The achievements of the Australian Sugar Producers Association in 75 years of existence can be measured by the prosperity, stability and growth of the industry. The efficient agriculture, the mechanised harvesting, the technologically advanced mills, the orderly industrial relations, the controlled production and successful marketing of sugar at home and overseas are all achievements in which the A.S.P.A. has been vitally involved.

The success so evident today was beyond the imagination of the industry leaders who met together in Townsville three-quarters of a century ago to plan their very survival. The Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 meant an end to the system of indentured South Seas Island labour which had served the industry so well. Work in the mills had already become the preserve of European labour as the early primitive factories were replaced by more efficient ones. Now the Kanakas, as the islanders were known, were to be phased out of the cane fields in a bold experiment in tropical agriculture.

The prospect was less daunting in southern Queensland where temperatures and humidity were lower. The industry was longer established and the land free of the stumps which made the use of horse-drawn ploughs and implements impossible in much of North Queensland. The Northern Rivers of New South Wales had led in the use of European labour, but planters in the north found it no easy matter. They became alarmed as they saw land going out of

Mr Watson, is President of the Australian Sugar Producers Association, and Chairman of the Mossman Central Mill Co. Ltd.
production or leased to Chinese, and the faithful islanders being replaced by an influx of Asiatic labour from other parts of Australia.

Thirty delegates of farmers’ and planters’ associations met in Townsville on 24 October 1904 and urged the Federal Government to postpone the end of Kanaka labour scheduled for 1906, and to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the present position and future prospects of the industry. Peter Petersen of Cairns and Thomas Drinkwater Chataway of Mackay journeyed to Brisbane to express their concern to Premier Morgan.

The lack of sufficient experienced field workers and cane cutters in the Far North grew worse as the islanders were repatriated. Conditions were so bad during 1906 that on 28 December, with the crushing far from finished, the directors of Mossman Central Mill, Australia’s most northerly sugar mill, wrote to the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, which had organised the 1904 conference. They asked the chamber to call another conference, inviting all owners and all employers of labour, to decide as to the best means of obtaining suitable labour.

George Henry Pritchard, president of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce and chairman of the 1904 conference, acted quickly. He circularised growers’ associations and mill owners, inviting them to send delegates to a conference in Townsville on 25 February 1907.

Thirty-one delegates came, from the sugar districts of Mossman, Cairns, Johnstone River, Herbert River, Lower Burdekin, Proserpine, Mackay and Bundaberg, and representing both growers and millers. Dr. Walter Maxwell and John James McGee attended on behalf of the Queensland Government and Thomas Foley, later member of Parliament for the State seat of Mundingburra, represented the interests of workers. Others to attend included the Japanese consul, Goro Narita and C.F.A. Sparre, the Danish Consul.

The conference focussed on solving the labour crisis. Dr. Maxwell extended his stay and telegrams flowed to and from Premier Kidston. As delegates heard of each others’ experiences and of the Government’s plans for orderly migration, they were united in tackling a common problem. Leonard Cecil Horton, president of the Johnstone River Sugar Cane Growers Organisation echoed the sentiments of delegates as he stated:

We must band together ... and have a United Employers’ Association, not by any means for the purpose of trying to do anything unfair, but for preserving the industry and protecting ourselves from unfair and impossible demands made by the organised workers.
Edward Bowdich Swayne, later elected to Parliament as member for Mirani, and a tireless worker for the industry, reminded delegates of the need to act before the conference ended. A sub-committee of three was appointed and their report proposed the establishment of the “Queensland Sugar Producers Association”.

The report envisaged an association with headquarters in Townsville and controlled by a council comprising delegates from each of the main sugar districts. It culminated in the first meeting of the executive of the Queensland Sugar Producers Association in the Municipal Council Chambers, Townsville, on Monday 12 August 1907 at 10am. Delegates present were Thomas William Crawford from Mossman, Alexander John Draper of Cairns, Edward Barclay of Johnstone River, John Harold Thornton representing Burdekin, Horace Young for Bundaberg, Alexander Eastaughffe, Isis and Henry Crawshay Sterry, Prosperpine. L.C. Horton was also present and was appointed by telegram to represent Herbert River.

It was decided to maintain the district representation, two delegates for each of Cairns, Mackay and Bundaberg and one from each of the Mossman, Johnstone, Herbert, Burdekin, Proserpine, Isis, Maryborough, Mount Bauple and Brisbane to Tweed districts, a total of fifteen delegates. Each district was required to pay the levy on 25,000 tons of cane to qualify for its representatives.

