VOICE FILE NAME: COHP Rashleigh Jackson

Key:
SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
RJ: Mr Rashleigh Jackson (Respondent)

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Rashleigh Jackson in Demerara, Guyana, on Tuesday, 27th January, 2015. Sir, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to take part in this oral history of the Commonwealth project. I wonder if you could begin by commenting, please, on what you thought of the Commonwealth as an idea and as an association at the beginning of the 1960s, when you joined the new Ministry of External Affairs for the government of British Guiana.

RJ: Well, in 1960, we were still a colony and therefore the Commonwealth was, for us, still the British Commonwealth. It was a collection of countries having a relationship with Britain, in one form or another, most of them being ex-colonies. But at a different level, the philosophical level, one saw it not as an institution but as a collectivity that represented certain commonalities: commonality of language, commonality of political system and commonality of certain basic values. There were some practical things in the sense that, in Guiana's case, the currencies were tied [and] markets were available through the Commonwealth Preference System. So, it had both a practical and a philosophical element.

SO: Guyana became independent in May 1966. The Commonwealth itself changed with the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965, the previous year, and the creation of the new post of Secretary General. At what point would you say that you started to alter this view of a 'British' Commonwealth?

RJ: Well, I think that as we approached independence, we began to think about it. The fact that India became a republic and remained in the Commonwealth was of great significance. In fact, you find that in the first foreign policy debate in our legislative assembly in 1967, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham had made reference to that particular point – that the Commonwealth was no longer a 'British' Commonwealth. Therefore, for people who had been British

– who had been colonies of Britain and, in Guyana's case, part of its political evolution, involving quite contentious relations with Britain – the fact that it was no longer the 'British' Commonwealth was significant.

SO: By 1968 you had become Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and that department, of course, evolved into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by 1972. Was that particular office still very firmly within the Office of the Prime Minister in 1968? In other words, was it the Office of the Prime Minister that directed, shaped and framed Guyanese foreign policy?

RJ: Well, the Department of External Affairs started before independence under Dr Cheddi Jagan. It was a Department, with foreign affairs associated with [but] not assigned to the government. In 1964, when Burnham became Premier, he appointed a minister without portfolio, Deroop Maraj, and then we went into separate quarters. So, there was a physical separation from out of the Office of the Prime Minister into our own Department of External Affairs, with a 'minister with portfolio' not having the responsibility for foreign affairs but reporting to Burnham. Then, in 1966, the Department was still there, but foreign affairs was now the responsibility of the Prime Minister. Then, when Sonny Ramphal came, he was made Minister of State. Then Ramphal was Attorney General and Minister of State. Later, in 1972, he became Minister of Foreign Affairs and, I think, Minister of Legal Affairs as well.

SO: Yes. During that evolution of the structure of Guyana's foreign policy making, what was Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's attitude to the value of the Commonwealth in terms of day-to-day diplomacy? Do you recall?

RJ: I think that he had respect for and a great interest in continuing the relationship with the Commonwealth, because there was a motion in Parliament for us to remain a member of the Commonwealth.

SO: Do you mean when Guyana became a Co-operative Republic in 1970?

RJ: No, when we became independent: we had to take a formal decision to remain in the Commonwealth. And in fact this leads to a very interesting point. Because of the nature of domestic politics at the time, we had the opposition of Dr Jagan. He abstained on the motion that we should remain in the Commonwealth. He had a personal view. First of all, Dr Jagan, in 1966-1967, was more left-wing than Burnham. He had harboured the feeling that he had been put out of office by the British and in his mind he was gerrymandered out of office in 1964.

SO: Well, he was, Sir! Britain changed the constitution and brought in proportional representation precisely to achieve that goal!

RJ: Well, I have a view of that which doesn't accord with the popular view. Shall I tell you?

SO: Please do.

