VOICE FILE NAME: CHRIS LAIDLAW

Key:

SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
CL: Chris Laidlaw (Respondent)

SO: Sue Onslow talking to Mr Chris Laidlaw in Wellington on 3 April, 2014. Mr Laidlaw, thank you very much for taking part in this project. I wonder if you could begin, please, by saying how did you come to be recruited to the Commonwealth Secretariat?

CL: Well, it's an interesting story. I was with the New Zealand Foreign Service and I had been in Paris at the Embassy for some time. I had just taken on, for about a year or so, a job with the International Energy Agency. This was in1975/6.

SO: Was this the International Energy Agency, or the International Atomic Energy Agency?

CL: No the IEA, part of the OECD. And quite a lot of what was happening was OPEC versus the Western world. Interestingly, OPEC were beginning to reach out to the Third World, as it were, and trying to develop alliances amongst the G-77 for instance, of which some of them are members. But they wanted to get the Third World behind them in this big contest over oil pricing and their rights to their oil and so on. All of this was a hugely tense period. Anyway, Sonny Ramphal had just joined the Secretariat as the boss and I met him at a conference in Paris. He was talking - I can't remember the subject - but he was the champion of North/South relations. The whole emphasis was the North/South dialogue. It was developed against developing countries and finding a kind of way of living together that was a bit more reasonable than was the case before that. So (Ramphal and I) got into a conversation. I told him what I was doing; how I was sitting on the OPEC desk and roaming around OPEC countries, trying to persuade them that the IEA wasn't their enemy, which was no mean task, really. A few weeks later, he sent a message saying, "How would you like to come and work for me?" (This was) on North/South stuff. I thought about it and it meant taking a gigantic drop in salary to go from Paris to London, but I couldn't resist it. The man was so magnetic and so full of life and, in his own way, quite radical. I said, "I'm going to do this". My wife didn't want to leave Paris; she was at university there and so commuted back and forward for quite a while. But that was the reason I responded.

SO: That's when you became Assistant Director, in the SG's Office?

CL: Assistant Director. Yes, that's right. Mark (Robinson) and I were both Assistant Directors.

SO: I know that you shared an office.

CL: Yes, we shared an office with a Gainsborough on the wall.

SO: How did you share the tasks?

CL: Well, I was concentrating much more on the developmental stuff and the politics of that; but in the end, it was all hands to the deck mainly. He had many more contacts in the UK than I did obviously and so he was a very good foil; particularly during the Thatcher era. He was able to open the odd door for us and that was very helpful, whereas I was more orientated towards the Third World.

SO: How much was that a grand strategy under Sonny? Because it's often said that the battle against apartheid was a Commonwealth 'grand strategy', but to my mind this whole question of the developmental agenda was equally a 'grand strategy', under Sonny Ramphal's guidance.

CL: Yes, it was his grand strategy. I don't know that many other people, many of the senior personnel and the Secretariat understood it all that well. He effectively turned the Secretariat into a campaigning organisation for the rights of the newly independent or the 'abandoned independent'; and that became his vocation. Yes, the thing against apartheid was there and it was there before him, and it was there after he left. But I think this was where his heart really lay.

SO: So was that part of, in a way, non-alignment and Afro-Asian attitudes to social justice and racial justice?

CL: Yes and economic justice. So the economic dimension was always important, I think, as the sort of liberationist and that's reflected in the Brandt Report which he threw himself into completely. He and Willy Brandt became really very close and I spent a lot of time drafting sections of that, redrafting sections of that and redrafting them again.

SO: Do you have an economics background?

CL: No, no, I studied a bit of economics. But no, I was an anthropologist, which is a qualification probably just to shout.

SO: I don't know! It might've been quite good in the Secretariat!

CL: I thought it was. So that (the economics dimension) was his creation and with people like Michael Manley, Kenneth Kaunda and Nyerere.

SO: Malcolm Fraser too.

CL: Yes and Fraser backing him strongly. Fraser's an exceptional case; he was sort of a fish out of water in this respect and you can talk about Fraser all day. The Secretariat was mobilised for this purpose and the Canadians were supportive as well, I think. Trudeau was the Prime Minister at the time. So there was this huge

tidal wave of support they just transformed the relationships, you know, let the Commonwealth lead the world in this respect and Sonny genuinely believed that that's what his vocation was. If the Commonwealth had a purpose, then this was it.