To be geographically representative, the name Australian Sugar Producers Association was adopted. The objects were expressed as promoting combined action on the part of Australian sugar growers, manufacturers and others interested in the industry for its protection and advancement. While eschewing party politics in any form, the Association proposed to approach the Federal Parliament or any State Parliament in legislative matters affecting the industry, and to foster a fraternal feeling among all connected with the industry.

After the constitution had been prepared, Draper was elected president, and Gibson and Crawford were unanimously voted to the two positions of vice-president. The selection of secretary and organiser was a crucial decision. After setting the salary at 300 pounds per annum, plus travelling expenses, the position was immediately offered to Pritchard. He accepted; it meant a loss of salary and the end of a banking career. He was manager of the important Townsville branch of the Queensland National Bank and might become one of its chief executives. Pritchard made the sacrifice and for 23 years helped shape not only the Association, but also the successful sugar industry of today.
The next decision gave the A.S.P.A. its unique character, a motion moved by Thornton and seconded by Young:

That the manufacturing interests in each district be accorded equal representation with the growers on this association and upon the same basis — thus completing the interests necessary to secure an “Australian Sugar Producers Association”.

THE EARLY YEARS

Council meetings, as the conferences were called, were held twice a year for nearly twenty years. One was held annually in Brisbane, the other in a sugar district, an opportunity for the host district to show its achievements to visiting delegates.

Between Council and Executive meetings, Pritchard conducted the business of the Association besides being active as its Organiser. He visited most of the sugar districts in his first few months in the job, signing up members as he persuaded both growers and millers of the wisdom of joining. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (as CSR was then known) did not join but from 1908 made a generous annual donation. CSR donated a sum approximately equal to the levy, on cane crushed by its Queensland mills, until 1975 when it became a full member of the Association and by arrangement was given observer status at Executive meetings.

The Association carefully monitored the progress of the Kidston immigration scheme and the industry contributed substantially to its costs. Pritchard as secretary represented the Association on the Queensland Branch of the British Immigration League.

At the first Council meeting in August 1907 a decision was made to sponsor an official newspaper to fill the vacuum left by the demise in 1905 of the Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator conducted by T.D. Chataway of Mackay. When Crawford learned that E.J.T. Barton, the editor of the Silverwood Gazette and previously editor of the Brisbane Courier on which Crawford had worked in his youth, was available, he secured his services.

The Journal soon won a fine reputation for quality, and within months the print run had to be nearly doubled to meet the demand. Barton worked tirelessly establishing it with a minimum of staff, preparing most of the material and taking the photographs himself and even performing many of the secretary’s duties when Pritchard visited England in 1916.

Barton edited the Journal for more than a quarter of a century until in 1935, at the age of 81, illness forced him to retire. He was succeeded by the well-known sugar chemist Claude H. O’Brien who
had joined the Association in 1930 as its technical adviser. For nearly 15 years, O’Brien faithfully maintained the Journal’s tradition. He spent his final years before retirement researching the industry’s history, handing over the Journal to the capable journalist, Harry A. Moore. As editor of the Mackay Daily Mercury, Moore knew the industry well and his previous experience as sub-editor of Truth made him well equipped to popularise and modernise the Journal. Before his retirement in 1971, Moore had trained Graham Petty as his successor.

In its first issue, the Australian Sugar Journal recognised “that under white labour conditions we must be ahead of other sugar producing countries” in efficiency in order to pay the high Australian wages.

The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, created in 1900, was financed equally by millers and growers who together paid half the total cost of running it; the Government paid the other half. Dr. Maxwell, Director of the H.S.P.A. Experiment Station in Hawaii, who had recommended its establishment had been secured as Director with the offer of such a princely salary that he could not refuse. He became in 1907 the A.S.P.A.’s first Honorary Technical Adviser. In 1932 the A.S.P.A. unanimously adopted a scheme to eliminate the Government subsidy to the Bureau within five years, provide it with a new headquarters and transfer control to a board of trustees comprised of four growers, four millers and a Government nominee as chairman. But when Dr. Kerr who had succeeded Easterby as Director in 1933 suggested an Advisory Board as a politically feasible alternative, the Association agreed. The A.S.P.A. and Queensland Cane Growers Council offered to limit Government expenditure to 7000 pounds ($14,000) annually, the current Government contribution to the B.S.E.S. budget, and the industry agreed to meet any additional expenditure involved in the Advisory Board’s recommendations.

The war seriously interrupted the work of the Sugar Bureau. When the worst was over in 1944, the A.S.P.A. conference urged the State Government to restore its strength at the earliest opportunity. A year later the conference resolved that if the Government did not agree to increase staff numbers and remove public service control, the Executive should have power to establish a research organisation completely under industry control.

