

CHARLES STURT REGIONAL ARCHIVES

The Rise and Fall of Al Grassby

The Riverina and the MIA in the Whitlam Era

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Albert Jamie Grassby (1926-2005) was a controversial political representative of the Riverina. Grassby also remains one of the Riverina's best known politicians. He was a flamboyant and colourful figure, a 'personality politician' of the Whitlam era, known for his energetic and extravert demeanour and for championing the cause of multiculturalism in Australia. Grassby was born in October 1926 in Brisbane to parents of Irish and Spanish descent. Throughout the 1930s and 40s Grassby's family lived in England where he attended school and where he developed an English flavour to his accent.

At first glance it appears that Grassby was little more than an aberration in the political history of the Riverina. However closer examination of his membership of the Australian Labor Party, culminating in his electoral victory to become the member for Riverina, reveals why he was simultaneously liked and detested. Not only was Grassby eccentric and progressive, he was also a core member of the Whitlam ministry, assuming the portfolio of Minister for Immigration in 1972. In contrast to the hitherto normative, conservative representation, Grassby was an anomaly in the electoral history of the Riverina, considered the traditional territory of the then Country Party.

It is clear that Grassby's electoral success in the Riverina came through his transcendence from state to federal politics. Grassby's successful career in state politics, attainment of a relevant ministerial portfolio and strong background in the agricultural industry enabled him to meet the unique, desired traditional representational qualities of the Riverina by presenting a strong regional policy platform, despite his party affiliation. Some similarity to Eddie Graham, (the affectionately remembered Labor Member for Wagga Wagga from 1941 to 1957) can be drawn here, especially when consideration is given to Grassby's established profile in the local community and his fervent commitment to it. Although it was Grassby's first preference to attain the Ministerial portfolio of Primary Industries upon entering federal governance in 1972, his placement instead with the Immigration portfolio occurred for reasons related to his multicultural appeal and ethnic background, combined with his strong relationship to the Griffith community. From this position, and later as Commissioner for Community Relations, Grassby was instrumental in implementing the progressive reforms of the Whitlam government. Grassby ushered in a new era of multicultural immigration and community relations in Australia, sweeping the final vestiges of the White Australia Policy from existence.

This aspect of Grassby's political career has overshadowed his advocacy for rural Australia. Grassby understood and campaigned for 'a better deal for the country' and fought to strengthen the prosperity of rural Australia on a range of fronts including economic, social, industrial and most notably agricultural policy. As Grassby continued to weigh in on policy issues that most affected his constituents in Griffith and surrounding communities, his political career was propelled forward into the realm of federal politics. Throughout his career Grassby maintained a strong connection to Griffith which formed the foundations of his power-base. This in turn empowered his constituents by giving them an influential voice in matters on relevant and controversial policy issues, bringing the Griffith community to the forefront of national politics.

Whilst many historical sources acknowledge his strong association with the Griffith community, the majority consider Grassby's contribution to multiculturalism and immigration to be the most remarkable aspect of his career. As a result of the legacy of these significant and lasting accomplishments however, there is a general lack of awareness or acknowledgment of the broader spectrum of Grassby's career in state and federal politics. In addition to the emphasis on Grassby's

contribution to multiculturalism and immigration reform, Grassby would become involved in several political and personal controversies, either directly or as a matter of proximity, during the time that he served as Commissioner for Community Relations, a position he assumed after losing his seat in 1974. These affairs and scandals have not only distorted the public's memory of Grassby, they have also influenced the historical recording of his career. There is therefore a significant gap in the historical literature related to Al Grassby, a flaw that this paper seeks to address.

This paper makes extensive use of the Griffith based *Area News* and the Wagga Wagga based *Daily Advertiser* to address the deficit in historical literature about Al Grassby. It will give an account of early aspects of Grassby's career, from a local history perspective. It will also acknowledge the broader, contemporary historical and political context and place Grassby into the spectrum of the era. In doing so, this paper will illustrate how the legacy and recollections of Grassby came to be relegated to a complex and turbulent period of Australian political history, rather than elevated to a well-deserved place in the history of the Riverina.