SO: Helping in the politics and economics of transition from these newly independent states?

CL: Yes.

SO: To help the Commonwealth develop apart from the Cold War?

CL: Achieving viability by any experts from the CFTC. This was sharpened in order to do exactly that, to provide people who could help the transformation.

SO: I am interested in the autonomy of the CFTC, funded primarily but not exclusively by ABC countries. A lot of Canadian energy was put in to it. But how far was there political crossover and control during Sonny's time? Obviously, institutionally it was relatively separate and had been set up as such.

CL: Yes, but it wasn't really separate. There was an overarching committee which I sat on with the Secretary General, the Deputy and the Head of the CFTC and the Head of International Relations. It was an informal arrangement, but …

SO: You mean International Affairs Division?

CL: International Affairs, yes.

SO: So Moni Malhoutra was involved, while you were there.

CL: Yes. And Hugh Craft. Moni and Hugh couldn't probably be any more different. Anyway, so the CFTC was the developmental arm and it focused on providing the kind of sympathetic skills that were needed. People like Yash Ghai who is a fascinating guy: a constitutional lawyer, who came to Fiji. He was invited by the Commonwealth to try to find a way through the constitutional terms and gave up. But a lot of countries were trying to settle their constitutional arrangements as well as their economic relationships and the nature of their relationships with all of the international corporates. So all of that was the driving force and that's what drove Sonny. There was no doubt about that.

SO: How about the parallel battle against apartheid? Rhodesia obviously was a particularly big push while you were AD, SGO as it were. Did you and Mark, again, put all hands to the pump or was there an assumption of particular responsibilities?

CL: Well, it was essentially a political issue until it came to the whole question of the election and I came in just as that was beginning.

SO: What, as the election was beginning?

CL: I joined in 1978, I think it was.

SO: The Rhodesian election which saw the victory for Bishop Muzorewa was held in April 1979; Sonny's big push for an all party constitutional conference came after that in the run up to, and at the Lusaka CHOGM.

CL: That's right, at Lancaster House.

SO: At Lusaka and then Lancaster House September – December 1979.

CL: Yes.

SO: So you attended the Lusaka CHOGM?

CL: Yes.

SO: What were your reflections of the dynamics between the heads at that particular point? Obviously Sonny Ramphal had put a lot of leg-work in to smoothing the way beforehand, for Mrs Thatcher's first CHOGM meeting. Were you involved in that?

CL: To some extent. I was dealing with the Australians as much as anyone. I had a particular problem with Muldoon. It was a sort of side sub-plot and I clashed with Muldoon over other things in the immediate past before that; he was a 'I'll get you in the end' type and he would reach out into the system.

SO: He was politically vindictive?

CL: Oh, he was very vindictive, yes. And so I couldn't really deal with New Zealand. It was odd in a way because I was dealing with a whole load of other countries. But there weren't any kind of assigned roles in this. Everything was task forced when the election came around in Rhodesia. I actually stayed in London for most of the time. I've forgotten why. I think maybe I was having a child, well, I wasn't! My wife at that time was. But I went in immediately after that, but that was task force related; Jeremy Pope, Head of the Legal Division who died tragically about a year or so ago and who was a close friend of mine, masterminded the electoral stuff, because he was particularly good at elections. He understood them and there were a whole of people. We had an Observer Group, we had all the sort of machinery, some was a bit 'seat of the pants'.

SO: Having read the files, 'Yes' is the answer to that. Derek Ingram, who was in charge of assessing the media for your election observer mission, has told me the story of a sudden panic on polling day that Coca Cola washed off the stamp that proved people had been through the polling booth. And this suddenly created a crisis, as it would mean the entire poll result was questionable.

CL: There are a lot of good stories. Anyway, that was a pretty successful time for the Commonwealth and its ability to mastermind peaceful transitions beyond awkward colonial dependence.