It was not until March 1951 that the Sugar Experiment Stations Act was changed establishing the Sugar Experiment Stations Board, ending a prolonged struggle. The A.S.P.A. acted more quickly to set up its own research institute, which gave millers the
opportunity to fund milling research not limited by any grower contribution. A conference of millers on 20 January 1949 unanimously decided to establish Sugar Research Limited. It was appropriate that its first board of directors should include Charles A.N. Young as chairman and Edward T.S. Pearce, the two men who had been so instrumental in its formation.

To ensure close co-operation with mills, the headquarters were located in Mackay on a ten-acre site selected so that the institute could expand into agricultural work. The revitalisation of the Bureau made that unnecessary. An impressive well-equipped double storey research building was erected and, under its first Director, Dr. H.W. Kerr, the Sugar Research Institute quickly established a world reputation in both practical technology and scientific research.

The well respected A.J. Draper made an ideal choice as first President to set the Association on its feet. He was unable to continue giving it the same attention and declined re-election in 1909. Crawford was elected to the vacancy, a position he filled for a record 34 years, like Pritchard, devoting his life to the industry.

The Council meeting in Cairns in June 1910 requested the Executive to consider forming the Association into a company. The memorandum and articles of association were prepared with the help of the Association's solicitors and the company was registered on 6 September 1911. The transfer of headquarters to the capital was completed in the same year.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Considering the major role the Association now plays in solving industrial disputes while protecting the interests of its members by resisting demands for wages beyond those enjoyed in other Australian industries, it is surprising that the Association was reluctant to enter the field.

When Wages Boards were instituted, the industry feared it would come under the jurisdiction of several independent boards enacting different working hours and conditions for men working alongside each other. The entire A.S.P.A. Council formed a deputation to the State Minister for Works, W.H. Barnes, in December 1909. When an amendment to the Australian Constitution was proposed to give the Commonwealth Government power to act in industrial disputes, the Association urged its members to study the proposal carefully but did not take sides. This detachment could not last. The 1911 strike, the first one to affect the industry as a whole, soon plunged the Association into a deep and lasting involvement in industrial matters.
E.G. Theodore and W. McCormack, both of whom later became Premiers of Queensland, had created the powerful Amalgamated Workers Association by uniting the miners and sugar workers into a single union. As General Secretary of the A.W.A., McCormack wrote to the A.S.P.A. in February 1911 seeking a conference to discuss improved working conditions. Pritchard advised McCormack of the Executive's view that no good purpose would be served by a conference between our associations; for the reason that the question of wages and conditions of employees must be regarded as a "District" one, on account of each district having its own peculiarities and, in consequence, disparity of remuneration, particularly, for instance, in the price paid for the cutting of cane. We have been accustomed to allow matters of this sort to be settled by our District Associations.

This stance was logical except that it made no allowances for the new situation. Well organised unions were determined to improve the primitive conditions of many workers in the canefields and to achieve a wage structure which compared favourably with the rest of the Australian work force. The A.W.A. claim demanded an eight-hour day in field and mill, an end to cane-cutting agreements under the archaic Masters and Servants Act, the abolition of retention money kept by employers to ensure cutters did not break their contracts, and a minimum pay of 30 shillings per week.

The A.S.P.A. had to become involved. With the crushing fast approaching and no solution in sight, the Council declared the judgement of the Mackay Wages Board as the only basis for settlement and unanimously rejected the union demands as "unreasonable and beyond the financial ability of the farmers to concede".

The harvest was nearly paralysed. Farmers left the fields to man the mills and kept the crushing going slowly with what non-union labour they could get in field and mill. Railway, waterside and shipping unionists declared their product black and refused to handle it. Sugar cane being extremely perishable once cut or burnt ready to cut, a strike which stopped production could cause farmers ruinous loss.

That prospect was very real in 1911. On 27 July a number of members of State Parliament plus Frederick Bamford, the Labor member of Federal Parliament for the northern sugar districts; W.V. Ralston, General Manager of the Queensland National Bank and Managing Director of the Millaquin Sugar Company, and R.M. Shannon representing the Mackay branch of the A.W.A. met with Pritchard to discuss settlement terms. The Union leaders made
no concession in their demand for an eight hour day and 30 shillings minimum pay. No solution emerged until a further conference arranged by W.H. Barnes, Minister for Works. The Union accepted a nine-hour day, 48 hour week, and achieved its minimum 30 shilling wage, with any excess time paid as overtime at 1 1/4 times normal rates.

The A.S.P.A. learned quickly, having seen itself almost powerless compared with "the splendid organisation of the labour unions". Decisions were taken to form a defence fund to help meet similar emergencies in the future. Council in July 1912 unanimously approved affiliation with the Queensland Employers' Federation, and resolved as far as possible to work in unison with the Queensland Farmers' Union.