The road to Al Grassby's political success began in Griffith, New South Wales. Before his political career, Grassby was employed as an Information Officer at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). He was eventually transferred to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, a "cornucopia of wheat, citrus fruits and increasingly wine" as part of the CSIRO Extension Service established there.¹ From here, Grassby began to establish himself in the Griffith area, going on to become director of the Griffith Base Hospital and President of both the Griffith Old Peoples Welfare Council and the Griffith Good Neighbour Council.² Grassby's Griffith, by the mid-1960s, was a rural community of 17,500 people with a significant Italian population of about 15%, who had immigrated to Australia in the post-war era.³ Other unverified estimates exaggerate their proportion of the population to be approximately 33%, however what is undisputed is that the Italian community in the Griffith area was one of the largest outside of the capital cities in New South Wales. Mark Lopez writes that "Grassby was a proud resident of the town of Griffith, in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area... where he had developed a particular affection for the regions sizable Sicilian and Calabrian minorities."⁴ In 1951 Al Grassby established the Continental Music Club. It was "an initiative intended to foster greater cohesion amongst the highly segregated Italian population and the wider Griffith community," which later became "a model for multilingual radio in Australia."⁵ Additionally, Grassby married into a local Calabrian migrant family with his marriage to Ellnor Louez in 1961.⁶ Grassby's appeal to the Griffith Italian community is widely viewed as the primary attributing factor to his electoral success. Whilst it cannot be denied that this was a significant boon in Grassby's favour, it can also be argued that it was merely one of several key factors that led Grassby to electoral victory in the 1962 State election.

Grassby, (a member of the Australian Labor Party since 1951), having become a well-known personality within the in the Griffith community, was urged to submit his candidacy to the 1965 New South Wales general election. In early April 1965, Grassby announced that he would run for the seat of Murrumbidgee. He enjoyed strong support during his campaign from several influential ALP politicians, including the N.S.W Attorney-General Robert Downing, N.S.W. Senator Joseph Fitzgerald, Senator Lionel Murphy, the N.S.W Premier J.B. Renshaw, the N.S.W. Deputy- Premier Mr P.D.Hills and "one of Australia's senior women Members of Parliament Mrs. Edna S. Roper."⁷ Grassby's

candidature did not, as one might assume, challenge a conservative Country Party seat. Instead Grassby received the blessing and endorsement of the retiring, long-term sitting member for Murrumbidgee and then Minister for Agriculture, Mr. A.G. Enticknap, who had been in office since 1941.⁸ Not only did Grassby benefit from Enticknap's endorsement, but a significant amount of pork-barrelling from Enticknap also went in Grassby's favor.⁹ This was detailed in an *Area News* article drawing attention to the £4 million which "had been spent on improving the efficiency of irrigation systems in the Murrumbidgee and Coleambally areas [by the] Minister for Agriculture."¹⁰ This would appeal strongly to the dominant agricultural community in the electorate. By contrast, when the campaign for the Liberal candidate for Murrumbidgee, Michael Lowing, was supported by the N.S.W Opposition Leader Robert Askin, they presented Griffith electors with an education policy platform.¹¹

During his policy speech at the opening of his campaign, Grassby declared that it was the "destiny" of the Murrumbidgee "to become the major food arsenal of our nation in Southern Australia." In his words, "the original concept of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation area has been fulfilled" and that despite the harsh drought conditions in N.S.W "food supplies to Melbourne and Sydney have hardly been affected because they have been able to rely on the irrigation areas."¹² On the eve of the election, Grassby summed up his campaign in a statement to the *Area News* that "the major issue to be decided [on election day] is whether the great development plans already blueprinted for Murrumbidgee are to be implemented or not." He also highlighted his support for the "need to ensure that the great fruit and vegetable industries," prominent in the Griffith area, "continue to prosper and expand."¹³ In doing so, Grassby highlighted the centrality of the MIA to food security in Australia, signalling to local electors that the importance of the region was paramount to the N.S.W Government. Liberal candidate Michael Lowing could only counter this campaign platform by "[urging] electors to judge the opposing parties on their merits."¹⁴ In addition, Grassby was the only candidate to publish multi-lingual advertisements in the *Area News*, strongly appealing to Griffith's Italian community (see Appendix A) for their vote on election day.¹⁵

