Senior was ordained (See Mercer, 1958, Pp. 2 – 5).

⁶ For example, T.H. Bath, who only came to know Harper in 1902 when the former was elected to the Legislative Assembly in a by-election, described a number of reminiscences in a letter to Harper’s family written after Harper’s death in 1912. In this letter, Bath describes the source of Harper’s leadership qualities as beginning with the “many quiet talks...in the orchard, farm and home” had between the young Charles and his cleric father (HFP, 3706A/16). Bath grew much closer to Harper from the time he was made Minister for Lands and Agriculture in 1911 within the Scadden Ministry. He was attracted to Harper for his capacity to develop the co-operative idea because, in Kalgoorlie, he had tried to form a co-operative wholesale society to no avail. The two men worked closely for the short period from then until Harper died in 1912. They had mutual interests and, apparently, a mutual respect (HFP, 3706A/16).

⁷ Brown (1999) catches the importance of these relationships when comparing the development of colonial society in mid-century with the picture of society painted by Jane Austen in her various novels and novellas of an earlier age. Brown convincingly suggests, using the Hillman diaries to describe social structure in the colony, that while Austen was dead before the initial settlement of the Swan River Colony took place, the settlers remained locked into a social ordering that had ceased to exist in the mother country, but which appears to have persisted into late Victorian times in Western Australia. Central to this structure was the importance of family, family-in-law and friends and acquaintances in gaining preference and establishing careers.

⁸ The social circles in which the Harpers moved included such scions of the colony as the Lee Steeres, the Lukins (to whom Harper was related via his mother) and the Viveash families. Charles Harper went on to develop life long friendships with colonial leaders of his generation, including Walter Padbury, the Forrest family and the Clarkson family.

Empire. Unfortunately, this most isolated of colonies met with little success in this regard. Landholders and merchants became the leading men of the time and the political system reinforced their position by reserving political participation to those classes that had a “stake in the land” as evidenced by the value of their landholdings and the opinion of their fellows (Crowley, 1960). By 1850 convict labour was being brought into the colony. While the labour itself was of limited value in the context of the needs of the colony, the monies transferred to the colonial government from the Imperial government were of great benefit to increasing the amount of cash available for commerce, the building of much needed infrastructure and for increasing the level of demand for local products. Very limited communications and transport systems,⁹ combined with the government’s lack of capacity to make investments of a scale that would ameliorate these obstacles and assist the population to rise to levels that would allow for economic growth ensured that the colony remained a relatively stagnant backwater for the first 60 years or so of settlement. Indeed, it was not until the gold rushes, getting their stride in the early 1890’s, that the colony gained any capacity for economic strength. The limited population and the relative economic stagnation of the decades leading up to 1890 meant that the Harpers and others of the colonial elite were able to achieve and maintain a social, economic and political position within the colony over a period of sufficient length that they were considered the leading families in politics, commerce, religion and society by the time that Harper became of age. Charles Harper himself then reinforced such connections in business dealings with leading families, including those with which he grew up – confirming his position as part of the establishment of Western Australia.¹⁰ This, however, is to get ahead of the narrative. He made use of the skills of the bushman acquired as a result of his childhood roaming through the Avon Valley and embarked, at the age of 16, on a life of farming by renting a portion of a farm near Beverley.¹¹ This

⁹ There were no railroads established within the colony until 1874 and the colony was not connected telegraphically with the outside world until 1877 (Crowley, 1960; Crowley, 2000). Further, the postal service between the colony and the outside world was based on sea transport. This sea transport required the establishment of an official mail port (as designated by the Imperial government) and Albany had this honour until as late as 1900. The designation of Albany was a considerable set back for Fremantle and inhibited the development of the Colony as a whole. It meant that mail and passengers arriving in the colony made landfall at Albany had to either tranship and continue their journey to Perth via Fremantle or take a very uncomfortable land journey of some 350 miles between Albany and Perth with very little in the way of comfort in between. This requirement added time and discomfort to an already long journey and often dissuaded those heading for the Eastern Colonies from dallying in the West, thus losing an opportunity for the Swan River Colony to display itself beyond the confines of Albany (Brown, 1996; Evans, 2001).

¹⁰ *The Western Mail* newspaper reported that Harper’s pall-bearers at his funeral in 1912 included S. Viveash, W. Hackett, A.M. Oliphant (the manager of the Producers’ Union – a co-operative venture commenced by Harper and discussed in detail below) and Pearce, while Sir J. Forrest, S.F. Moore, G. Lukin, J. Cowan, W. Padbury, E. Shenton and D. Clarkson all participated in the service itself (*The Western Mail*, 22nd April 1912).

¹¹ It seems there are a number of legends that have grown out of Harper’s leaving home. A most interesting story is centred upon the young Harper leaving home after his mother had given him 50 pounds in cash, a horse, cart, a barrel of salt pork and a gun. It would seem an appropriate beginning considering Harper’s future career in the bush and in politics and fits well with the idea of opportunity being there for the making in Western Australia. However, while the story is neither able to be confirmed nor debunked, it is unlikely that in 1858 the family had 50 pound in cash. Furthermore, it is not clear where Harper might have spent it at Beverley during those years.

farm was owned by Augustus Lee Steere, father of Sir James, the future first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Phillips, 2004).

Life at the Beverley farm was likely primitive and somewhat lonely. However, during this period, Harper undertook two expeditions during which he explored considerable territory east and north of the established farming districts heading out from a vertices running loosely from Northam to York to Toodyay. These exploration parties did not reveal any great discoveries in terms of farming or mining opportunities. In fact they might be considered as failures in this regard as they missed a number of mineral discoveries within the region that were made later by others. The expeditions nonetheless allowed Harper, at the age of 19, to confirm lifelong relationships with people who were to be leaders in the colony in the years to come. Compatriots on these expeditions included Clarkson, Dempster and Lukin. The expeditions also gave him an advantage by honing survival skills that would be used later in the North-West. Of perhaps more lasting use, he was able to develop knowledge of the country that would be useful in his commercial and parliamentary roles in the future. This knowledge placed him in a position of advantage over political and commercial rivals as he possessed knowledge of the country superior to most city based members of parliament and merchants at the time. He was able to regale the House with his experience and opinion relative to weighty topics such as agriculture, exploration, development and infrastructure (Phillips, 2004). The trials endured as an explorer¹² together with the experience of farming in Beverly and grazing in the North West, ensured Harper developed a passion for the future of Western Australia and a notion that that future was to be agriculturally based. He became very much aware of both the potential of the colony and of the problems associated with exploiting it for economic development. Over time, his expansive energy was devoted to farming, pastoral grazing, market gardening, orchards, vineyards, dairy farming and various other primary industry pursuits, including pearling and fishing. Usually he farmed, grazed or gardened in combination with a partner or two. Records point to Harper having taken a central role in the running of his various interests, although his partner(s) and others were sometimes left to operate properties while he pursued other opportunities.¹³ He also took great interest in inventions and technology that could be applied to make the work of the pioneer farmer or pastoralist, if not easier, then less risky and more profitable. Further, and from a relatively young age, Harper undertook experiments in agricultural practice, sought new ventures in opening and expanding industries and sought to apply scientific and engineering ideas. He expended a great deal

¹² The trials and tribulations of these journeys were recorded by Harper in reports and journals. These are preserved for consultation (HFP, 1973A/17).