The Industrial Peace Act of 1912 established the Industrial Court as well as a number of boards with employer and union members in equal numbers. These had little chance of reaching agreement, but the Industrial Court exerted unquestionable power. In handing down his award for Mulgrave Mill in October 1913, Justice MacNaughton awarded the union its long-sought eight-hour day and double time for work on Sundays and holidays. Charles Vesey Hives, later to be the A.S.P.A.'s Industrial Advocate, proposed a motion at the subsequent Council meeting, carried with applause, viewing

with alarm the action of the Judge of the Industrial Court in granting wages and conditions in the sugar industry that both growers and millers are unable to pay, and where the Judge himself doubts their ability to pay, and from which there is no appeal.

Worse was to come. Early in 1916 the Association pointed out the foolishness of appointing Acting-Judges to the Industrial Court from whose judgements there was no appeal. The Dickson award of 21 August 1916 made by such an Acting-Judge brought much of industry to a halt when farmers refused to harvest rather than accept its provisions. The award surprised even the unions by granting nearly all they had asked for. In North Queensland, where cane could not be stood over, farmers grudgingly carried on, wondering whether they had a future.

Crawford as President wrote in despair to Premier T.J. Ryan and Treasurer Theodore urging their intervention:

I respectfully submit that when an Acting-Judge so exercises that authority, as to threaten the extinction of one of our staple industries, it is the important duty...to save the country from such a calamity...

The appeal was in vain.
Every legal avenue was tried; first an appeal to the Full Court for disallowance of the award. The restrospectivity provision was overturned, as were some minor matters as being beyond the Judge's jurisdiction. The subsequent appeal to the High Court failed when the Queensland Parliament was found to have passed an Act validating all awards then in force. The Association now took the initiative in the Industrial Court, appealing for a new award. The result was the McCawley Award of 1917. While it did not reduce wages significantly, it helped, and eliminated provisions of the Dickson Award which had threatened to make it unworkable.

From its reluctant involvement, the Australian Sugar Producers Association was now a leading protagonist in industrial matters, and the handling of disputes and appearances in court have become one of the major roles of the Association. In his numerous Industrial Court appearances, Pritchard led the employers' case, supported by Hives.

**CANE PRICES BOARD**

The Ryan Labor Government by its Sugar Acquisition Act of 1915 had reduced the power of the refiners, CSR and Millaquin, by acquiring ownership of all raw sugar upon its manufacture. Next it legislated to regulate the price paid for cane which had previously been determined by bargaining power between grower and miller based on the law of supply and demand.

The Labor Government's move was bold and decisive. The Regulation of Cane Prices Act of 1915 adopted the CSR Company's pure obtainable cane sugar formula as the basis for payment, renaming it commercial cane sugar or C.C.S. formula. Although CSR had introduced payment by analysis as far back as 1899, it was not in common use and had received a mixed reception from the farmers it was meant to benefit. The Act made payment by analysis compulsory, although mills and growers found ways to circumvent the Act by agreement.

Prices for cane were determined by local boards on which growers and millers were equally represented. A Central Sugar Cane Prices Board was established to adjudicate when the parties could not agree. The A.S.P.A. has seldom been involved in the question of cane price since it is one best left to the respective growers' and millers' organisations to pursue independently.

While the Queensland Government legislated in 1915 to acquire sugar and fix the price of cane, its real power was severely limited because the Federal Government controlled customs and excise. With federation, these had become uniform throughout the country. A partial rebate of duty was allowed on sugar grown by
white labour to enable it to compete with imported sugar. The rebate was replaced by a bounty on cane when the rebate proved unconstitutional. Unfortunately it made taxpayers believe they were subsidising the sugar industry whereas the tax received on sugar far exceeded the amount paid in rebate or bounty. Like all industry protected by tariff measures, consumers of sugar paid for the protection, but not the taxpayers.

The matter of duty and excise was referred to district associations of the A.S.P.A. in 1908. The bounty would end in 1912 unless extended. The Association supported the proposal to ensure that white labour was used to grow cane but asked for "some less cumbersome and penal legislation than excise and duty".

Justice Sir John Gordon of South Australia was appointed chairman of a Royal Commission of five members on which T.W. Crawford, President of the A.S.P.A., as sole representative of the sugar industry carried a heavy responsibility. Hearings began in Mossman and for several months in early 1912 as the the sittings covered the sugar districts, public attention was focussed on the plight of farmers who found it scarcely possible to make a living despite long hours and help from family labour.

Many were apprehensive of the Royal Commission appointed by the Labor Government and were surprised that it should recommend abolition of excise and bounty, reject nationalisation of CSR as impractical, and oppose a State-run refinery as likely only to cost the taxpayer and consumer money. The Commission did recommend wages of eight shillings per eight hour day, finding the industry lagging behind others in rates of pay. But it was to be 30 years before the defence value of the sugar industry in keeping a population on the northern coast, as stressed by Crawford, was fully appreciated during World War II.