Grassby won the May 1965 Murrumbidgee election by a clear majority of 657 votes, although he was destined to serve in opposition.¹⁶ The election prompted a change in government to the Liberal Country Coalition, ushering in Bob Askin as Premier of New South Wales. Grassby indicated to electors his intention to remain available to the community on a regular basis and that he wished to "stay connected with the hospital until the new building complex [was] completed."¹⁷ It is clear that Grassby retained his strong local popularity in Griffith, despite serving his first term in opposition against what was largely considered to be a competent Liberal Country government under Askin. In the following 1968 New South Wales election, Grassby held Murrumbidgee against a further state-wide swing in favour of the Liberal Country Coalition.

By 1969, vehement opposition to the controversial Wheat Industry Stabilization Scheme became a platform which helped to propel Grassby's political career into Federal Parliament. The authoritarian legislation was issued by the Federal Government, requiring the adherence of the State Governments to ensure that farmers stored specially allocated qualities of wheat to ensure the future stability of wheat prices and the sustainability of the industry. This was known as the *Wheat Industry Stabilization Act*. and although the scheme had been established in 1948, recent drought,

market fluctuations and downturns in commodity prices prompted a high degree of criticism to the scheme.¹⁸ The Wheat Quota legislation was a component of an overall industry stabilisation scheme that was part of a set of post-war rural policies to " stabilize prices and incomes in the wheat industry and to assist in the achievement of the more general economic objectives of a stable internal price level and steady economic progress."¹⁹ In Parliament, Grassby led A.L.P. (and later coalition) opposition against the legislation which he described as overly destructive. Grassby urged the N.S.W. Minister for Agriculture, Geoffrey Crawford, to "reconsider" the legislation which he firmly believed would cause "widespread hardship" to wheat farmers both in the M.I.A. and across Australia. This echoed the concern of many M.I.A. farmers who believed that the scheme would result in "a state and nation-[wide] calamity."²⁰ During one debate, Grassby stated that the scheme would likely mean bankruptcy for thousands of farmers and country townspeople alike.²¹ He also claimed that the decision to enforce quotas had been made "far too late" and that "the Federal Government has made a grave error in forcing a quota system on the industry and the states [considering that many farmers] had [already] put out their crops."²² Although some M.I.A. farmers decried Grassby's opposition to the scheme as nothing but a cheap and empty grab for popularity, it seemed the majority of his constituents, faced with potential financial hardship and devastation, sided with Grassby in his opposition to the Wheat Industry Stabilisation Scheme.

Against this backdrop and in the midst of long-running speculation about his intentions, Grassby announced in September 1969 that he would contest the Federal seat of Riverina in the upcoming election. Since 1965, the traditional Country Party seat had been held by Country Party member Bill Armstrong. At the time it was felt that winning the seat of Riverina would be a "tough challenge" for Al Grassby.²³ However, it was widely recognised that Grassby's strong local profile in the Griffith and surrounding communities, (widely considered amongst local historians to be a key quality shared by the most successful political representatives of the Riverina) had grown significantly during his term as Member for Murrumbidgee.²⁴ Grassby's widespread support within the Riverina, in addition to his "accomplished background in agriculture" and centrality in popular opposition to the Wheat Industry Stabilisation Scheme, placed him on a strong footing to contest the seat.²⁵ However, these were not the only factors in Grassby's favour.

Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam, who spoke at a well attended Griffith meeting in support of Grassby's election campaign, presented local electors with a 'strong Labor rural team.'²⁶ The visit from Whitlam and other core members of the A.L.P, although dousing speculation that Grassby had been promised a ministerial portfolio should Labor be elected to Government, nonetheless emphasised Grassby's importance as a key member of the Whitlam rural and industry reform agenda. Borrowing from that rural reform agenda, Grassby presented the Riverina with a policy platform that, at its core, proposed to "address the changing social dynamic of rural Australia."²⁷ Grassby's policy platform mirrored Shadow Minister for Primary Industries Rex Patterson's pledge that Labor would deliver a new assistance package for primary industries and that a "central theme of Labor's rural policy [would] improve and stabilise the purchasing power of rural incomes."²⁸ The strong focus on rural policy in the Griffith announcement came at a crucial time when the Country Party was instead more focused on manufacturing and mining industries rather than agriculture. This opportunity was seized by Grassby, who reinforced to voters that the 1969 federal election "was probably the most significant election for the Riverina in 20 years."²⁹ Ultimately however, it was the 'Wheat debate' that would decide the fate of the 1969 Federal elections.

The 'wheat debate,' a pivotal election issue across the nation, played out on the pages of the *Area News* and the *Daily Advertiser* through a series of debates, political statements, editorials and letters to the editor. Drawing great media attention from all across Australia, the most significant political debate occurred in Griffith where Al Grassby issued a challenge to the federal Minister for Primary Industries Doug Anthony.³⁰ In an "excited atmosphere" the Griffith Hall was packed to capacity to hear the climactic debate, with over thirteen-hundred attendees, the majority of whom were reportedly Grassby supporters.³¹ Eleven days later Australians went to the polling booths and within twenty-four hours of them closing, Grassby "held an absolute majority of 1600 votes... his win coming as a surprise to many hardened political observers."³² Although the Gorton Government remained in office there was a significant 7% swing towards Labor, marking one of the most promising results for Labor in two decades.

Grassby continued to maintain a strong following in the Riverina. By the following 1972 federal election, it was said that although many in the community may not vote for him, the man everybody in the Riverina knows as 'Al' can claim that "nearly all of the electors know him."³³ Although the subject of wheat quotas still remained an important election issue in the face of continued drought conditions in New South Wales, Grassby was able to take advantage of the apparent inaction of the McMahon Liberal government. Grassby opened his 1972 federal election campaign with a strong warning to voters against re-electing the McMahon Government who were refusing to release a \$20million assistance package for struggling farmers."³⁴ Instead, at a Labor campaign rally in Griffith, Gough Whitlam "pledged special rural finance to bring a new deal to the countryside and rural industries" that was "fundamental to Labor policies on resource development, reconstruction and [the] rehabilitation of rural industries."³⁵ Grassby was again able to claim strong advocacy for rural Australia, which was in his favour. This was in addition to the proposed termination of the national draft and the withdrawal of Australian soldiers from the Vietnam War, a promise made by Gough Whitlam as a key election issue which brought further votes to Labor. Grassby was nearing the climax of his popularity and political career.

In December 1972, Gough Whitlam became the Prime Minister of Australia and formed the first Labor government in twenty-three years. Of the entire Whitlam Government, Grassby was only one of three members who represented rural electorates.³⁶ Grassby easily retained the seat of Riverina by "an absolute majority of four-thousand votes."³⁷ According to political journalist Mungo MacCallum, throughout Grassby's ascendancy to governance he was "never loath to portray himself as the saviour of rural Australia, the heroic knight at the fore of what he called the Crusade for the Countryside."³⁸ For this reason, Grassby had ambition for a ministerial portfolio in the Whitlam Government and given his strong background in agriculture, Grassby's first preference was the primary industries portfolio.³⁹ However, Whitlam recognised how "approachable and accommodating Grassby was to people in his electorate...[and] Whitlam decided against allocating it to a representative from a rural electorate."⁴⁰ On the 19th of December 1972 Grassby became the Minister for Immigration. This aspect of Grassby's political career is well documented and is what Grassby is best remembered for.

As the minister for Immigration under Gough Whitlam, Grassby became widely renowned as the father of Australian multiculturalism. Although the watershed act to abolish the White Australia Policy was enacted by the Holt Liberal Government in 1966, the Whitlam Government introduced key amendments introducing the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, considered to be "further steps in the gradual process to remove race as a factor to Australia's immigration policies."⁴¹ According to Mark Lopez, "Grassby brought a number of qualities to his role as Minister for Immigration that had a significant impact on subsequent events. His approach to many issues was often to reduce them to a form where it seemed that his position was simply one of common sense and ethical decency, consequently he could take stands on issues with great moral passion."⁴² However, The Whitlam reform agenda, spanning several key policy areas including social, economic and of course immigration reform, was soon met with growing criticism. The perception in the Riverina that Grassby played an integral role in the Whitlam Government (initially beneficial to Grassby) slowly became detrimental to his popularity within the electorate.