¹³ For example, in 1868, after having arrived in the North-West, Viveash and Harper established "Tambrey", a sheep station between Roebourne and Wittenoom Gorge. The pair then left "Tambrey" in the hands of J. Edgar, the manager of the proximal Pyramid Station, and sought wealth from pearling. Originally setting their sights on beach fishing (at the mouth of the de Grey and Ashburton Rivers – traversing a considerable distance between to two positions), they soon realized the limitations of such an occupation. The work was hard and they depended on natives to lead them to productive locations. It was deemed necessary to use a boat for sea fishing from which the pair expected to achieve a greater return for their efforts. Having no boat available, they agreed to build one and, after purchasing a milling saw, they utilized the endemic cajeput trees to build a boat over a period of twelve or so months. The boat, appropriately named "The Amateur", was launched in December 1868 (*The Western Mail*, 27th April 1912).

of energy and time in pursuing a resolution to the issue of transporting produce to distant markets in a state fit for sale. For instance, he undertook an examination of refrigeration. In fact, any opportunity arising from the east of the continent, from England or from the United States was sought out, researched and considered for application in the Western Australian context. This expansionary and experimental practice continued throughout his life. On becoming wealthy as a result of his agricultural interests, his significant tenure in parliament and his various investments, including as a partner in the West Australian newspaper, he was able to expand his influence. He appears to have exercised this influence wherever and whenever he felt so inclined and deployed a proportion of his financial resources toward the establishment of a sound, agriculturally based economy in the West. Harper invested in people as well as ideas. In the case of Catton Grasby, for instance, he demonstrated a willingness to attract people from wherever he found them.¹⁴ In conjunction with Grasby, Harper developed new strains of wheat capable of high yields in the poor Western Australian conditions and also pioneered the use of broadcast super phosphate almost two decades before the practice was widely taken up. Undertaking experiments in developing new strains of wheat capable of growing profitably on the more arid fringes of the expanding wheat belt of the Colony was an interest developed later in life. However, it was representative of Harper's enduring expansive sense of the economic opportunity afforded by the colony and his role as a facilitator in the achievement of that economic expansion. His labour was based on a great internal fortitude but also upon a home life built around Woodbridge, the family homestead on the Swan River at Guildford.

In 1879, Harper married Fanny de Burgh, the daughter of a farmer local to Harper's childhood home in Toodyay and whom he would have met during his traversing of the country between his father's farm and the leased farm at Beverley (Mercer, 1958). Over the course of fifteen years Fanny and Charles brought 10 children into the world, Charles Walter being the eldest and born in 1880 and Aileen Fanny the youngest, born in 1895.¹⁵ These children all grew up in the family home built by Harper at Guildford,

¹⁴ William Catton Grasby was brought to Western Australia by Harper to take up the role as chief agricultural editor on *The West Australian* after Grasby had reported to the Western Australian government on fruit growing possibilities in 1904. He arrived in Western Australia in 1905 and immediately commenced work with Harper in experimenting on wheat varieties, an activity he continued well after Harper's death. Sometimes jointly with Harper, he developed wheat strains such as "Gresley", "Wilfred" and "Niloc". Gresley and Wilfred being named after Harper's two sons who were both killed in the same action on the same day at Gallipoli, and so were named by Grasby after Harper's death in 1912 and perhaps in recognition of Harper's loss. Grasby served as an original senator for the University of Western Australia and also founded the Kindergarten Union in 1911. He died in 1930 (Ramsland, 1983).

¹⁵ Of the siblings, Charles Walter is most pertinent to the story of Co-operation in Western Australia as he inherited his father's interests in this area of economic development and went on to become a foundation Trustee of Co-operative Bulk Handling and was chairman of Westralian Farmers Co-operative. He went by the name of Walter in order to separate himself from his famous father (Sandford, 1955). The remaining children were Clara Julia (born 1881), Harcourt Robert (born 1882), Gresley Tatlock (born 1886 and killed in action on Gallipoli in 7 August 1915), Prescott Henry (born 1886), Mary Elizabeth and Mildred Louisa (both born in 1888), Wilfred Lukin (born in 1890 and killed in the same action as his brother Gresley Tatlock, on Gallipoli on 7 August 1915), Geoffrey Hillesden (born 1892 and died in infancy) and Aileen Fanny (born 1895) (Mercer, 1958).

“Woodbridge”¹⁶. The land upon which Woodbridge was built in 1885 was formerly selected by Governor Stirling although the rudimentary cottage built by Stirling is no longer extant and its precise location has yet to be identified (HFP, 1113A/4).¹⁷ All records indicate that life at Woodbridge was delightful for a young family. Indeed, the Reverend C. H. D. Grimes described his experience of the family as one full of life – a favourite saying of the family seems to have been that a life uncriticised was a life un-lived (HFP, 3706A/16). As we shall see, this motto seems to have been a driving principle in Harper’s life. While Grimes only came to know Harper during his final illness, he described kindnesses extended to him by Mrs Harper at a time of great exigency and considered Harper himself as willingly baring the pain and suffering of his last days. Indeed, Grimes grew to have great respect for the capacity, drive and selflessness of Harper during his final days. The house he built at Guildford became the centre of a wide ranging life for Harper. All of his interests in terms of agriculture were represented in this microcosm of the wider colony. At Woodbridge, Harper undertook many agricultural experiments, established an orchard and vineyard, and experimented in the packing for transport to England of produce. He combined these activities with various other pursuits of interest to the wider community including the establishment of the private school that later became Guildford Grammar School under the auspices of the Anglican Church (Sharp & O’Hara, 1992; Alexander, 1957; Fletcher, 1982). Life was not always easy even in this relatively civilized riverside homestead. It was, however, certainly a comfortable home and restful retreat when the pressures of politics, business and other interests became significant.

Harper was also able to seek strength from his religious convictions. He was an Anglican Layman (Alexander, 1957) and he represented Guildford and Beverley at various times at the Anglican Synod held in Perth (see for instance *The West Australian*, 25th October 1892). During the decades beginning at the founding of the colony in 1829 and ending at the enthronement of Bishop, later Archbishop, C. O. L. Riley in the Western Australian diocese, the Anglican Church’s domination was never seriously challenged in the colony by any other denomination and, therefore, its adherents were never in a position where their social power and control was in jeopardy. Bishop Riley arrived in Perth in 1895 to lead a church that was many times numerically, financially and politically dominant over the next largest, the Roman Catholic Church (*The West Australian*, 5th February, 1895). The remaining denominations represented within the colony were insignificant. The Anglican Church had enjoyed this domination throughout the formative years of the colony. Indeed, given that the legislature, clubs and the majority of banking was in Anglican control, the Anglican Church appears never to have felt the sense of urgency and threat to survival that the Roman Church felt during the same period in Western Australia. Notwithstanding internal difficulties within the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church during the nineteenth century¹⁸, the institution excelled in adversity and

¹⁶ Reverend C. H. D. Grimes believed that the house was named after the village in Sussex, England where the Harper family came from to settle in Australia (HFP, 3706A/16).

¹⁷ Interestingly, Harper Senior also leased land from the Sterling family in order to establish Nardie.

¹⁸ The leadership of the Roman Church in the colony was particularly rocky during the 1850’s with Archbishop Polding of Sydney travelling to the colony to settle a dispute between Bishop Serra and Bishop Brady. In time, Bishop Serra and Bishop Salvado also crossed swords (Salvado, 1978; McLay, 1992). Difficulties within the leadership of the Catholic Church in Western Australia continued well into the time

by 1895 dominated the Anglican Church in the social areas of education, Aboriginal mission work and services to the poor white population (de Garis, 1981). It had achieved this outcome notwithstanding leadership problems and financial difficulty brought about by poor decisions and over expenditure.¹⁹ By comparison, the Anglican Church was stagnant.²⁰ Naturally, Harper was involved in the political motions of the Anglican Church through the positions he held but also showed a certain liberality toward matters religious. Indeed, as he became older and more liberal in his thinking, it appears that his aims for religious institutions in Western Australia revolved more around reducing the influence of Catholicism than reinforcing Anglicanism in preference to any other Protestant religion.

In its description of Harper's funeral, *The Western Mail* reported of Harper that he was closely identified with Guildford Church (while not expressed specifically, the paper was describing St Michaels of which Grimes was the vicar)²¹ and that Reverends Grimes, A. Eddington and P. U. Henn (of Guildford Grammar) officiated at the funeral (22nd April, 1912). Grimes left us a description of Harper as a reserved man who believed in prayer and held a sincere faith but "...was not given to talking easily about sacred things" (HFP, 3706A/16). He believed that suffering was not pointless but, rather, allowed one the prospect of perfection. His father's faith seems to have infused Harper. It allowed him to read, think and to broaden his views, and thereby facilitated the development of his

of Bishop Mathew Gibney. Gibney's leadership almost bankrupted the Church in the West and much time and effort was expended by his successors in the Cathedral toward rectifying a very precarious financial position. The low numbers of Catholics relative to Anglicans served to exacerbate this problem which influenced the leadership of the Church well into the twentieth century. The Anglican Church was not a stranger to controversy. However, in the case of this institution, the issues revolved around theological differences. Anglican Churchmanship in Western Australia during the period under review was complex. While popular history often suggests the existence of an homogenous Anglican church in operation, Holden (1997, 4 – 17) convincingly demonstrates otherwise. The Oxford movement of High Churchmanship was well represented within the diocese and was in conflict with Low Churchmanship. Among the priestly and lay personnel of the church leadership, there was considerable conflict. This conflict represented a significant difficulty to Riley, who seems never to have expunged it. Holden (1997, 6) cites an example of this struggle when he relays the instance of Hackett using his considerable influence as editor of *The West Australian* newspaper to prevent Goldsmith – a principal leader of the Oxford "party" - from election as Bishop of Perth upon the death of Bishop Parry. The visual representation of these issues are seen in the description provided by Sharp (1993, 492) of the ceremony for the laying of Christ Church Claremont's foundation stone. This occasion included the St George Cathedral Choristers, dressed in red cassocks and white surplices because of "...the influence of Dean Frederick Goldsmith, very High Church if not indeed Anglo-Catholic."