As the 1913 crushing approached, the repeal Act was proclaimed and growers received the benefit of two shillings and twopence per ton of cane from millers as the A.S.P.A. had recommended. Sugar was now neither taxed nor subsidised but its existence depended on tariff protection. Jam manufacturers and fruit preservers in the south still had little concept of conditions in north Queensland. Sugar producers envied their profits, and to counter their propaganda the Association decided in 1915 "that an effort should be made to establish a large co-operative jam factory, in Tasmania or Victoria." The shares were to have been held by fruitgrowers and sugar producers.

Southern Governments pegged sugar prices on the outbreak of war in 1914, denying the industry legitimate price increases. The huge wage rise of the Dickson Award made the situation desperate.
The Ryan Government’s Sugar Acquisition Act of 1915 brought the weight of the Queensland Government as owner of the raw sugar into the negotiations with the Federal Government. With the two governments at loggerheads, Premier Ryan called a conference in March 1917 but the A.S.P.A. took him by surprise. Pritchard had seen Prime Minister Hughes after Ryan, and he told Ryan of his Association’s preference for the Commonwealth Government taking complete control.

DEPENDENT ON GOODWILL

Neither the United Cane Growers Association wanting 24 pounds per ton for raw sugar nor the A.S.P.A. wanting Federal control was satisfied with Hughes’ offer of 21 pounds per ton for raw sugar for three years, but it made it possible to pay the rates set by the Dickson Award. Treasurer Theodore told both parties, “the sugar industry, they must remember, depended largely on the goodwill of the people of Australia”.

After the Labor Party split over conscription, the formation of the Nationalist Party in 1917 attracted to its ranks many including both Pritchard and Crawford, who was elected to the Senate later that year. For nearly 30 years, Crawford was outspoken in his advocacy of the industry, for 26 years of that time being also President of the A.S.P.A., but he could not get the Nationalist Prime Minister Hughes to raise the sugar price from 21 pounds to 24 pounds.

The Interstate Commission held a further inquiry in 1919. Costs were increasing significantly and production in Australia had languished because of low prices. After denying local farmers a rise to 24 pounds, the Commonwealth Government found itself importing raw sugar costing as much as 100 pounds, while guaranteeing consumers refined sugar at sixpence a pound. When Hughes offered to extend the contract price not for one year but for five, W.N. Gillies, Minister for Agriculture, called a conference in Brisbane on 17 February 1920. It unanimously agreed to request the price of 30 pounds 6s. 8d. proposed by the A.S.P.A. and appointed six delegates to go to Melbourne to see the Prime Minister. With imports at high prices biting deeply into Treasury funds, the request was granted.

The A.S.P.A.’s desire to have Federal instead of State control was extinguished when the Interstate Commission released its report proposing a new control body on which the industry would not be represented but which it had to finance by a new tax, “a great and artificial monopoly, with all the evils of political interference, and none of the advantages of friendly competition”.
As time for the renewal of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement drew near, Pritchard gave evidence before the Federal Parliament Public Accounts Committee as to its stabilising influence. Prime Minister Hughes was invited to see the industry for himself and was welcomed and guided by industry leaders. But his days as Prime Minister were over; he was replaced by S.M. Bruce who was not inclined to extend the Agreement.

State Premier Theodore called a meeting of industry representatives in January 1923 and warned them not to press for a high price but for a politically acceptable price which was sufficient to “give confidence to the farmers, and to those with capital invested”. He agreed that the drop to 27 pounds for raw sugar, and the formation of a pool to control all Queensland sugar to ensure that the retail price of refined sugar to the consumer would not exceed fourpence halfpenny, was a sacrifice but warned them “the alternative might be the extinction of the industry”.

Despite protests by the A.S.P.A. and representations by Senator Crawford, a member of the Government, Bruce remained adamant there would not be another Sugar Agreement. He maintained that tariff protection was sufficient although as a transition measure he agreed to continue to 30 June 1925 the embargo on the import of sugar other than by the pool to meet shortfalls in local production.

The Queensland Government, as owner of the raw sugar, passed the complementary legislation creating the pool, and on 4 July 1923 by proclamation appointed the first Sugar Board chaired by William Joseph James Short. The other members were Pritchard and Thomas Alfred Powell, President of the U.C.G.A. It was a tribute to Pritchard’s ability that he was appointed despite his forthright role in previously seeking to remove the industry from Queensland Government control.

Successive A.S.P.A. conferences have strongly recommended the continuation of the Board as a permanent institution. In 1974, when the formation of an Australian Sugar Board was mooted, the Association expressed concern lest Queensland be denied the right to market its own sugar.