As dissention to the Whitlam Government spread throughout Australia, anti-reformist and indeed anti-Grassby sentiment began to gain momentum in the Riverina. Graham Freudenberg writes that throughout its first term, "there was a skilful and extraordinarily successful effort to portray [the Whitlam Government] as shoddy, tainted and even corrupt"⁴³. Freudenberg claims that "the whole object of the exercise was to undermine the moral authority of the Government and the moral reputation of Ministers."⁴⁴ This backlash against the Whitlam reform agenda was reflected in the body of correspondence to Riverina Country Party candidate John Sullivan, who would later succeed Grassby as the member for Riverina. Public discontent grew over Grassby having a constant presence in the pages of the *Area News* and the *Daily Advertiser* throughout the duration of his political career (with criticism intensifying as Grassby earned a ministerial portfolio), and a marked contempt and aversion for Grassby emerged in the wake of the Whitlam Governments election to office.

Although there is a distinct conservative bias in the correspondence John Sullivan received from his Riverina constituents, there are definite trends present in the overall body of correspondence. These trends demonstrate the prevailing attitude that Grassby's integral role as Minister for Immigration within the Whitlam government meant Sullivan had a moral obligation to the community to stand against him. One letter in particular to Sullivan expressed concern about Grassby's appeal to socialism and its potential impact on agriculture and the wellbeing of the nation.⁴⁵ Throughout the first term of the Whitlam Government, it is evident from the shift in Riverina to contemptuously oppose the progressive reform agenda, that a sharp divide developed between Grassby and the traditionally conservative constituents of the Riverina.

The 1974 double dissolution election brought electoral disaster to Grassby. John Sullivan, the deeply conservative candidate for the Country Party, ran a distinctly negative political campaign against Labor and more importantly against Al Grassby, capitalising on the momentum of anti- progressive and reformist sentiment in the Riverina.⁴⁶ The core campaign strategy of the Country Party was built on strong undertones of contempt for Al Grassby and the Whitlam Labor Government.⁴⁷ However, Sullivan's campaign was simply a reiteration of the party-line, albeit more poignantly anti-Grassby.⁴⁸ Grassby had become too much a part of the overly progressive Whitlam Government, diverging too far from his rural and agricultural roots, which alienated him from the largest body of his constituents on the right of the political spectrum.

Additionally, Grassby suffered a "virulently racist campaign" against him in the Riverina 1974 election.⁴⁹ Grassby's influential position as Minister for Immigration, and the subsequent immigration reforms introduced during his term in office, was targeted in a series of racist advertisements in Riverina newspapers (see Appendix B). An anti-immigration group known as the 'Immigration Control Association' was largely responsible for the newspaper and pamphlet advertisements across the electorate, "spending thousands of dollars on racist scare advertising... bent on sowing the seeds of division in a community."⁵⁰ The advertisements covered two full pages in the Area News, specifically urging Riverina voters to place Grassby last on the ballot paper and warning that "the Whitlam/ Grassby [immigration] policy would turn Australia into a trouble-racked coffee coloured mess," among other things.⁵¹ Although both Grassby and Country Party candidate John Sullivan condemned the advertisements which "blatantly appealed to racism," the advertisements were nonetheless an attempt to empower conservative Riverina voters by their appearance of authenticity. Whilst in the spirit of democracy Grassby indicated his "cheerful acceptance" of the election results, he expressed his shock and dismay at the fact that "political blackmail and terror tactics" were allowed publication in local newspapers, calling upon local media outlets to refrain from publishing such material in future.⁵² Although the extent to which the advertisements affected Grassby's defeat in the 1974 double-dissolution election cannot be quantified, it must be remarked that it was a significant indignity of the campaign to remove Grassby from the Immigration portfolio.