¹⁹ See footnote 18 above.

²⁰ Riley worked quickly to try to reverse the apparent stagnant state of the Anglican Church in his Diocese. Up to that point, it would seem that the church leaders' energy was spent considering liturgy and churchmanship to the detriment of the Anglican families in Perth and across the colony. He travelled many thousands of miles to visit each of the parishes and to assess, instruct and chastise the incumbents. He also sought to remedy the gulf between the Anglican and Roman churches in terms of the numerical strength of the later over the former in numbers of schools established. In 1895 the Anglican Church could lay claim to operating only two schools within the colony while the Roman Catholic Church operated 19. Anglicans (of which there were numbered 50,000 in the colony) appeared content to send their children to government schools or even Catholic schools (Boyce, 1957).

²¹ The same article reports that Harper was laid to rest at Karrakatta cemetery notwithstanding, his will allowed for the allocation of 100 pounds to the Diocesan Trustees of the Church of England for the sole benefit of St Matthews, Guildford (Last Will and Testament of Charles Harper, HFP, MN94/1973A/10).

liberal thinking over the course of his life. This liberal thinking is exemplified in a number of ways. It is, however, both consistent with his simple view of religion and the dominant position of the Anglican Church that Harper established what became Guildford Grammar School as a private, secular though Anglican leaning – rather than expressly Anglican - school in 1895. The establishment of the school met his needs in terms of education for some of his children and the wider community. He sold the school to the Anglican Church in 1909 on condition that he retained financial control (Sharp and O’Hara, 1992; Boyce, 1957). Upon Harper’s death, an allotment of Woodbridge land was made available to the school on the proviso that the school remained under the control of the protestant religion - not specifically the Anglican Church. It appears that Harper was content provided the school was neither Roman Catholic nor secular (Harper’s Last Will and Testament, HFP, 1973A/10). This position is commensurate with the position he took while Vice Chairman of the Girls College of Western Australia. Harper’s apparent religious indifference is represented in a letter written by him (the letter is undated and may not have been posted) wherein he writes regarding the capacity of the Girls College of Western Australia to meet the demand in the colony for the education of Anglican girls. This letter describes as a natural imperative the need to meet the demand for the education of the girls of Anglican families in preference to sending them to Adelaide. For it was to Adelaide that they had to travel in order to avoid having to receive an education in a secular or a Catholic institution. In this letter, however, he is indifferent as to whether the religious education ought to be Anglican or Presbyterian (HFP, 1973A/15). There is no doubt that he was a religious man and that religion played an enormous part in his life. It was the social and political cement that brought together Harper’s interests and family. However, he appears to have compartmentalized his religious roles and beliefs so that they did not overtly inform on positions he took in other walks of life. It would seem that he rarely allowed religion to impose itself upon the solutions he sought for economic development and the realization of his economic dreams for the colony. It may be thought likely that he had no need to consider religious aspects to political and commercial problems due to the superior position of his church. However, he was not averse to meeting social and political challenges head on, regardless of their origin, when economic growth was threatened.

Harper conducted exchanges with a number of Catholic leaders over the course of his life and particularly in relation to the Aboriginal question and the development of the North West. Resulting from the expansion of his interests in the north and his knowledge of the opportunity to be found there, Harper engaged with both Bishop Gibney and Bishop Salvado over the treatment of Aborigines, their rights regarding land use and their capacity for being civilized in the image of white men. These exchanges might be seen to suggest that Harper took the simple economic development argument as axiomatic. He appears not to have developed strongly considered arguments in response to criticism from Catholic clerics and may have been bested in some exchanges save that he clearly held the majority view. For instance, in a letter of 24th July 1880, Salvado responded to Harper’s comments apropos the capacity for Aborigines to become Christians and, therefore, economic resources for the colony. Salvado mounts a strong argument in reference to Harper’s expectations that Christians must “...stand firm against the temptation to vice...” where he says he does “...not consider it fair to expect from the

Aboriginal Christians that of which we cannot boast” (HFP, 1973A/4). In a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* of 25th October 1892, Gibney attacked those interests guilty of mistreating aborigines, including Harper, not for their direct action against Aborigines but for their “apathy in connection with these events and a general want of practical sympathy with the sufferings of human kind”. In Harper’s mind, his personal economic interests in the North West, those of his one-time constituents and the interests of the broader community were put ahead of the rights of the indigenous and their capacity to live while being at odds with the colonists. This issue was debated once more at a meeting at the Town Hall in Perth in 1893. The issue of Aboriginal rights in the context of the development of the North West was the specific topic of the day. Bishop Gibney spoke once more on behalf of Aboriginal rights while Harper was equally eloquent against any concession that would see development delayed. The exchange clearly demonstrated Harper’s position when economic advancement was threatened. Gibney, on the other hand, sought to decry Harper as a representative of a few wealthy, privileged landowners who were out of step with the popular view (Durack, 1967). Clearly, Harper developed his position vis-a-viz Aborigines by reference to their capacity to assist or retard the economic growth of the colony. His religious convictions were important but his debate with the Catholic Church did not relate to religious convictions but with the need, in his eyes, to curtail the rights of indigenous people where those rights actively restricted economic advancement. He argued with great clarity for pursuit of a programme of economic development that would serve his and his compatriots’ interests in the North West ahead of the social imperative pursued by Gibney and the interests of the Aborigines. He also shared the then commonly held view that economic development would be of benefit to the Aborigines. This appears to be the yard stick by which he measured most issues, whether political, economic, religious or social. He did not take up an argument for purely religious purposes. A practice neither unusual amongst most thinking people of the time nor, perhaps, out of step with the broader economic position of the colony and its requirements for development and sustainability.

Aside from religious involvement, Harper also displayed an interest in social development and, while he was primarily committed to the economic development of the colony, he made a significant contribution as a catalyst for the development of social infrastructure. Aside from taking leading roles in the establishment of various schools, Harper became a board member of the Museum and Public Library Board (Mercer, 1958), a member of the Anglican Board of Missions (*The West Australian*, 18th September 1886) and was also involved in various philanthropic activities naturally emanating from his roles in the Parliament, as an agriculturalist and as a lay leader within his church. In an article written describing his life and reporting his funeral, *The Western Mail* newspaper reported that Harper had a lively concern for the State (22nd April 1912). Harpers social position, his work in agriculture and his various social objectives were enhanced by his business interests.

At various times throughout his life, Harper held a number of significant positions within the business community that were commensurate with his standing in society and also his capacity as an entrepreneurial developer. He was a local director of National Mutual Life Ltd together with Burt and Forrest and his name is included among the directors of the

company in its newspaper advertising²² – an indication of the Harper name commanding recognition and credibility. He was also reported by *The Western Mail* in 1912 as having been a director of the National Mutual Life Assurance Society (22nd April 1912). In 1879, Harper purchased the group of newspapers with Sir Thomas Cockburn-Campbell that, in 1880, were to become *The West Australian* and *The Western Mail* newspapers. He was deeply involved with the intricacies of running this publishing house until J. W. Hackett became a partner and editor in 1883.²³ He remained concerned as to the capacity of *The Western Mail* (which was established to report on matters agricultural and to serve the farming communities) to achieve its objectives and he was able to handover responsibilities to Catton Grasby as agricultural editor in 1905 (Mercer, 1958). In 1882 Harper became a foundation director of the Perth Ice Company and he was appointed chairman of the West Australian Trustee, Executor and Agency Company in 1892. His wide ranging interests identified above also led him to become involved in companies associated with technologies that would, to his mind, provide a stimulus to the colonial economy by enhancing agricultural industries.²⁴ It was a natural step for Harper, one with obvious foresight and leadership qualities as well as social connections, that he should also take a place in the colonial legislature.