**OVERPRODUCTION**

Prime Minister Bruce had visited the sugar districts in 1924 soon after becoming the country’s leader, and on his return announced a most significant change in policy; the embargo on imports would not be abolished but extended. The Government had realised that violent fluctuations in the world sugar market meant that tariff protection would not work. A three-year extension of the embargo was granted with an increased concession to jam manufacturers.
and retention of 27 pounds as a fair price for raw sugar to the producer.

The massive price rise from 21 pounds to 30 pounds 6s. 8d. in 1920 had enormously stimulated production and 27 pounds was still profitable, especially as tractors began to replace horses. For the first time Australia was self-sufficient and had, like other primary industries, a regular surplus for export. In 1925 with a big crop looming, J.W. Inverarity, delegate of the Mackay Manufacturers' Association, gave notice of a motion seeking to give the Sugar Board power to allot to each mill annually a share in the Australian home market, with all sugar produced in excess paid for at the average export price.

Few disagreed with the need for a scheme, but it was impossible to propose one that would achieve control without appearing to disadvantage some mill districts. Action by the Queensland Government to limit production to home market consumption was required under the terms of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement.

At the beginning of the depression, the Queensland Labor Government was replaced for three years by the Moore administration. In June 1929, the seasoned politician W.H. Barnes, as Treasurer, presided over a conference summoned by the Sugar Board. Much hard bargaining was required before a formula was finally agreed to. As a control measure in the short term it was a failure. The new scheme allotted to each mill a quota, not based on the available market, but equal to its highest production in any of the years from 1915 to 1928. For various reasons, some mills claimed they should have the chance to establish an equitable peak by including the 1929 season. They were allowed a peak of twenty times their average weekly production in 1929.


A majority report of the Committee recommended a five year renewal of the embargo with provision for review of the Agreement after three years, and a special fund of 315,000 pounds annually financed by the industry to provide concessions to the fruit and jam interests. The 1931 A.S.P.A. conference unanimously expressed its appreciation when the Government adopted the report.
Like other administrations in the depression, the Scullin Government lasted only one term. The new Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, said he regarded the 1931 Agreement as binding for its five-year term, but within months called a conference which he chaired demanding a reduction in price. Crawford, Innes and Curlewis presented the A.S.P.A. case but the industry had no choice but to accept a halfpenny reduction in price. Lyons announced a further five-year extension of the Agreement in 1935, 1½ years before the old one was due to expire, and again with the maximum price at fourpence a pound. Despite the low price, the A.S.P.A. conference expressed its appreciation to the Federal Government for the stability that the advance renewal gave.

Overproduction stimulated interest in sugar cane by-products. A distillery was opened at Sarina in 1926 to produce power alcohol. The A.S.P.A. continued to press for legislation to compel the use of alcohol mixed with petrol. This was passed in 1933 and remains on the statute book.

The A.S.P.A. considered the consequences of overproduction and the need to export long before it happened. During World War I the 1916 Council decided to ask the British Government to give preferential treatment to sugar from the British Dominions after the war ended instead of buying sugar, as it had previously, from Germany and Austria. The Association was deeply involved in the British Empire Producers' Association or BEPO. Pritchard and Horace Young visited England in 1916 to represent the A.S.P.A. at the London conference which decided to form it. The 4 pounds 5s. 6d. preferential duty favouring sugar from the Empire became a substantial bonus when the industry began to export at world prices far below those guaranteed in Australia.

Overproduction in Australia was eventually solved, not by reducing production but by expanding markets. Sir Earle Page, Federal Minister for Commerce, Queensland Premier W. Forgan Smith, Sir Philip Goldfinch, General Manager of CSR and Senator T.W. Crawford all visited London during the period of negotiations preceding the first International Sugar Agreement of 1937. R.G. Casey, later Lord Casey, and S.M. Bruce represented Australia at the Government to Government negotiations and achieved for it the irreducible export quota of 400,000 tons.

The Queensland Government appointed Judge W.F. Webb, President of the Industrial Court and Chairman of the Central Sugar Cane Prices Board to head a Royal Commission into Sugar Peaks and Cognate Matters. It included Curlewis, A.S.P.A. Secretary as a member. It reported in time for the 1939 season and recommended increased mill peaks to reflect the additional market
allowed by the export quota. Adherence to peaks became mandatory by the payment of only ten shillings (\$1) a ton for sugar produced in excess of each mill’s peak.

The outbreak of war in 1939 again changed the international sugar outlook. Premier Forgan Smith announced in Parliament in September 1939 that the Queensland Government and British Sugar Control Board had reached an historic agreement which gave Australia its first exports at a guaranteed price, 290,000 tons of sugar in its first year at 7 pounds 10s. per ton. Although the International Sugar Council continued to meet, all export quotas were lifted as production in Europe plummeted.