SO: Had you been closely involved in providing the diplomatic back up to Joshua Nkomo's and Robert Mugabe's delegation teams at the Lancaster House conference? I know that Sonny Ramphal was particularly keen that they

shouldn't be caught out as naïve liberation fighters going into tough negotiations with the wily British.

CL: He spent a lot of time at his house having them there, talking things through with them. That's where I first met Mugabe. They were very open; they trusted him (Ramphal). There was no question: they trusted him. They did what he suggested to them, they did it and they did it because Ramphal had an unbelievable charm and power of persuasion. I think the Queen once said, "This is a man who can charm the birds from the trees". I heard her say it and she was right. She liked him. You should talk to her.

SO: It would be great, if I could!

CL: Well, I'll tell you a little side story. In 1982 the Commonwealth Games were in Brisbane and because of New Zealand rugby contacts with South Africa yet again, there was a major threat of a boycott by the Africans, so we got the Commonwealth Games Federation to meet beforehand in Brisbane. The Queen said she was coming to the Games which put huge pressure on everybody to avoid a meltdown and we spent two days gently beating these people over the head, to try to hammer out a code of conduct. The process was one of shuttle diplomacy with Jeremy Pope and I going back and forth among the key protagonists slowly working round to an acceptable form of words. It was finally accepted, not with much grace by the NZ and British delegates but they were going to walk out. They were going to come and then dramatically walk out unless they were offered something. It was a code of conduct, not legally binding on anybody but with real moral force. It was drafted up, we got them to agree to it; we got the New Zealanders, very reluctantly, to agree to it and they all shook hands and the Games went on. We succeeded because the draft simply put it that no country would have sports contacts with any other country that systematically practised racial discrimination. Anyway, the Queen then said… this had got back to the Queen and (she) was really worried about this, thinking she might have to go … She was on the Royal Yacht, up the Brisbane River, and the message came through, "Tomorrow morning for breakfast, would you like to join the Queen on the boat?" So Sonny said, "Do you want to come?" and I said, "I'd like to come", and Jeremy Pope said, "I'd like to come". So off we went. Anyway, we were shown down to one of the state rooms; the Queen comes out very casually dressed and says, "Well done". (I went two or three times with Ramphal to the Queen when he was briefing her and that's where I developed a fair understanding of just how much she did know about what was going on in the Commonwealth.) Anyway, she said, "The breakfast is all over there, there's a big breakfast bar, there's stronger drinks there if you're so inclined. I'm going to watch the marathon, because I love watching the marathon" and she said, "Help yourselves, freedom of the ship, stay as long as you like" and with that she switched on the television set and she chatted away and it was extraordinary. So the Queen and Sonny understood each other which, when I first thought about it, I thought more or less impossible; but it wasn't. She understood him and she really liked his company. She joked with him, this man and his lurid, loud sports coat.

SO: His long sideburns?

CL: Those long sideburns. He looked like a snake oil salesman. But it worked. Anyway, that's a side story.

SO: But what you're describing is Ramphal's energy and input, and the Queen's personal charisma and kindness.

CL: Oh yes, she won me over.

SO: Yes, a very effective Head of the Commonwealth.

CL: Yes. Yes, she was. Still is.

SO: I do want to come back to this question about the future Head-ship of the Commonwealth. But on the Zimbabwe issue: were you there when Sonny Ramphal was trying to help sort out the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean land deal, which had been deliberately left out of the Lancaster House plenary sessions?

CL: No.

SO: I know Sonny Ramphal was having extensive discussions in his residence on Hill Street, and also had excellent contacts with the American Ambassador in London, Kingman Brewster.

CL: The World Bank and various other funders were involved. No, I wasn't involved in that. I can't remember exactly when that was.

SO: That would've been about 17/18/19 October 1979, when Ramphal had the big debate behind the scenes at the Lancaster House talks; Nkomo and Mugabe were on the point of breaking up the conference on the land question, which was embedded within the proposed Zimbabwean constitution. There was the big discussion with the international or the multi-lateral donors.

CL: Yes.

SO: And the question of land restitution was wrapped up within a promised developmental fund - but no figure was put on it in late 1979.

