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Sir John Crawford

Jim Ingram

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THE CONFERENCE DINNER

Sir John Crawford

JIM INGRAM AO

This year is the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Sir John Crawford, after whom the Crawford Fund is named. Neil Andrew and Denis Blight believed that tonight's dinner provided an appropriate occasion for Sir John's achievements to be remembered. I am honoured to do so. I worked with Sir John for many years, first in negotiations with the EEC in 1960 on the Common Agricultural Policy. Our collaboration was very close during my years with the overseas aid agency, culminating in the establishment of ACIAR in 1982.

Sir John was a truly great Australian. His achievements, I believe, compare favourably with those of his better known contemporaries, for example 'Nugget' Coombs. It is disappointing that a full-scale biography has not been commissioned¹.

What is so extraordinary about Sir John is that he was a visionary; a visionary committed to realising his vision, something seemingly in short supply in

today's Australia. At the same time he had an acute sense of what was practical, what was achievable. His lifetime interest was the development of public policy, policy rooted in an understanding of long-run political and economic trends. Among his diverse successes were the harnessing of agricultural economics to the development of policy for Australian food and fibre production; the conception and implementation of Australian overseas trade policy; as a builder of institutions; as an academic and university administrator; as a manager of government departments; and as a trusted adviser to successive governments.

Given my own background it is perhaps not surprising that I see Sir John's greatest achievements as being in the international sphere, among them the conclusion of the 1957 Trade agreement with Japan and implementation of the Green Revolution in India².

The approach that Sir John brought to the Japanese negotiations was in line with his brilliant, prescient essay published in 1938. In it Sir John challenged every major assumption upon which our approach to world affairs was then based. He argued that to attempt to thwart Japan's industrialisation would lead to conflict and war. Thus he was critical of Australian support for UK trade policy toward Japan through the 1930s. He gave weight to the fact that already one-quarter of our

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¹For those interested in an overview of Sir John's work see: Evans, LT. and Miller, J.D.B. 1987. *Policy and Practice, Essays in Honour of Sir John Crawford*. Pergamon Press, Sydney.

²For information on relations with Japan and India, see especially the essays by Peter Drysdale and W. David Hopper on which I have drawn.

trade was with the Pacific. He was the first to describe the 'Far East' as the 'Near North'. He was sceptical, even at that date, of Australian confidence that we could rely for our security on what were later described as 'great and powerful friends'.

It says much for the courage of the Menzies government that it would contemplate, let alone conclude, an agreement which among other important steps extended most-favoured-nation tariff treatment to Japan, the still despised and hated enemy. Much business opinion was also strongly opposed. Sir John had as well to convince the Japanese that, given our past record, we were sincere in advancing generous proposals. The process of persuasion and negotiation took three years. That treaty laid the foundations for future agricultural-based prosperity. At the time farm products were 80% of total exports and production was increasing. We were as dependent on agriculture, especially wool, in 1957 as we are on minerals today.

That Sir John succeeded owed everything to his far-sightedness, patience, persistence and powers of persuasion.

Modest, quietly spoken, physically unimposing, Sir John was easily underestimated. In fact he had a formidable will and considerable self confidence. All who knew him have testified to his brilliant chairing of small groups. Somehow he gained the result he wanted without alienating those who may have initially favoured a different course. Never losing sight of his goals, he was ready to build on small advances. His judgement was not distorted by vanity or self-indulgence or arrogance. Never pompous, never ruffled, he did not 'put down' anyone. The result was that he engendered great respect and loyalty. He was also a superb judge of talent and gathered around him in each of his endeavours associates of the highest ability.

Sir John was a superb diplomat. His skills with the Japanese were repeated with the Indian government. Over time he persuaded it to provide the resources that enabled the Green Revolution to be taken up, just in time as it happened, to avoid ever more devastating famines. For over ten years Sir John, on behalf of the World Bank, visited India annually to review and thus help to keep on track and adjust as necessary the agricultural revolution under way. To this day his contribution is acclaimed in India.

Sir John developed a considerable and lasting respect for the top officials of the World Bank. It

was through his long association with the Bank that he became so deeply involved with the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The CGIAR was, and is, in essence a consortium to coordinate the work of, and secure funding for, an expanding number of international agricultural research institutes. From its inception the CGIAR was assisted by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) which, for many years, was chaired by Sir John to great acclaim from all involved—government and other donors, centre directors and scientists from among the world's best.

Under his leadership many new institutes were created. In Sir John's view it was essential to widen the range of disciplines to be addressed if food production, especially in developing countries, was to accelerate. One such was the International Livestock Centre for Africa, ILCA, created in 1974. Sir John was the first chairman of its governing board. The late Professor Derek Tribe was a member of ILCA's Board of Trustees at that time and he and Sir John developed a lasting respect and affection for one another. Tribe created the Crawford Fund in 1988 to honour the name of Sir John by promoting in Australia knowledge of, and funding for, the CGIAR centres. This annual conference is one way the Fund continues to do so.

Sir John was not a natural scientist but through his leadership of the CGIAR he was alive to all the scientific disciplines promotion of which is essential to achieve ecologically sustainable food production. Thus he played a leading role in fathering one of the most vital, but less widely known CGIAR institutes, today's Bioversity International. Its work bears directly on that of this evening's distinguished speaker, Professor Stephen Hopper, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

I'm quite certain that Sir John would share Professor Hopper's vision of a world at a turning point. As Professor Hopper argues, maintenance of plant diversity has become essential if food production is to expand sustainably while adequately nourishing the earth's burgeoning population. Professor Hopper, an Australian by the way, is uniquely qualified to explain why that is so. In addition to his primary role at Kew he holds many others including visiting professorships and fellowships.

Professor Hopper is a very welcome contributor to this conference.¹

¹ The presentation is included here, commencing on page 92.