When Japan entered the war, Queensland became the front line of defence. Heavy tractors were impressed by defence authorities, labour was scarce and production sank. In October Premier Forgan Smith announced a Royal Commission chaired by Judge Alan James Mansfield to determine how best to carry on. The Commission recommended, with partial success, that the industry be allotted sufficient labour to enable mills to avoid the heavy losses of overnight shutdowns. Harvesting committees were set up to allocate the available cane-cutters, and rationing of fertilizer was based on soil needs as judged by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and limited by previous usage.

**POST-WAR ORGANISATION**

Curlewis died of a heart attack on the eve of the 1945 conference, aged 69. Captain Edward Tom Stanley Pearce returned from five years of war service to take up the duties of Secretary. Eddie Pearce had joined the organisation in 1934 on completing his University degree and quickly achieved distinction in industrial work. Charles W. Davidson was appointed Assistant Secretary in late 1945 but spent only two years with the Association before resigning and successfully contesting the Federal seat of Dawson. He rose to become Postmaster-General and was always a friend of the industry in the Federal Parliament. His place as Assistant Secretary was taken by Lloyd J. Woods whose work in the sugar division of Australian Estates had equipped him for the post; his service in Borneo in “Z” force during the war had earned him an M.B.E. in the military division.

The A.S.P.A. was anxious to encourage the settling of ex-servicemen on the land. It co-operated with the Returned Servicemen’s League and recommended increased peaks to enable new assignments to be granted to ex-servicemen. E.T.S. Pearce was a member of the R.S.L. Problems Committee and in his dual role helped overcome difficulties in implementing the scheme.
Despite the demobilisation, labour continued to be in short supply. Thousands of "displaced persons", refugees from the war and the communist takeover in Eastern Europe, migrated as New Australians; 768 of them were cutting cane in 1949. The A.S.P.A., Queensland Cane Growers Council and Australian Workers Union met regularly to discuss labour needs in consultation with the Commonwealth Departments of Labour and National Service. Shortages of labour were most acute in the north, as they had been half a century earlier, and a survey in 1957 found that over 80 per cent of cane cutters there were migrants who had arrived in Australia in the previous ten years.

As World War II ended, Britain elected a Labour Government; said the new Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, "we must retain Empire preference while tariffs are used against us by other countries". Australian sugar exports depended on tariff preference and throughout the war Australia had rationed itself to increase the supply to the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada.

No new International Agreement was achieved until 1953, but in late 1949 after negotiations in London, an eight year British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement was established. E.T.S. Pearce had been a vital member of the team and became increasingly so over the quarter century the Agreement operated. His expertise and balance were valued in the annual negotiations which determined the price, and the triennial reviews of the whole Agreement. Millions of pounds were at stake; preparation and thoroughness were essential. Rod Muir, representing the Q.C.G.C. and J.E.M. (Jim) Dixon of CSR also took major roles.

Although Australia's sugar exports were made profitable under the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement, the industry was anxious to see an International Agreement which could give the price stability it needed to expand into other markets when the opportunity arose. The first post-war Agreement was not signed until 1953 and maintaining it was no easy task. Deadlock resulted in the 1961 review of the 1958 International Sugar Agreement when Cuba demanded massive increases in quota, based on its Russian and Chinese contracts, and would not compromise.

Prices rose astronomically as the Agreement ended. The United States refused Cuban sugar entry to its high-priced market and Australia shared in its redistribution. The British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement had provided the basis for the first post-war expansion; now the advent of the United States market resulted in the second. Pearce was a member of the 1950 Royal Commission which planned the first, and was the sugar industry's adviser to the 1963 Gibbs Committee which planned the second.
The Sugar Board took advantage of the high market prices to negotiate long-term contracts with Japan and other countries at prices designed to give stability to both producer and consumer. As President, A.W. Shepherd made overseas trips, visiting Washington to speak to high ranking officials and welcoming Japanese refiners visiting Australia to see the industry first hand. Long-term contracts gave Australia the ability to withstand the ending of the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement in 1974 as Britain joined the European Economic Community.

At home, the work of the Commonwealth/Queensland Sugar Agreement continues to require the persistent attention of the A.S.P.A. Honouring contracts has been a feature of the sugar industry at home as much as in overseas markets.

At the end of World War II the industry found costs up 30 per cent and the sugar price unchanged since it was reduced a halfpenny in 1933. Acting Prime Minister J.B. Chifley refused the industry's request for price movement in accordance with the "C" series consumer price index as giving no incentive for efficiency gains. Federal Cabinet finally agreed to restore the price to fourpence halfpenny in 1947.