CL: And the whole question of land restitution and 'willing to buy or willing to sell' was established. The pity is that process died off after independence and that in turn led directly to the upheavals and land confiscations of 2000 and beyond. A tragedy.

SO: Yes. I know that Sonny had said to them, "Look, accept it. It's about getting power" and that they could modify the constitution afterwards.

CL: Well ho, ho, ho! He didn't quite have in mind what that would lead to…

SO: No, I don't think he had in mind what has happened in Zimbabwe since 1999, at all.

CL: No, that's true. I do remember that now and the discussions that took place in 1998/9 or thereabouts, was about a major programme of land transfers. There was a clear blueprint drawn up involving many international players as well as Britain and the U.S; that was before the invasions and so on, before it broke down.

SO: Yes, it was because there had been a proposal for an accelerated land transfer.

CL: May have been a year or so before that.

SO: I think it was when the John Major Conservative government in Britain was still in power, because there was certainly the idea of a land audit.

CL: There was some British money on the table.

SO: Yes, there certainly was, which is why perhaps Robert Mugabe has reflected that he gets on a lot better with Conservative governments than he does with British Labour governments.

CL: Funny, isn't it? Yes.

SO: So you stayed behind in London and didn't go down for the first electoral monitoring mission on Zimbabwe in January/February 1980?

CL: No.

SO: I know that Sonny accurately called the outcome of that election, telling Carrington that the Zimbabwean people would opt for 'self-government' rather than necessarily 'good government'. Were you involved in the repeat election monitoring exercise in Uganda?

CL: Yes.

SO: To what extent was the Commonwealth encouraged to do this? I know it was obviously invited by the various parties in Uganda to monitor the election, because that's how the Commonwealth responds. But how far did you use the earlier Zimbabwe exercise as a model, going into Uganda?

CL: I think some of the mechanical aspects were used and quite a lot of experience of how to assess a polling station and all that sort of stuff; but Uganda was different.

SO: Very different: there were four major political parties and there was a lot more violence on the ground, yes.

CL: I went up to the West Nile area where there effectively wasn't an election because of the effect of intimidation by the remnants of Amin's military force which had been driven back toward Sudan by the Tanzanians, who invaded in order to ensure Amin was defeated. The Tanzanian Army were encamped at a place called Pakwach on the side of the river. There were bodies in ditches rotting away, they'd been there for weeks the legacy of Amin being driven out to Sudan and the Tanzanians were ruthless.

SO: Going back to the Tanzanian invasion of Uganda in 1979 to overthrow Idi Amin: had Sonny Ramphal received had any prior warning of this? Obviously the Secretary General's Office has a great deal of crossover with International Affairs depending upon what the agenda of the Secretary General is.

CL: Yes. I can't recall anything in particular, but all I can recall is that this came as a bit of a surprise and he rang Nyerere immediately and I think Nyerere said, "We had no

choice. There were people being killed here and some Tanzanians being killed as well." That may or may not be absolutely true.

SO: The Commonwealth Secretariat archives will be opened for that period. The documents from the later period after 1984/85 are still closed.

CL: And the telephone conversations probably won't be noted; Ramphal did a lot on the phone and he'd just get on the phone every time he wanted to deal with a problem. He was regularly in touch with the likes of Nyerere and Kaunda.

SO: Was that his preferred way of working?

CL: Yes, or getting on a plane and going to see people. He enjoyed travelling and did it in some style.

SO: That requires a great deal, not just of personal input, but also physical energy.

CL: Oh yes, he had that in abundance.

SO: How much do you think he was remarkably lucky that he was indeed a politician? He'd been Attorney General, he'd been a successful Foreign Minister, and so he knew how to talk to other politicians?

CL: Yes, he couldn't possibly have done what he did had he not been that, and very prominent in the G-77 circle as a Foreign Minister known as a problem solver. It doesn't work otherwise.

SO: No, indeed.

CL: I think Moni Malhoutra found that out in many ways when he would be deputed to go and sort something out. Politicians simply wouldn't talk to him.

SO: Because he was seen as an Indian bureaucrat, rather than as a politician and somebody who'd been successful in his own right?

CL: Yes.