IV. Making His Way in Politics

Clearly, Harper was a leader in a place and at a time when leadership and sheer willpower were valuable commodities. With an enduring interest in things Western Australian, Harper focused on the development of business and agricultural interests. These would provide him and his family with wealth and act as a catalyst for further economic expansion. Working toward the expansion of production, trade, infrastructure and the population needed to enhance the Western Australian economy, he was to leave a legacy for future generations. He led by example in undertaking agricultural and business pursuits as well as performing experiments and investigating opportunities for the introduction of new ideas. In these activities, Harper was a collaborator and facilitator. As such, it was natural that he be attracted to Parliament and that his constituents be

²² This advertisement appeared in the September 1909 edition of *The Farmer*, although it appeared in several editions that year.

²³ Hackett remained a partner with Harper in the *West Australian* until Harper's death in 1912. In that year, the shares recently transferred to Harper's three sons were to transfer to Hackett with the intention of Hackett becoming sole proprietor but at a valuation agreeable to all parties. Correspondence in the Harper Family Papers (1973A/10) show that Hackett was less than accommodating in terms of agreeing to a value of the shares and expediting the transfer. Ultimately the shares were transferred, after arbitration being sought from a firm of professional valuers in South Australia, in return for compensation to the shareholders for a total of 88,000 pounds. However, one suspects that some considerable social pressure was applied to Hackett, who wrote to Harper's widow on 29th August 1913 recognising a "coolness between their two families" and following what Hackett termed in that correspondence to be two pages of scolding about the affair from no less than Sir John Forrest (HFP, 1973A/10). This is an interesting anecdote giving some impression not only of Hackett's business methods, but also highlighting the closeness of the Harper family to the social elite within the State.

²⁴ Letters extant provide evidence that Harper promoted The Perth Ice Company in 1888, amongst other technology ideas that he supported, to resolve the principal problems preventing agricultural advancement in Western Australia – namely, packaging and transport of bulk produce and shipment of that produce to very distant markets in a condition such that it was suitable for market on arrival (HFP, 1973A/7 and 1973A/8). He was promoting the concept of refrigerated transport via rail as early as 1893 (*The West Australian*, 12th September 1893).

attracted to him. His approach to Parliamentary election, as represented by correspondence written during his time in the North West, seems to have been based on a sense of responsibility and duty to the nation (HFP, 1973A/6). The fulfilment of such responsibility and duty was not separate from Harper's interests but, rather, constituted an enunciation of his interests and those of his class. Notwithstanding his drive to take up legislative responsibilities and to go into battle when he perceived a threat to the economic development of the West, when it came to political confrontation and competition, it would seem that Harper was happy to stand aside and take a conciliatory and collaborative role. Discussed further below, this attitude is exemplified in his refusal to stand for re-election in the North West as well as his refusal to stand for re-appointment as Speaker, once he had been appointed to that position following Lee-Steere's unexpected death. Perhaps, because he would be taking issue with his social equals and business partners, Harper was less likely to try his political hand than to acquiesce to the position of his equals and stand aside, allowing others to take the lead while he kept his focus on the ultimate goals of economic development. This does not mean that Harper did not pursue outcomes vigorously but, rather, that he would do so in a non-confrontational way where his social equals were concerned. He would often prefer to use the machinery of the Parliament, in the form of committees and commissions, than to square off with those in his party or in the Opposition with whom he did not agree.

Harper came into the colonial legislature for the first time in 1878 following his election for the Northern District and so represented the sparsely populated and geographically isolated North West (Black & Mandy, 1998). At that time, the Legislative Council was partly elected and partly nominated by the Governor. Responsible government was not introduced into the colony until 1890 and the eligibility criteria for appointment or election to the Legislative Council in 1878 included property qualifications and a requirement that a prospective member not be an ex-convict. Voters, on the other hand, could be ex-convicts but were also subject to a property qualification as universal suffrage was not introduced into the colony until 1899. Indeed, so few were the voters of the Northern District constituency that MaCrae, in a letter to Harper of 21st September 1879 (HFP, 1973A/6), was able to provide a list of the names of a significant proportion of voters of that district together with a notation of their voting intentions. This letter reinforced MaCrae's position that Harper should not stand for re-election and Harper seems to have accepted the judgement probably based on this written intelligence.²⁵ A further and very effective, although unofficial, qualification was that of wealth. Members of the legislature were expected to sit and contribute without remuneration. Therefore, only a handful of men could afford the time away from their profession to sit in the House even if they had passed the necessary property qualification. Not only would they

²⁵ The circumstances of his initial retirement from politics in 1880 are suggested in the secondary literature to have been related to his predilection against public office (See Mercer, 1958; Black and de Garis, 1992; Black, 1990). However, examination of primary sources in the form of letters from MaCrae to Harper (21 September 1879 and 5 November 1879, HFP 1973A/6) indicates that Harper was less than satisfactory from the electors' perspective as a representative of the North District. Amongst other things, MaCrae provides a list of those electors who were opposed to his re-election. Citing Harper's apparent opposition to responsible government and his lack of interest in the North, the list of opposing opinion even includes close business associates such as Grant and Edgar. Indeed, in the second letter dated 5 November 1879, MaCrae reports that the "...people seem dissatisfied and the majority against you".

not be earning an income, they may also have not had the capacity to manage their affairs (Black & Mandy, 1998). This is almost certainly the position that Harper found himself in. His seat was located at an enormous distance from the capital, there were very limited options for transport and he could neither communicate with his constituents nor oversee his affairs when the House was sitting in Perth. Indeed, this situation combined with the fact that his family and connections were centred on Perth and the inner Wheatbelt may have contributed with Harper's return south. Therefore, the legislature that Harper joined at this time was a single house, partly appointed and partly elected by landholders, and dominated by agricultural and business interests. It was appropriate that someone with Harper's standing be a member. The House had the hallmarks of a conservative, elite club. The Weld Club, established in 1871, was the proximal rest to which many of the members repaired after their deliberations (Crowley, 1960). Harper was a natural and comfortable addition to this coterie and remained a conservative throughout his political career – well after the establishment of universal suffrage and responsible government saw the relative eclipse of the colonial elite (Phillips, 2004). Having said this, there are examples of increasing liberality in his thinking as he grew older. This is demonstrated by his acceptance and support of female adult suffrage and payment for Members of Parliament in the last five years or so of his Parliamentary career.

Harper remained a member of the legislature within the colony and then the State of Western Australia from 1878 until his retirement in 1905 with a break when he was succeeded by MacKenzie Grant in the Northern District in 1880. He was elected for York in 1884 after a four year hiatus and moved from the Legislative Council to the Legislative Assembly in 1890 when he was elected to the first Responsible Parliament as Member for Beverly. During that time, Harper held only one position in the House, that of Speaker, and was never a minister. He retired from the elected Legislative Assembly as Father of the House²⁶ and a deeply respected remnant of the Forrest Party, having drifted away from Forrest but generally retaining his conservative values and rural perspective (de Garis, 1991).

Over time, and as the political and social framework matured in the colony, Harper grew to dislike the extent to which politics had become party based and the extent to which members sought political gain above the interests of the colony. While he is unlikely to have understood the interests of the colony as anything but his own and those of his class, as the franchise broadened and the social dynamics of the Parliament changed, Harper became less enamoured with the political scene. It is also apparent that, over time, he became less and less an enthusiastic supporter of the Forrest Party. In the period commencing with the establishment of responsible government in 1890 and ending with federation in 1901, when Forrest left the state legislature for the federal Parliament, the Forrest Party was the only party in the House and it faced a very ineffective Opposition.²⁷ The weak formal Opposition allowed Harper to be increasingly identified as a leader of what Evans (2002, 158) describes as an “informal fledgling” opposition that was defined

²⁶ The member with the longest service in the House.