Pearce, Muir of the Q.C.G.C. and Hunter Freeman of CSR co-operated closely in preparing the draft submission and negotiating with the Commonwealth Government, and they were to repeat the exercise many times. At the Jubilee conference of the A.S.P.A. in 1957, delegates could look back over 50 years of achievement. But when they looked back only five years, they saw how:

The average sugar prices received have seriously lagged behind the industry's price requirements...as calculated in strict conformity with the principles of the majority report of the 1952 Commonwealth Committee of Inquiry.

Good export prices saved the industry.

The Agreement has been renewed at five-year intervals, with a further inquiry in 1961 and again in 1976, chaired by W.A. McKinnon, which broke new ground by incorporating a formula for annual price increases.

An enormous factor in the industry's ability to respond to new markets was the adoption of mechanical loading and then full-scale mechanical harvesting. The A.S.P.A. had been interested in the subject since 1908 when delegates agreed to donate up to 30 pounds of their meagre funds to encourage any proposal to mechanically cut and top cane.

The success of the Fairymead harvesters during the second World War prompted renewed interest. In a joint venture with the
Queensland Cane Growers’ Council, the Mechanical Harvesting Committee was established, including Federal and State Government representatives. The Federal Government initially provided 70 per cent of the funding, the Q.C.G.C. 20 and the A.S.P.A. 10 per cent, used to finance the building of experimental loaders and harvesters. The willingness of the industry to spend its own funds, pressing on when Federal funding ceased for a time, encouraged inventive farmers to persevere. When the chopper harvester demonstrated it could handle twisted, suckered and lodged cane, the committee knew the industry finally had a machine which would not be found wanting in difficult years, and in 1962 it disbanded. The A.S.P.A. continued to be interested in harvesters, especially ones able to cut green cane and handle wet conditions.

The Australian industry was slow to move into bulk handling of sugar and adopted the shed system in preference to the silo system. The 1946 conference urged the Executive to consider implementing a contract system to speed-up loading, and the following year, the North Eton delegates successfully moved

That the possibility and economics of the bulk handling of raw sugar be explored and if found to be a practical proposal, we obtain the facilities to handle raw sugar in bulk.

CSR introduced bulk handling at its Pyrmont refinery in 1950, but the Bulk Handling Consultative Committee with the Association represented by President Brand and Secretary Pearce, was not set up until 1953. All producers shared in the savings as well as the costs of the first terminal at Mackay, commissioned in 1957. The chain was completed with the opening of the Cairns Bulk Terminal in 1974, but the Bulk Handling Consultative Committee has continued in existence to advise on the further development of terminals as the industry expands.

Depressed prices in the sixties threatened many growers with extinction and in 1966 and 1967 loans of $19 million and $4 million, since repaid in full, were provided to the industry by the Federal Government following a joint approach by all the sugar organisations and endorsement by the Queensland Government.

Successive conferences continued to re-elect Crawford as President. He had been a steady and guiding influence over the organisation since its formation but age was taking its toll. With candidates willing to offer, Senator Crawford announced in 1943 that he would stand down. W.A. (later Sir Alfred) Brand, Chairman of Directors of the Isis Central Mill, long serving member of the Queensland Parliament and later to transfer to the Federal Parliament, was elected President.
The A.S.P.A. has had only four Secretaries and five Presidents. Pearce became Secretary only two years after Brand began his 21-year term as President. Brand was a very able chairman of meetings, well regarded and his deep hearty voice combined with his friendly manner to make him successful both as politician and President.

His successor was the Senior Vice-President E.M. (Mick) Bennett, Chairman of Directors of Mulgrave Central Mill, who took office in 1964 when Brand was in poor health. Kindly, respected and well-liked, he preferred a short term and occupied the chair for only four years. He was followed by the first President from the Mackay region, A.W. Shepherd, a successful cane grower with a good business head who had become Chairman of Directors of Marian Mill.

After eleven years he was succeeded by myself, a grandson of T.W. Crawford. Only a year previously, Norman Dillman had been appointed Secretary succeeding Pearce. Eddie Pearce did not survive long in his retirement. His dedication to the Association and the high esteem in which he was held by members led to the establishment of the E.T.S. Pearce Memorial Bursary. As Secretary, Dillman brought with him experience in Canberra in the sugar section of the Departments of Overseas Trade and Primary Industry, and an ability demonstrated while General Secretary of the Western Australian Farmers’ Union.

Having completed 75 years with a strong membership and a fine record of service, the future augurs well for the Australian Sugar Producers Association as it heads for its centenary.

Reference

This paper is based on the history prepared by John Kerr and incorporated in the Association’s Annual Report for 1982.