SO: Mr Laidlaw, were you involved in any way in the negotiations on Belize becoming independent and joining the Commonwealth?

CL: No.

SO: Does that ring any bells?

CL: No. That was after I left.

SO: I've got a note of Belize joining the Commonwealth, after independence, in September 1981.

CL: Oh okay. I was thinking of Mozambique.

SO: So you were part of the Secretariat support team setting up the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Melbourne in 1981. Malcolm

Fraser had had the idea of a Commonwealth Regional Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGRM) in Sydney in 1979 as well.

CL: Yes.

SO: What was Sonny Ramphal's view of that proposal, do you recall?

CL: I don't think he was particularly keen, but he certainly had to humour Malcolm Fraser because Fraser wasn't going to take no for an answer. Interestingly, New Zealanders didn't want it. I don't think, certainly the Prime Minister didn't want it. The Foreign Ministry weren't particularly keen about this, but the Foreign Ministry wasn't in the habit of telling Rob Muldoon what he should or shouldn't do. He didn't really appreciate advice and they were conscious of the fact that if Fraser was for something Muldoon would be instinctively against it. They were chalk and cheese.

SO: Fraser's logic, as he explained to me, was because that small Pacific Island states' Heads wouldn't speak up at the larger Commonwealth meetings.

CL: Yes. True.

SO: But speaking to other Commonwealth Heads, they've said, 'Well, the trouble was that they felt that they'd been relegated to the Second XI in CHOGRM!'

CL: That's right, yes.

SO: So something of a paradox then.

CL: Yes. The Pacific states weren't that anxious to do it. I spent a bit of time being sent out to carry messages from around the Pacific. I only did one grand tour of the Pacific with Ramphal which was a hilarious experience. I don't know what year that was, 1981/82 or something.

SO: Why was it particularly comic?

CL: Well, just they didn't know what to make of it really. The Pacific leaders had had no experience at all of the Caribbean before; there had been virtually no interchange at all.

SO: There really had been none?

CL: Oh, absolutely. No interchanges whatever apart from meeting in the corridors at the UN.

SO: So it was the metaphorical Pacific Ocean 'Tonga Trench' between them?

CL: That's right and here's this rather loudly dressed, garrulous Caribbean Indian. It was fascinating watching their reactions to him. Ratu Mara, who was a personal friend of mine was deeply suspicious at first but he too was won over by Ramphal's dedication to fairer developing country access to western markets.…

SO: And 6' 6" tall, Oxford-educated, a Paramount Chief and very much the patrician!

CL: Yes, very patrician, but a good man, said to me at one stage, "What makes this man tick?" I said, "Look, I don't know. You take him as you find him, but you can count on him" and he did count on him. He actually liked him. They all liked him in the end. We finished up having a lovely time, even in Nauru. But I think that sort of sub-regional thing fizzled out after a while.

SO: Bob Hawke commented that CHOGRM needed the energy and input of a regional head to keep it going and to carry it.

CL: Yes, that's right. Pity he didn't oblige.

SO: And so once Fraser had been replaced by Bob Hawke as Prime Minister?

CL: Well, Hawke wasn't too interested in any of this stuff.

SO: No. At the Melbourne CHOGM meeting in September 1981, Malcolm Fraser was quite keen to push the whole economic developmental side of things.

CL: Yes.

SO: That was very much 'your bag', as it were?

CL: Yes.

SO: I know Fraser had had the idea, together with Michael Manley, of creating a Common Fund for the stabilization of fluctuating commodity prices.

CL: That's right, yes. It was radical stuff in those days.

SO: Did you have any input into that proposal?

CL: Well, that idea had been around for a while and it was a question of how to persuade not just the Americans but those with resources in the developing world. Sonny was interested in some of my contacts with OPEC governments, not that they were that influential. There was talk of the fund being carried by OPEC at one stage. There was serious talk of the Common Fund, done through UNCTAD with contributions from OPEC and OECD countries.

SO: I asked Fraser about this and he refused to be drawn. Now I don't know if it was because this wasn't a success story, so he didn't want to talk about it.