Grassby was defeated in the 1974 federal election by a 7.7% swing to the County Party, with John Sullivan leading Grassby after preferences by a narrow 0.8% margin.⁵³ Although Grassby lost his seat, one of four rural seats held by the Labor Party to be lost in that election, the Whitlam Government remained in government with a loss of five seats.⁵⁴ Although this spelled the end of Grassby's political career, he was soon appointed as the first federal commissioner for Community Relations, where as part of his role he administered the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* into place.⁵⁵ In the years that followed Grassby became embroiled in political scandal, either by his close proximity and association to controversial affairs, or as a result of his own actions.

For example, in 1974 as Commissioner for Community Relations, Grassby appointed Australian businesswoman Junie Morosi to the public service, bringing her into contact with the upper-circle of federal politics. Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Jim Cairns later hired Morosi as his "office coordinator... where it rapidly became clear that she had extraordinary influence over him."⁵⁶ This sparked media speculation of a love-affair, with Cairns finally admitting a sexual relationship nearly three decades later, bringing public closure to a long-running enigma that damaged Grassby's reputation through his perceived facilitation of the affair.⁵⁷ However this was not the end of Grassby's association with controversy.

In 1989 Grassby was found guilty of defamation following the findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Drugs. The finding was that Grassby was responsible for the distribution of a document containing allegations that Griffith anti-drugs campaigner Don Mackay "had been murdered, not by persons connected with the drug trade, but by his wife, his son and their solicitor or by someone on their behalf."⁵⁸ Despite the fact that Grassby was later acquitted of the defamation charge in 1992,

his initial conviction no-doubt gave evidential weight to persistent rumours that Grassby had personal connections with organised crime figures in Griffith. There was speculation that Grassby's political campaigns were funded by profits from the Griffith drug trade. Clive Small and Tom Gilling even speculated that the local Calibrian mafia, including the infamous Robert Trimbole, helped to secure the Italian vote for Grassby.⁵⁹ Although there is little doubt Grassby would have known and even associated with prominent members of Griffith's Italian community who were later found to be involved in the drug trade, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Grassby was involved in any criminal activity.

The controversies that embroiled Grassby's reputation in a downward spiral coincided with a period in Australian political history with "sharp escalation in the political centrality of scandals."⁶⁰ Rodney Tiffen argues that since the Watergate Scandal and the Whitlam dismissal, the rise in the appearance of scandals may not signify increasing levels of corruption but that it may come as a result of increased public visibility or an increased willingness of the media to report it.⁶¹ Although there is a common perception that the 1970s and the 1980s were a troubling time of crime and corruption, the rise of investigative journalism and the new-left media in Australia led to a wide range of allegations against many key political figures, many of whom served under Gough Whitlam. Grassby's integral role in the Whitlam Government and his association with several controversial affairs and scandals in the autumn of his political career have consequently marred his legacy.

Al Grassby rose to power through his interest in agricultural issues and his advocacy for rural Australia. He transitioned from state to federal politics on the basis of his impassioned defence of rural society and the agricultural industry, and as a result of the strong connections he developed in Griffith and its surrounding communities – connections that he strengthened throughout his ascent. Grassby entered governance in 1972 after one term in federal opposition, on a powerful nation-wide surge of progress with the entry of the Whitlam Labor government.

Whitlam's decision to appoint Grassby as Minister for Immigration rather than the Minister for Primary Industries and Industrial Relations, which had been Grassby's preference, marked the beginning of the end of Grassby's political career. During his ministership, Grassby became increasingly alienated from his constituents who by now believed he was advocating for immigrants and a multicultural Australia at the expense of rural Australia. This alienation was exacerbated by the growing backlash against the Whitlam government and its reform agenda, which was particularly prominent in rural electorates, and of which Grassby was perceived to be an integral part. Although Grassby was only narrowly defeated by Country Party candidate John Sullivan in 1974, his name became embroiled in controversy, stemming from his outrage against racist and derogatory anti-multiculturalism advertisements targeted against him in the lead up to the election. Grassby was appointed Commissioner for Community Relations shortly after his defeat in the elections, but his proximity and association to the Junie Morosi affair only fuelled the public's growing disaffection with him. Criminal defamation charges against Grassby in 1989 served to reinforce the association of Grassby's name with affairs and scandals, many of which became the subject of a series of articles in the *Daily Advertiser*. The themes of 'Grassby' and 'controversy' became synonymous.