²⁷ Forrest was a talented politician who utilised the effective political formula of inviting the most stringent opposition spokesmen into cabinet (an invitation they invariably accepted) and thereby bringing them into his fold and depriving any organised opposition of talented members (Crowley, 1960; Crowley, 2000).

by a group of members with predominantly conservative agricultural and pastoral interests (de Garis, 1991) and who predominantly supported Forrest. While he maintained an attachment to the Forrest Party for the majority of his membership of the Legislative Assembly, he was not unused to utilizing political process to delay and resist government action. For example, during the debates surrounding the Fremantle harbour question in 1892, Harper successfully moved for the appointment of a committee to review the question as to where the harbour should be constructed and to report to the House the most appropriate way forward. Notably, one scheme under review was the preference of the Forrest government while the other was submitted by the Colonial Chief Engineer, C. Y. O'Connor.²⁸ Harper sat on the Committee²⁹ and supported a recommendation in favour of O'Connor's plan over that of the government. This recommendation led to the construction and opening of Fremantle Harbour in 1897 (Evans, 2001). A further example of Harper's changing position occurred during the debate regarding the payment of Members of Parliament. He was seen as a survivor of the "amateur-gentleman tradition" (Bolton, 1991, p.478) in initially opposing the question but then he subsequently opposed Forrest in 1900 when, after the measure was passed into law, the Premier sought to delay payment of Members until the following session (Mercer, 1958). This last example is probably a sound example of Harper's strict sense of political propriety and reverence for the institution. Having passed the measure, Harper believed it was wrong of the Premier to seek to delay the introduction. Finally, Harper also supported, in combination with a rump of 4 remaining members of former Forrest party, the forming of the first State Labor ministry, notwithstanding his prior considerable criticism of Labor in terms of its platform in 1901 (Mercer, 1958).

Perhaps such political fluidity ensured that Harper did not achieve high office within government. His constant refrain was that he was not interested in seeking office (see for example Mercer, 1958) and office certainly did not seem to seek him. As identified above, his highest political position was the Speakership attained in December 1903 and held until July 1904. The initial appointment was contested by F. Illingworth (Member for Cue), who nominated against him. Harper won the contest but did not seek to be re-elected in 1904 (Phillips, 2004). He indicated he would not re-contest the position due to his opinion that the Speakership was becoming a "party prize" and that his capacity for presiding over the House would be diminished because of party control and a general lack of discipline. There is, however, evidence that he would have had to contest the position and that he was not enthusiastically disposed to such a challenge. Harper's lack of political aggression is also evidenced in his minimal presence in Hansard.

²⁸ Two schemes were being considered for the construction of an appropriate harbour in proximity to the colonial capital and the rail terminals for the lines bringing grain and other export products to the city. The first scheme consisted of the making of a channel through the Parmelia Bank into Owen's Anchorage off of modern day Cockburn. This scheme was supported by Premier Forrest and the government. The second, and ultimately successful scheme, was that developed by C.Y. O'Connor, the colony's Chief Engineer. O'Connor's scheme envisaged the dredging of the Swan River mouth and the establishment of a harbour within the river itself. Interestingly, the Government's (and Forrest's) scheme was also supported by Harper's partner in *The West Australian* newspaper who was willing to write in support of the government (Evans, 2001).

²⁹ Joint Parliamentary Select Committee to Inquire into the Question of Harbour Works (WAPP).

Harper did not participate significantly in debate in the House but rather utilised his capacity through his part ownership of the “West Australian” newspaper to espouse causes (Phillips, 2004). For instance, he deployed his editorial control to mobilize opposition to federation (de Garis, 1981).³⁰ Phillips also indicates that Harper had a straight forward manner when he did speak in the House (2004, 110). When chastising the House for its lack of capacity for self-regulation, Harper singled out Forrest as a chief source of interjections and interruptions (Pental, 2007). As already described, Harper became adept at utilising Parliamentary processes to great effect and had significant influence in outcomes associated with some of the Colony’s major infrastructure projects of the time as well as having a deciding influence over the outcome of a number of social reforms. Utilising the functional process of select committees and royal commissions, Harper was able to become involved in, and to affect outcomes relating to, the development of the Fremantle Harbour (discussed above), the Goldfields Pipeline, railway building and the extension of the franchise to women. Other commissions of which he was a member included the Royal Commission on Agriculture (WAPP) and the Royal Commission on Immigration (WAPP, 1905).³¹ These various commissions and select committees often led to substantial legislative and practical change in the context of agriculture as well as various commercial pursuits associated with the agricultural sector. However, the enduring theme was agricultural advancement. Harper did not hold any political philosophy above the practical outcomes he sought. He was comfortable working against his party interests and even his class when it served his higher purpose. During his more than 25 years in politics, his two enduring interests were agricultural co-operation and scientific development in farming (HFP, Letter T.H. Bath to Mrs Harper, 3706A/16). These interests were pursued outside of Parliament and resulted in considerable advancements both in agricultural practice and in the establishment of semi-government and government institutions.

Harper’s experiments in scientific farming, which have already been briefly commented upon, occupied a lot of his spare time. He was both a promoter and an exemplar of scientific farming and contributed greatly by establishing his farm at Woodbridge as a “show place” (d’Espeissis, 1993). He recognised the need to overcome the limited productive capacity of geographically isolated poor farming land. Harper believed that science could overcome the low yields achieved with this naturally poor land. Not only did he undertake his own experiments in agriculture, viticulture, dairying, grazing and fruit growing, he extended his scientific interests by undertaking experiments in the packaging and transport of agricultural produce in order to extend the range of export opportunities available to Western Australian primary industries. Harper also recognised

³⁰ There are other examples. For instance, during an 1884 election campaign, Harper’s principal opponent in the York seat was a director of the West Australian Manufacturing Company. Harper deployed his editorial resources toward developing a case against both the candidate and the company. The essence of the case was that the particular director was chosen by the company as a delegate in order to increase its apparently already substantial influence in the colony. One wag heard the story so often from sources associated with Harper that he suggested Harper might actually be a spokesperson for the company due to his bringing the company name to the fore so often and in so many different ways (Cowan, 1988).

³¹ Harper was chairman of this Commission. It examined, among other things, ways of attracting immigrants to the State and financing options for same from Government sources – that is, from State, Federal and/or Imperial governments.

that transport and the tyranny of distance significantly retarded the capacity of the colony to bring produce to Western Australia's ports from geographically dispersed farms. He recognised the great difficulties in developing an export trade due to the difficulty of transporting perishable produce in bulk to markets on the other side of the world. Again, he saw in science the opportunity to develop solutions to these problems. Harper also encouraged others to undertake such tasks as the establishment of vineyards and orchards. For example, he cajoled a group to undertake the development of a vineyard in Caversham in 1893 and sold them the land on which to undertake the task.³² These activities led naturally to an expansion of political involvement in things agricultural in the parliament and, ultimately, to Harper being made chairman of the newly created Agricultural Bureau.

The development of the Bureau of Agriculture and ultimately the Department of Agriculture grew out of recommendations made by the Commission on Agriculture, chaired by Venn and of which Harper was a member who made a significant contribution. The Commission submitted its final report in 1891 and an Agricultural Bureau was established in 1894 with Harper as Chairman. The Bureau was then recreated in the form of a department of government in 1898. The role of the Bureau was to provide both technical assistance and undertake scientific experiments into farming techniques. It was to assist in the solution of both regional and ubiquitous problems faced by farmers at the time. Clearly, the overriding purpose of the Bureau was to enhance the productive capacity of the agricultural industries in the colony (Mercer, 1958; Crowley, 1960; Cox, 1966). The Bureau sought solutions to problems of production and transport. It also lobbied for the deployment of government resources to achieve some of the solutions identified. Of particular importance, such investment capital had to be coaxed from outside of the colony. The report of the Commission on Agriculture 1891 also addressed the issue of state funded school farms and the appointment of a supervising scientific agriculturist. This idea was supported enthusiastically by Harper as one would imagine (Cullity, 1979). The report itself identified that there was a distinct lack of knowledge as to how to farm various local conditions across the Wheatbelt and in the South West of Western Australia. It made mention of the need for scientific approaches to the development of an understanding relative to the application of fertilizers, the appropriate types of dairy cow and strains of sheep as well as which pasture treatments were appropriate to which areas of the farming zones. These ideas were an important issue in the context of the self sufficiency debate then raging in the colony relative to dairy produce.³³ Things moved slowly and it was not until 1900 that a travelling demonstration dairy was purchased by the Department of Agriculture and not until 1906 that a state farm was established at Brunswick.³⁴ The establishment or acquisition of new

³² One must consider the extent to which some of these activities were undertaken in a fully voluntary capacity given that one of the participants in the Caversham vineyard was John Nanson, a sub-editor with the West Australian (d'Espeissis, 1993).