CL: No, he doesn't like talking about failures. I interviewed him on my radio programme a few years ago, not about any of this because largely I'd forgotten most of it, but about what his concept of being a successful Prime Minister was, and he was very defensive. No sense of humour really. So all that was floating around, that's right.

SO: I wanted to encourage him to talk about the Common Fund because of the unlikely political alliance that he formed with Michael Manley: they were two radicals when it came to development, although they were poles apart politically and ideologically. This was a very serious diplomatic initiative to try to moderate fluctuations in developing countries' foreign exchange earnings. It made an awful lot of sense.

CL: It should have worked. It should have been allowed to work. It was killed off by the Americans and British basically, I think. OPEC wasn't particularly forthcoming either.

SO: What, at the World Economic Summit in Cancun, or before that?

CL: Before that I think. What year was Cancun?

SO: 1981.

CL: 1981, yes. Had we written the Brandt Report by then? Do you know when the Brandt Commission Report came out?

SO: I think you had. The Brandt Report (on international development issues) was published in 1980. I've talked to Peter Marshall about his time as DSG (Economic) in the Secretariat. His argument was that part of the international discourse was very much economic liberalization; it was 'the role of the market' and 'getting the prices right internally' (ie Vishnu Persaud's approach which emphasised endogenous, not exogenous factors). The Common Fund was the quintessential international interventionist approach of trying to control world prices …

CL: Yes.

SO: … and commodity fluctuations. Peter Marshall said that at Cancun it was the Mexicans who pushed a particular agenda; and thus destroyed any attempt of effective collaboration between West/South so that these 'late developers' could catch up. He said that possible collaboration was destroyed at Cancun. I just wondered whether the Common Fund discussions were all caught up in that general, shall we say, unravelling of a more 'developmental' interventionist discourse.

CL: Very likely. I can't remember the Cancun stuff. I wasn't there.

SO: Did Sonny send a delegate?

CL: I think he went. I'd be very surprised if he didn't. Vishnu Persaud would certainly have been there.

SO: What are your observations on Melbourne as a successful Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting?

CL: Yes, I think it was, but it showed that the Commonwealth could have a single voice on at least some issues. It was a bit over-policed by the Australians.

SO: To keep out the Aboriginal and Torres Island protestors?

CL: Oh, it was notable for that and, of course, the threat posed by the New Zealand rugby contacts and so on which was high on the agenda; and the media was only interested in that stuff and Fraser was furious. He was absolutely livid. He was at the grand press conferences and somebody would say, "Well, do you agree with Mr Muldoon?" and he'd say, "I'm not going to talk about it". He really did despise Muldoon.

SO: Chris, given your particularly tense relationship with Prime Minister Muldoon, how much were you actively involved in the whole politics of the sports sanctions busting?

CL: Quite a lot. I spent a fair bit of my time on apartheid and all of that. Jeremy Pope and I ran that; and it was a kind of tag game with Muldoon. Most of the senior New Zealand officials were very sympathetic and were feeding us stuff via the grapevine.

SO: So this was Prime Minister Muldoon's determination that the All Blacks would not be confined, nor constrained in any way to play whatever sporting fixture they so chose?

CL: Yes, he didn't believe in any kind of constraint. The majority in this country at that time - two to one - believed in this and they supported him on this. So Muldoon wasn't going to move one inch and after 1981 it became a complete debacle here, when there was a rugby tour by the Springboks.

SO: Of course there was, it was the Gleneagles Agreement sanctions busting tour, wasn't it?

CL: That's right, yes. So there was a huge eruption; it was a major event in New Zealand's history because there was virtual warfare in the streets.

SO: There were riots? There was civil unrest?

CL: Yes, I saw it in 1969 when the Springboks came to Britain. I was playing for Oxford and we felt at that stage, going back a long way, we felt that at this stage that we had undertaken to play them and then all of a sudden people started saying, "You can't do this". And so we dug our heels in. The match had to be shifted to Twickenham and there were large numbers of policemen and large numbers of student demonstrators.

SO: Yes, I remember quite how high tempers ran.

CL: Yes, it was heavy stuff and as a footie player myself, I had been in two camps here.

SO: What position did you play?