It is difficult for historians to research any subject so closely interwoven with the Whitlam Government without becoming side-tracked by the broader context of political controversy that characterised that era of Australian political history, of which Al Grassby was intrinsically a part. As a result, although the vast majority of Al Grassby's political career was occupied by rural policy issues, particularly with the great Wheat Debate, the overwhelming focus in historical accounts of Grassby relate to his role as the Minister for Immigration under Gough Whitlam and the ensuing controversies he was associated with. Whilst his achievements in this Ministerial role were the most significant aspect at the pinnacle of Grassby's political career, they overshadow his earlier, significant achievements as an advocate for Griffith, the M.I.A and rural Australia. Although from a broader, national perspective of political history this can easily be excused, the lack of acknowledgement at a local level of Al Grassby's contribution as a political representative of the Riverina is negligible. The Riverina has had few political representatives assume such a prominent role in federal politics and fewer still from the Labor Party, making Al Grassby an unique and influential politician from an otherwise mostly low-profile group of conservative backbench politicians.

The popular memory of the Whitlam Government, and the storm of affairs and political scandals that emerged in the wake of its dismissal, have largely overshadowed the emphasis by Grassby during his political career as an advocate for rural Australia. Grassby is remembered as the colourful Minister for Immigration, a position he held at the brief climax of a decade-long career in state and federal politics that largely centred on agricultural and industrial policy issues, many of which related directly to his electorate in the Riverina. His ministerial portfolio and subsequent role as Commissioner for Community Relations, and the controversy that accompanied these roles, bind Grassby inextricably to a complex and turbulent political period, diminishing his achievements as a champion of rural Australia and the legacy this left locally and nationally.

Appendix

Appendix A

Multilingual campaign for Al Grassby's 1965 Murrumbidgee election campaign found throughout the *Area News* in the lead up to the election.

GINO CENTOFANTI SAYS THIS IS WHY I WILL VOTE [1] for AL GRASSBY on ELECTION DAY, MAY 1 BECAUSE WHEN THE FRUIT INDUSTRY WAS IN TROUBLE....

1. Al Grassby fought hard for a Co-operative Cannery for Griffith.
2. Due to those efforts £1 million was made available to extend Leeton Co-operative Cannery to take more fruit and banish fruit waste.
3. Because for many years Al Grassby has worked hard to expand the development of Griffith and the M.I.A.
4. He has championed the cause of Griffith and the M.I.A. against its critics.
5. He has worked and is working for a better deal for vegetable growers who produce £800,000 per year in this district.
6. Because in his job and in his public life Al Grassby has been dedicated to helping in every way the farmers and the townspeople.
7. Because in the future Griffith needs a voice in Parliament that is strong, well informed and capable.

THIS IS WHY I WILL VOTE FOR AL GRASSBY (1) ON MAY 1, AND I HOPE YOU WILL TOO.

... Authorised by Gino Centofanti



Gino CENTOFANTI DICE 'QUESTO E' PERCHE' IO VOGLIO VOTARE [1] PER AL GRASSBY IL GIORNO DELLE ELEZIONI (1mo Maggio 1965):

1. Perche' Quando i Farmisti Si Trovano in pericolo Al Grassby ha fatto molto per ottenere una Cannery per la nostra frutta.
2. Per quanto ha fatto Al Grassby £750,000 furono date alla canneria di Leeton perche' possa prendere piu' frutta che sarebbe altrimenti rimasta sulle nostre piante a Griffith.
3. Al Grassby sta adesso impegnandosi per ottenere condizioni migliori per i coltivatori di verdura che al presente producono £800,00 per anno in questa zona.
4. Al Grassby ha sempre difeso L'Irrigazione di Griffith contro chi la critico' nel passato.