³³ In 1904-05, ten years after the establishment of the Agricultural Bureau, 400,000 pounds worth of butter and cheese alone was imported from the Eastern States. Highlighting the fact that the issue of self sufficiency was still to be achieved (Cullity, 1979).

³⁴ A pertinent example of delays in the identification and broadcasting of appropriate treatments involves Harper and his experiments in the early 1900s in the application of superphosphate to develop pasture. His

state farms in Hamel, Nanganen, Chapman, Narrogin and Denmark followed, although Hamel had been in operation as an experiment farm as early as 1900. The purpose of these farms changed with changing of governments. However, they did serve to increase knowledge of farming through experimentation and by disseminating knowledge gathered from other states and internationally. By the second decade of the 20th century, the Department of Agriculture had found its stride and during the 1920s agricultural experimentation – across all facets of farming operations – was undertaken to significant effect. It was in these decades too that agricultural co-operation was established as a fundamental element in the development of infrastructure and marketing mechanisms and as a channel for financial support provided by the state. The foundations of the co-operative movement were established in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century and it was Charles Harper who did more than most to see that foundation laid.

V. Harper and Co-operation

Harper's wide ranging interests, influence and contributions have been made apparent in the previous section. There is, however, little doubt that his real and lasting contribution to agricultural and economic development of Western Australia was in the establishment of agricultural co-operation. Harper's contribution was not one of advancing new ideas or pursuing revolutionary actions. Rather, he had a capacity for adopting ideas and promoting their implementation via the political and social arrangements in place. He was able to synthesise economic thinking and experience of the time into a pragmatic program for implementation in the Western Australian context. His energy in popularising ideas of agricultural co-operation and identifying and implementing solutions to the many problems faced was of great significance to the maturation of agriculture in Western Australia. Harper used as many opportunities for examining ideas and developing trials as he could. His scientific frame of mind is discussed Section III above and his appointment as chairman of the Bureau of Agriculture was a logical role for someone with such wide ranging interests and experience, all of which was focused to the practical end of advancing the agricultural prospects of the colony. He sought information from all over the world and was particularly adept at establishing relationships with those who had successfully implemented variations on the ideas that he was pursuing. He made several trips to England where he explored ideas and technologies that he thought may have been suitable in Western Australia. He also established correspondence with those whom he saw as experts in various areas across Australasia and in the US. Later in life, he even leant on his son, travelling in the US, to make enquiries and to speak with individuals who Harper thought would be able to furnish information to the benefit of his endeavours. It was natural that agricultural co-operation was of interest to Harper particularly after 1890.

It is erroneous to consider that Harper started the agricultural co-operative movement in Western Australia. Co-operation has been discovered and re-discovered by many over the years and Harper neither introduced the idea to Western Australia nor fundamentally

experiments were successful in a number of locations. However, it was not until 1919 that the practice became widely recognised by the "experts" (Mercer, 1958; Cullity, 1979),

changed the ideas of others to meet the needs of agriculture in the West.³⁵ Harper can be rightly described as the driving force of agricultural co-operation due to the extent to which his work, provided on a voluntary and often self-funded basis, maintained co-operation at the forefront of agricultural thinking. He successfully developed a support base that was ultimately to prove extremely effective in establishing a working model of agricultural co-operation in Western Australia. By the 1890s there were established a number of co-operative societies based on agricultural endeavours operating in Western Australia. Mercer (1955, 5 – 9) identifies and briefly describes a number of such organizations. These organizations were, however, deemed a failure by Sandford (1955, 25) on the basis that they worked in local isolation and failed to resolve the real problems restricting agricultural development at that time. Harper also identified a number of deficiencies in the way these organizations were treated by government and he considered these deficiencies served to restrict their effectiveness. Throughout the period from about 1890 almost to his death in 1912, Harper spoke extensively on the importance of agricultural co-operation. In 1894, at the inaugural Bureau of Agriculture conference, he outlined of his program of co-operation. In this speech Harper placed considerable emphasis on the need for farmers to receive a fair reward for their efforts – he considered the reward was at that time taken by middle men - the need for cheap loans to finance agricultural development and the need to resolve the transport issue. He regularly wrote and spoke on topics ranging from agriculture as a national sector to specifically regional issues to specific industries.³⁶ He also developed a broad social imperative to his argument by attaching the welfare of the entire population to that of the farmer. Using this idea he successfully created a sense of community benefit and social mission in the idea of agricultural co-operation. These ideas tended to make his arguments for government support more savoury to the Perth-based Members of Parliament. He successfully attached the prevalent ideas of thrift and honesty to co-operation. Harper described co-operation as a community endeavour arguing that under such a system “every man is interested in the welfare of his neighbour. Such a system must have a beneficial effect upon a community where it takes root” (Mercer, 1958). In parliament, Harper tried to convince the government to make provision for equipping co-operative establishments but with little success. He also used his position as the Chairman of the

³⁵ For instance, the idea of establishing agricultural colleges and scientific farms was put to the Western Australian government as early as 1884 by Anthony Hordern. Hordern’s submission was referred to a Special Committee of the Legislative Council and ultimately rejected on the basis that the colony did not have the financial capacity to carry out the ideas put forward (WAPP, 1884 No. A9). There were many co-operatives establish in rural centres throughout the West Australian Wheatbelt during the period from around 1860. However, these were often short lived and certainly ineffective. Equally after Harper’s death Co-operation would be “re-discovered”. Probably the most interesting example of which is the “discovery” of co-operative manufacturing by David Fletcher Jones in the 1930s in Warrnambool via the writings of the Japanese Christian Guildsman Toyohiko Kagawa. This discovery led to the establishment in 1947 of the FJ Organisation – a co-operative endeavour extending majority ownership of the Fletcher Jones clothing group to staff and introducing, among other things, ideas such as consultative management (Jones, 1977).

³⁶ In a piece of journalism published in 1895, Harper wrote that the cattle industry of North Australia would perhaps be best managed by a co-operative association “who would probably be the best fitted to push the business, and in a few years’ time should be in a position to pay interest...on the money advanced and establish a sinking fund for repayment.” (*The West Australian*, 1 January 1895).

Agricultural Bureau to urge government assistance to be provided to co-operative efforts. For instance, in the Bureau's 1886 annual report he made the representations in support of government assistance in the form of cheap loans and the investment in public goods (Mercer, 1958).

Harper promoted these ideas in the shadow of a fundamental change in the colony's economic prospects. Gold discoveries occurred in the last half of the 1880s in the North West and the Yilgarn. The governing classes still saw agriculture as the future of the colony's economic stability because it was considered that gold mining would be a transitory industry. However, the gold discoveries in Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in the early 1890s were of such immense value that it allowed those concerned with regard to the future prospects of the colony – the likes of Harper, Forrest and other politicians and merchants – the capacity to consider that they had at least a medium term opportunity to invest and establish a sound agricultural sector. As the Goldfields of the West flourished, they brought a much needed economic stimulus in the form of investment and population growth. For the first time in the history of the colony a surplus was able to be generated that would be attractive to investors in London and, therefore, a real opportunity had arrived for government to make investments in transport and other infrastructure as well as provide cheap finance to farmers intent on establishing or expanding their farms. Finally, there was a confluence of financial capacity and political intent allowing the likes of Harper and his ideas for co-operation to be practically assisted by a government that understood the need for capital to be applied in the provision of public goods in support of agricultural development. From the government's perspective, it was logical to take this roll as it was the only entity in the colony that was seen by London investors as being a moderate risk and, of course, it had sovereign powers. Further, the government was a logical entity to raise capital from the farmers' perspective. As the government required a lesser return than private organisations it could loan funds out to farmers at cheaper rates of interest and would be prepared to wait longer for repayment (Butlin et al, 1982). Therefore, the combination of co-operative organisation and government provided cheap loans and infrastructure seemed most likely to deliver the colony an economic future of some substance. At this time, co-operation and government support were seen as the only viable solution that was politically palatable to the Perth based merchants who controlled the parliament (Brown, 1996). The use of co-operative organisation was attractive to Harper because, as a collaborator, he saw co-operatives as the only real opportunity for resolving issues then stymieing agricultural growth. By 1900, the essential problems of the agricultural sector remained unresolved. However, a maturing of political interest and intent had occurred and the apparent logic of the co-operative model communicated. Further, the Agricultural Bank had been established and cheap loans were flowing to farmers (Parker, 1957 and Spillman, 1989). Harper was now able to consider more substantial and direct activities aimed at the establishment of a co-operative enterprise on a scale and organized in such a way as to bring the collegiate strength of the sector together in one voice. It was time to act.