CL: Half back. I went to South Africa in 1970 with the All Blacks and that was difficult and awkward because it was the first time we had a multi-racial team. We thought, 'They want to do this. They don't want to have this team, but they've agreed that they're going to have to have it.' So this is a breakthrough, so this is one step in the process of unlocking the door to non-racial sport which in turn would unlock the door to non-racialism in society more largely. It was that, that radicalized me in terms of South Africa.

SO: So were all your players able to play?

CL: Oh yes.

SO: I just wondered if the South Africans had insisted, as they had done in 1968 with Basil D'Oliveira - that he couldn't be part of the squad of the visiting English cricket team. I remember the English Cricket Board dropped him.

CL: That's right, and that was the pivotal movement at which they realized they weren't going to get any more contact. We said, "We're not coming unless we have a multi-racial team". So this is the background of all of that; and then, of course, a decade later when things had got so much more fraught, Mr Muldoon still decides to thumb his nose at the Commonwealth. So it was a huge stand off, and Mrs Thatcher was sympathetic to him on that. So the unity that might have existed with Malcolm Fraser there and Canada and Australia being pretty good, sympathetic and progressive on these things, Britain and New Zealand standing off and just being curmudgeonly and I think that persisted when Sonny stood down.

SO: He stood down in 1989; his last Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting was in Kuala Lumpur.

CL: That's right, yes.

SO: Yes. So this was roiling on in the background of the Melbourne CHOGM, undermining what was seen actually at Melbourne a celebration of Zimbabwe's success. You're painting a picture of Fraser trying to push through economics and a developmental agenda, but there were a lot of 'noises off'.

CL: Discordant notes.

SO: What was your recollection of Sonny's stance and the Secretariat during the Falklands War with Mrs Thatcher? Do you have any memory of that?

CL: No, not really.

SO: How about Grenada and the American invasion? This was in the immediate period before the New Delhi meeting of November of 1983. Do you remember?

CL: I do remember that because I was with him in Grenada just beforehand. He and Maurice Bishop had a really good relationship. Bishop really respected him and took advice from him and was clearly on the road to liberalization and normalization. Sonny was appalled by the American invasion and got on the phone to the US Assistant Secretary of State, Chester Crocker, somebody like that.

SO: Crocker was in charge of the Africa desk at State Department. I was just wondering who was responsible in the State Department for Caribbean/Latin America.

CL: Can't remember his equivalent, and it didn't do things any good. I remember, he sent me to the United States, to Washington when he was making a bid for the UN Secretary Generalship. What year was this?

SO: That would have been probably 1983/84.

CL: Something like that, yes. To talk to the Americans and I get to Washington and I made arrangements to see the Assistant Secretary of State concerned. I'm shown through and I get to talk to a couple of officials and they say, "Well, he's busy but we're hoping that he'll be able to see you." I began to think at this point, 'This isn't going terribly well,' because I was just trying to outline Ramphal's international

credentials as a problem solver. Anyway, I sat around in the State Department drinking coffee. It was a freezing cold day and I went for a walk around the block. I came back and eventually they said, “Look, it just isn’t possible”. I rang a guy I knew in the State Department and said, “Look, what’s going on?” Afterwards I was home and he said, “Look, let me just quote what I heard somebody say, between you and me”; and the Assistant Secretary had said to whoever the Secretary of State was (George Shultz) when they were talking about candidates. He said, “This guy, Ramphal: I wouldn’t support him if he was the last guy on the earth.” They regarded him as a socialist he having represented a far left regime in Guyana and a trouble maker over South Africa and in the international economic sphere.

I relayed that back to him and I rang him and told him what they’d said and said, “I wouldn’t have expected anything less”. So that was the end of his UN ambitions.

SO: Some have blamed the Thatcher government and Peter Carrington for opposing Ramphal’s candidacy.

CL: They did too. And they, along with the Americans effectively killed it.

SO: Carrington is reputed to have said that he would personally swim the Atlantic Ocean to vote against Ramphal’s candidacy as UN SG.

CL: That’s right, yeah. Carrington didn’t like the way Sonny was able to command attention and cleverly undermine British authority on so many issues.