VOTATE ESATTAMENTE COSI' PER SCEGLIERE AL GRASSBY

[4] BALDWIN, E. H. I.

[1] GRASSBY, A. J.

[2] LOWING, M. N.

[3] TROY, J. P.

Io Voterò per Al Grassby e Spero che voi Farete lo Stesso.

Authorised by Gino Centofanti, Griffith.

Appendix B

Racist advertisements in the *Area News* targeted at Al Grassby and the Whitlam Labor Government during the double-dissolution election of 1974 in which Grassby was defeated by John Sullivan of the Country Party

Page 16, The Area News, Friday, May 27, 1974.


(Advertisement)

THE IMMIGRATION CONTROL ASSOCIATION CALLS GRASSBY'S IMMIGRATION POLICY A NATIONAL DISASTER

What kind of Australia is the Whitlam/Grassby immigration policy building for your children?

GRASSBY HAS STATED:

- * "The White Australia Policy is dead."
- * "We should establish urgently a migration office in Asia".
- * "We won't be asking their colour or religion."
- * "People from Asia, New Guinea, from anywhere will be admitted."
- * "Colour will not count."
- * "Our immigration officers will be colour blind."



WHITLAM SAID:

"The White Australia Policy is dead-
give me a shovel and I'll bury it."

ARTHUR CALWELL WAS RIGHT

He warned the Labor Party that the Whitlam/Grassby policy would turn Australia into a trouble-racked coffee coloured mess.

A VOTE FOR GRASSBY WILL BE A VOTE FOR
WHITLAM'S SHOVEL AND RACIAL TROUBLES IN AUSTRALIA.

VOTE **4** GRASSBY and vote him OUT.

This advertisement is inserted for the information of voters in "Wivenhoe" by the IMMIGRATION CONTROL ASSOCIATION and paid for by voluntary donations from its members and supporters. Authorised by R. Clark, P.O. Box 322, Crows Nest N.S.W. 2065.

(Advertisement)

GRASSBY SAID

"THE WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY IS DEAD"

Asia has a brown and yellow Asia policy
Africa has a black Africa policy

Their politicians defend and uphold those policies.
(They don't want permanent European settlers.)

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY.

The trouble lies with our politicians who lack the will, the commonsense or the 'guts' to defend that policy.

HERE IS POSITIVE PROOF THAT THE A.L.P. IMMIGRATION POLICY IS DELIBERATELY AND RECKLESSLY CREATING A COLOURED COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA.

The figures quoted below are taken from the returns of the GOVERNMENT STATISTICIAN (They refer to the net intake, i.e. arrivals less departures)

IN THE THREE MONTHS ENDING DECEMBER 1972 (i.e. the last period before the A.L.P. immigration policy took effect) FOR EVERY 100 PERMANENT ARRIVALS FROM EUROPE THERE WERE 75 FROM ASIA and 1 FROM AFRICA

IN THE THREE MONTHS ENDING SEPTEMBER 1973 (last available figures) FOR EVERY 100 PERMANENT ARRIVALS FROM EUROPE THERE WERE **50 FROM ASIA** and **11 FROM AFRICA**

THE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE FROM ASIA AND AFRICA HAS DOUBLED IN NINE MONTHS. WHAT WILL THE POSITION BECOME IN ANOTHER THREE YEARS?

CAN AUSTRALIA AFFORD TO RISK THE CONTINUATION AND FURTHER EXTENSION OF THIS DANGEROUS POLICY? CAN YOU AFFORD TO RISK IT?



A VOTE FOR GRASSBY IS A VOTE FOR AN AUSTRALIA WRACKED
WITH RACIAL DISORDER— FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S SAKE

VOTE 4 GRASSBY

LET THE MESSAGE BE
LOUD AND CLEAR
GO — GRASSBY — GO

This advertisement is inserted for the information of voters in "Riverina" by the IMMIGRATION CONTROL ASSOCIATION and paid for by voluntary donations from its members and supporters. Authorised by R. Clark, P.O. Box 322, Crows Nest N.S.W. 2065

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