Almost single handed, Harper established the Western Australian Co-operative Producers' Union (Producers' Union) in 1902 and took office as its first chairman (*The Western Mail*, 22nd April, 1912). This organization was the first co-operative body

established with the goal of meeting the triple difficulties of limited infrastructure development, long distance transport and marketing of produce and enhancing the return to farmers. At the time Harper was still a member of parliament and used his influence to garner support in a land where co-operation did not have a solid foundation or successful history³⁷. The establishment of the Producers' Union was intended to resolve the issues faced by the unsuccessful local co-operatives established in regional areas and which had failed to secure support from the government in a way that resolved the identified issues. As an example of Harper's very real commitment and efforts to make the new organization a success he travelled extensively throughout the farming districts at a time when transport options were limited and when he had farming, parliamentary and business commitments that could easily have kept him in Perth. He sought to promote the Union and to increase its membership across sectors and regions. He undertook this travel at his own expense and ensured the financial capacity of the Producers' Union by standing guarantor for the organisation's overdraft to the tune of 10,000 pounds – a by no means insignificant sum at that time. By 1904, Harper and the Producers Union had commenced a subsidiary enterprise in the establishment of the Producers' Markets Ltd (physically located in West Perth). Harper took great personal interest in this initiative due to his appreciation that the markets represented the working reality of co-operation and acted as an extremely effective advertisement.³⁸ Further, in attempting to recruit and retain members, Harper realized that the success of the markets in increasing returns to producers and facilitating the sale process was imperative if the Producers Union was to survive. The Producers' Union was successful in a number of other ventures and became a showcase and living proof of the concept shepherded by Harper for so many years. It is true that the Union continued to have difficulty in recruiting members. Principally this was because it had great difficulty in paying cash for produce. However, it achieved a number of firsts as an agricultural co-operative in Western Australia. By 1905 the Producers' Union had undertaken experiments in the shipment and sale of wheat on the London markets in parcels made up of grain provided by several growers. This task required growers to agree on quality, quantity and timing of delivery of their produce as well as the capacity of the Union to establish agents in London to receive and market the grain. In the period between 1906 and 1908, the Producers' Union established a scheme for the building of grain sheds at sidings via complex financing arrangements including the issuing of promissory notes and the provision of land by the Railways Department (Sandford, 1955). By 1910 it was sending frozen lambs to London and importing fertilisers and other inputs required by farmers (Zekulich, 1997). From 1904 the Producers' Union had joined forces with the Royal Agricultural Society and other primary production associations to publish its own newspaper - *Producers' Review*. All of these advances were the direct result of Harper's involvement, the contacts he had created and experiments he had conducted over many years. The appointment of A.M.

³⁷ Harper was never afraid of using his place in the Parliament to advance interests long held. As far back as 1892 he managed to have himself appointed to chair the Cold Storage Commission as a member of Parliament (WAPP 1892/3 No. A8). He had raised the issue of the advantage to the Colony that would be represented in an ice company in 1888 (HFP, 1973A/7) and notwithstanding his role as a director of Perth Ice Company.

³⁸ In fact, in 1907, in response to threats from Bridgetown producers considering making alternate arrangements for marketing their produce due to their dissatisfaction with management, Harper took personal control at significant personal expense in terms of money and time (HFP, 1973A/8).

Oliphant to the general management of the Producers' Union in 1906 assisted Harper greatly. In 1914, the Producers Union was incorporated into Westralian Farmers Ltd by Harper's son, Charles Walter, and A. M. Oliphant became general manager of the combined entity (Sandford, 1955).³⁹ The co-operative initiative had worked in practice and, in the last years before Harper's death, the call for government support of co-operative agriculture reached a crescendo. I have already touched on the rationale for government becoming involved as a provider of capital but now the agricultural community grew to appreciate the need.

By late in the first decade of the 20th century, various editorials were calling for the provision of public funds which would be applied to the interests of agricultural production. Of these editorials, that of "The Farmer", was most radical in its call for government funding and an adequate return to the man on the land by making a call for the limiting of government spending to only agricultural programs (May, 1909). The same editorial went on to argue that it was only reasonable to place public financial resources in the hands of farmers as they were "... in the strictest sense, truly Western Australian. The miner, the timber getter, the merchant are all, by comparison, birds of passage." Such "fair not preferential" treatment was to be provided regardless of religion, politics or status of the farmers in need. Over a period of three years, the editor of *The Farmer* developed arguments aimed at bringing farmers together in co-operation and calling upon the state government to place public resources in the hands of such organisations to ensure the agricultural development of the state.⁴⁰ Indeed, this monthly newspaper appeared to bring most economic questions back to the idea of farmer co-operation and government preference in terms of providing financial and other support to the man on the land. An example of the logic developed is painted by reference to the difficulty co-operative and private flour mills had in amassing sufficient capital in order to ensure they were able to purchase enough wheat to keep the mills running. The Farmer posited that it was the state's responsibility to subsidise flour milling or the co-operatives that undertook it. Such a subsidy would ensure the mill operated at a level sufficient to warrant the investment and ensure cash could be paid to farmers for their produce (June, 1911). The most substantial and comprehensive enunciation of this newspaper's position was provided in the editorial of October 1910. In that edition, it called for the establishment of a "farmers alliance". Such an alliance would pursue a three point platform incorporating decentralization, industrialization and politicization of the agricultural interests of the State. The platform called for the decentralization of ports in order to give farmers options as to where they sent produce, equal facilities for land settlement in all districts and the provision of government funds for public works aimed at the development of agricultural districts. Industrialisation included the development of infrastructure (at government expense) such as the installation of pneumatic elevators in

³⁹ In point of fact, Westralian Farmers moved into offices occupied by the Producers' Union in Harper's Building on Howard Street in central Perth.

⁴⁰ The various editorials published in *The Farmer* deployed a number of arguments in support of their drive to achieve government support of agricultural interests. For instance, in October 1909 and again in May 1910 the newspaper made reference to the "great economic essential", namely the growth of population of the Australian continent and the suggestion that this would be achieved when farming was properly supported and returns adequate to effort and investment.

ports and at railway sidings to allow for bulk shipment of grains. This element of the proposed platform also included the establishment of a State Department with responsibility for export and the establishment of cool storage facilities. The final element – the establishment of a political party – was said to be necessary to counter the interests of the City and to ensure adequate provision of public funds to the development of the agricultural interests.⁴¹ Such public funds were to include resourcing of co-operative enterprise. The editorial went on to describe a model for state marketing of produce and the dissemination of pricing and other market related information to be provided by government at the expense of the Treasury. This model included the appointment of regional state auctioneers and the capacity for farmers to opt in and out of the state market system. The state was then to undertake to market the produce in London. These ideas were very similar to the ideas being put forward by Harper at the same time. However, Harper saw government as a provider of resources while farmers should conduct all of their business – growing, transporting and marketing. In Harper's mind, the problem was not know-how or intent but a lack of capital. The know-how could be provided by co-operatives while capital must come from government – the only institution with the capacity to attract funds and disperse them in a manner that served agricultural development. It was evident to Harper that co-operatives were the best structure for transport and marketing and that government ought to be a facilitator and provider of cheap funding. Overall, Harper developed a program for co-operation that was practical in its objectives and relatively unambitious compared to the objectives of the Continental co-operators. Rarely did Harper seek to articulate anything close to a comprehensive program of co-operation. When he did, it was devoid of references to any other European co-operators – Owen, Fourier, the Christian Socialists – rather, it was based on the logical expression of a set of problems and the finding of suitable solutions. Harper sought to identify pragmatic, politically attractive and effective solutions to the problems of transport, marketing and finance in the agricultural sector.