SO: 1983 obviously was a big bust up at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting about Grenada with the tension between those Caribbean states who did support the American action, and those who didn’t. Do you recall any detail on how Ramphal handled this, or how the Retreat in Goa was handled?

CL: Big bust up, yeah. Alas, I can’t recall detail on these questions.

SO: How much, do you think, the Secretariat and the Secretary General made a difference in international affairs, as the Commonwealth as a diplomatic actor during your time there?

CL: Hugely. The Commonwealth, led by the SG, was out there in the middle of what was happening, but the North/South dialogue was tailor-made for the Commonwealth. It was an area where the Commonwealth fitted perfectly. It was a microcosm of the world community and we used to say, “We can’t negotiate for the world, but we can open the world to negotiate”. We all knew this and we knew that there were huge opportunities. That’s what attracted me. The Brandt Report came out and it really did seize the imagination. It was read, it was analysed, it was worked over, and it was accepted in many capitals as being a workable blueprint.

SO: But did it have a lasting impact?

CL: In a way it energized the intellectual debate which it would’ve come sooner or later, but it gave an enormous confidence and strength that people like Joe Stiglitz and others who read it and thought about it and got fired up. It fired up lots and lots of influential people.

SO: Just thinking about the Commonwealth achieving its grand strategic aims of supporting development – social justice, you could say – and working for Rhodesian/Zimbabwean independence and the end of apartheid in South Africa – racial justice. How far would you say the Commonwealth's grand strategy now is good governance?

CL: Yes, and that's its strongest suit now. And I think in a way, they've agonized over this. There have been special High Level Groups looking at it: 'What is it that we can do that hasn't been done already?' My very strong feeling is that this is where a lot of the peripheral stuff, like Education Ministers' meeting, should really fall away and the Commonwealth should concentrate on what it can do better than anybody else. That's providing advice, help, sustenance to good governance.

SO: Rather than trying to be a mini UN?

CL: Yes.

SO: It has been described as a 'Small States organization' because the majority of its members are small states.

CL: Very good, yes. We set that up. We had a Small States conference, I think, in whatever year it was.

SO: You mean the Security of Small States report which came out of the New Delhi meeting?

CL: Yes, that's right, yes.

SO: **How and why do you think the Commonwealth has survived to date? And what does this then say for the Commonwealth going forward?**

CL: In a way, the world has leapfrogged it and internationalism is more organic now. There is so much more to the sinews of internationalism.

SO: You mean, civil society organisations/NGO activity which have emerged as actors in the international community and international diplomacy?

CL: All that stuff.

SO: They certainly now have a far greater presence rather than the inter-governmental Commonwealth of your day.

CL: Yes and there's too much inter-governmental stuff now, I think. Yes, you've got the G-20 and the G-8. There are these interminable meetings; a lot of Prime Ministers and small countries say, "Well, I could basically just travel around the world going to meetings". Of course, now you have a whole lot more institutional regulation in terms of the ICC and the World Trade Organisation; so the Commonwealth can't really add to that. It was a pioneering organisation and that pioneering time is over. I think inequality is the big issue for any country now and the inequality gap which is huge, the biggest threat to international order and international security that exists. It's there in plain, in front of us.

SO: Because it breeds violence as a political language and it breeds the politics of envy?

So how important has the Queen been? You've pointed to her extraordinary persona, her character, her good humour, her knowledge, her support. What does that then suggest for the Monarch as the future Head of the Commonwealth?

CL: I think that will endure. Yes, she's held it together; there's no doubt about that because there's enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that the respect for the Queen that so many fairly radical leaders who took their country in to independence and have run it since then. That respect is what has enabled the Commonwealth to stick together. The respect for the Queen almost compelled them to stay put and not to try to upset the apple cart. But the Queen must be worried about what the Commonwealth can do in future. She would be well aware of what all this means. An old friend of mine, a Professor of History, in Auckland, Keith Sinclair who wrote the history of New Zealand said a few years ago. He's dead now, I'm afraid. He said, "The Commonwealth is a bit like the Cheshire Cat, quietly disappearing and leaving behind nothing but a pleasant smile". It's a ruthless observation, but I'm afraid it's true.

SO: Chris, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]