On one occasion, Harper enunciated a comprehensive statement as to his position on co-operation in his own hand in a petition to the State legislature just three years before his death. The petition sought support for a motion to ensure the government enacted suitable legislation to promote and establish co-operative bodies as a means of developing the economy, the agricultural industries and enhancing the reward for the man on the land (HFP, 1973A/8). The petition was constructed in the form of a letter to W. J. Butcher, member of the Legislative Assembly for the Gascoyne. Harper used the correspondence to direct attention to the major arguments in support of co-operation. He argued that co-operation is a natural state of economic organisation for all of those with like interests. He cited as examples of co-operative enterprise organisations such as commercial multi-national corporations and local unions. He argues that co-operation is a method of organisation that farmers must adopt in order to mitigate the effects of others' co-

⁴¹ The establishment of a farmers political party was not long in coming but was instigated not out of planned policy on the part of farmers collectively but as a result of the serving of a log of claims upon individual farmers by the Victoria based Rural Workers Union. One lasting result of the service of the claims was the establishment of the Country Party of Western Australia in 1913.

operation - that is, commercial corporations and trusts.⁴² If farmers cannot co-operate then they cannot achieve a full return on their labour and, by natural deduction, this state of things results in a retardation of the economic development of the state. He had seen the outcome of poorly constituted agricultural co-operatives during the 1880s and the 1890s and he believed that, bringing together the constituency of agricultural interests via an inclusive co-operative organisation, agriculturalists could achieve a suitable return for their efforts and that the Western Australian economy would be the beneficiary. Without putting the argument in the theatrical terms used by *The Farmer*,⁴³ Harper saw that co-operation was at once a defence for those on the land – replacing the middle man with a combination of agriculturalists - and an opportunity for enhancement of the state's capacity to expand economically via the provision of cheap loans from the government to those on the land without capital to develop their holdings or capacity to get their produce to distant markets. In his view, if the people on the land did not unite, then their profits would be reduced to the extent that middlemen would stand in the market to deliver the produce and market it. Further, such middlemen would undertake such roles at rates that would serve to ensure the farmer did not receive sufficient return for his labour and, because of their lack of a structure to support action, farmers would not have the capacity to influence the middlemen in their operations. Building on this theme, Harper insisted that if the government were to assist by providing funding and other forms of support, then the state would also move forward from its reliance on mining - and the transient population that came with it - toward a more stable, secure economic base built around the idea of sufficient rewards for those with a true stake in Western Australia. Harper thought that the government's role in setting this inequality right included the fostering of co-operation amongst farmers and ensuring that they had a voice in the transport of their produce to markets - local, national and international - and the disposal of their produce. Citing the experience of the farmers of the Victoria District who had formed a co-operative for the purposes of milling and exporting grain, Harper was keen to demonstrate that, even at that late date, the government's intentions remained unclear in relation to support of co-operative enterprise. He argued that a statement providing clarity of intent by the government – naturally in support of the co-operative movement – would also provide the necessary impetus for the establishment of a strong co-operative movement as the confidence of prospective members would be increased. The farmers of the Victoria District had formed their co-operative and had received support from the state government in the form of sheds for the storage of grain to be transported. However, the government placed the sheds in the control of the marketing merchants, rather than the co-operative. Naturally, Harper viewed this scenario as only a partial solution, stating that the sheds should be in the charge of the farmers who would then be in greater control of their destiny. He went on to place the government under pressure not just to articulate its support of co-operation but to seek a practical demonstration of government's position by seeking the alignment of land policy with the interests of agriculture. Suggesting, with

⁴² Harper noted, for instance, that mercantile and shipping interests were able to decide when grain comes onto the wharf at Fremantle and these mercantile groupings were able to ensure their interests were protected by collaboration with the result being that farmers forfeited a proportion of their just rewards for their labour.

⁴³ For instance, in its editorial of June 1909, *The Farmer* described the idea of middlemen contracting with farmers for their produce as an “unholy alliance”.

some political dexterity, that clear support by government of co-operative arrangements would see the government's land policy aim of the fullest possible agricultural development as being more likely to be fulfilled if the farmer received an appropriate return for his work. This letter was a comprehensive enunciation of Harper's beliefs and motivations as they related to agriculture in Western Australia.

Other than broad judgements about the flow on effects of increasing the wealth and output of the agricultural sector, Harper did not develop a comprehensive position regarding perceived social advantages of co-operation neither in relation to the co-operators themselves nor in terms of the wider community. He was also uninterested in the betterment of farmers and their families other than in terms of the return they were able to achieve for their labour and investment. This interest was limited to the very practical idea that the more farmers made, the more they would invest and the more stable the economy of Western Australia would become. He considered co-operation would be a solution to the practical economic problems associated with agricultural development in the state and he successfully demonstrated those outcomes in practice. He did not see the need to implement a wider social program to improve the social position, education or health of farmers and their families. He was more concerned to improve agricultural output in terms of quality and quantity. Further, Harper did not demonstrate a knowledge or understanding of Owen. It is likely that he came across his ideas (and possibly those of other English co-operators such as King and the Christian Socialists) in his research⁴⁴ but he was concerned to use co-operation as a defence against the "co-operation" of other elements within the economy and who were prepared and able to take the profits from the farmers (HFP, 1973A/8). He saw co-operation as a natural mode of operation for farmers but did not see such organisations reaching beyond the purely economic activities of supporting farmers in their productive enterprise and transporting and marketing produce on behalf of members. In fact, Harper saw co-operation as providing those services and support to farmers that they themselves could not provide on an independent basis. In Harper's mind, co-operation was a practical response to transport and marketing problems faced by agriculturalists. It was a way of gathering political constituency to coerce the government into attracting funding and providing cheap loans for agricultural development and for the government provision of public goods in the form of much needed infrastructure in support of agricultural development.

VI. Concluding Remarks

There is little doubt that Harper's work - particularly from 1890 - served greatly to assist in the normalisation of co-operative ideas within the agricultural sector and the wider community in Western Australia. His contributions of time, money and expertise were substantial and certainly earned for him a place in Western Australian history as a founding force in the establishment of co-operative agriculture. However, it is equally certain that Harper gave of his time, money and expertise from both a selfish and sectional point of view. He sought to establish agriculture as a driving force within the

⁴⁴ For instance, it is likely that he came to appreciate the organisation and failure the co-operative agricultural villages of South Australia because he wrote to many in that colony about agriculture and co-operative enterprise.

West so that his interests and those of his class and agriculture were served. His various representations regarding the positive social affects that he attached to co-operation were not developed but were simple reflections relative to the flow on effects of building wealth. In reviewing his writings such ideas seem to be recited for political effect rather than as a description of Harper's social concern. The Owenite ideals of man bettering himself through membership of a co-operative community are nowhere to be seen in Harper's calculations. He did not emphasise or reject religion, provide for education within the co-operative organisation nor seek to remove co-operative communities from the broader community. Rather, he makes the sound but pragmatic argument that, essentially, an increase in agricultural wealth will naturally lead to an increase in Western Australia's wealth and, therefore, better economic prospects for all. The attachment of Owenite ideals to co-operation have been shown to have been somewhat superficial and made after the fact. Metin's description of socialist actions in other parts of Australia and New Zealand resonate as they confirm the supremacy of the pragmatic over socialistic ideals. Colonial socialism was applied in all of the Australasian colonies in order to see the development of a strong economic base rather than with the intention of establishing some antipodean social utopia. Indeed, William Lane felt the need to establish New Australia in Paraguay in 1893 in order to pursue his utopian ideal notwithstanding the extent to which social advances had been made in Australia. Overall, the claim of CBH Ltd or Wesfarmers Ltd to an Owenite foundation is likely disingenuous. Clearly, those involved, including Harper, in the establishment of such organisations were focused upon solutions to the problems of capitalisation, transport and marketing that had plagued the economic prospects of Western Australia since 1829. Any social benefit achieved as a result of the establishment of agricultural co-operation is more likely to be explained in terms of a natural result of an increase in the community's wealth rather than as a result of a policy decision.

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