RJ: After Burnham lost in the 1961 elections, he raised [a question] in his party circles after looking at the seats and votes he'd obtained. This showed that if you had proportional representation, the representation of his party would have been much greater and the representation of Jagan's party would have been less. So, the party took a decision then, at the Congress of 1962, to advocate proportional representation as a means for reforming the electoral system. And in fact, they organised their own constituent assembly. Later on, he got the support of the United Force party for proportional representation and proposed to Jagan that there should be a referendum in Guyana about proportional representation. Jagan refused. So, what I'm saying is that there's a tendency – and I have a personal view and feeling about this – to portray Burnham as being willing to work along with the Western powers in order to defeat Jagan. [He was] not really a stooge, or a …

SO: No, but there was a degree of collaboration?

RJ: Yes. In my experience with Burnham, I found that he had such a great sense of his own capacity that he believed that he could always achieve his objectives: "This is what I want, and if you can help me to get it, then I'll go along with you!" Which was very different from Jagan. Jagan was loyal to the Soviet Union. In fact, in 1991 at his Party Congress he said, "We have been wrong to have followed Soviet foreign policy, even when we disagreed with it." That was a very significant statement to make. I am trying to underline the difference between the two.

So, when they went to London for the constitutional conference, Jagan was the first person to sign the letter asking Duncan Sandys to decide on the system, because he was of the view that since the British were not themselves wedded to proportional representation – in relation to their country – so they wouldn't apply it to Guyana.

SO: [*Laughter*] Okay. So, as a political calculation, that proved something of a miscalculation?

RJ: In fact he was criticised by his own party for agreeing and for signing the letter.

SO: So, what you've underlined here is Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's self-belief, his surety of purpose and his ability to manoeuvre, to use the political space?

RJ: Yes, or marry the interests of his country with the interests of Burnham, not to the detriment of the interests of Guyana.

SO: Sir, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, did you witness Prime Minister Forbes Burnham using the Commonwealth precisely because it helped to provide this space in the international system, to further Guyana's foreign policy?

RJ: I can't say that. My mind is really hazy about attitudes to the Commonwealth in the period leading up to independence. I think he was more driven by the materialistic side. He would see the Commonwealth being useful in terms of being a market for sugar – we had a preferential system arrangement. And I

suppose, to some extent, on the philosophical side, our values. He himself had trained as a lawyer in Britain, and it's the place in which he got some of his political groundings.

SO: I believe he studied at the University of London. You went to the University of Leicester, did you not?

RJ: Yes. England was where he got a lot of his political groundings. It was a venue for people who were advocating an end to colonial rule. A number of people with whom he became very close later on were also students at the time: like Errol Barrow and Seretse Khama. So, the Commonwealth provided that opportunity, that facility, whereby political development could take place.

SO: And also you started to establish those interpersonal relationships which proved of such value in international diplomacy

In the early 1970s, it would appear to me – as a historian looking at President Burnham's decision to go for the Co-operative Republic and the shift to the left in terms of his domestic politics – that there was a greater emphasis in foreign policy on the Non-Aligned Movement.

RJ: Well, I want to say something about that. I think that you have to look at Burnham in the pre-independence period to see what he had said in general terms. What was his vision for Guyana? Because I believe foreign policy has domestic determinants, and you'd find that he had this great sense of independence – I can find you a number of quotes on this. He had this great feeling about two things: one is that you can always learn. In relation to foreign policy – he was clear about this, too – that [because] we're a new nation, and although we have ideas that we bring of where we want to go, we're entering into an arena in which we have to learn. And the second thing is that we are learning as independent people. I say this because he saw decolonisation as not just the end of a colonial relationship. He called it 'a decolonisation of attitudes', and what I call 'the decolonisation of the mind' – so that unless your mind is decolonised, you can't really pursue independence.

SO: Yes, I understand totally what you mean.

RJ: You understand?

SO: Yes, I do.

RJ: So, in this respect, when he was going to deal with the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement, [they are] going to see Guyana as an independent country pursuing its own interests. But recognising that other people have interests, therefore you can't always pursue your interests, ignoring other people's interests. Now, where [does] that take you in relation to CARICOM and the Non-Aligned Movement? As regards CARICOM, and as regards the Caribbean, I think that was a bedrock belief of his that we are in this neighbourhood. We have a lot of commonalities which took place even before independence. In fact – I said the same in a speech when I spoke in Brazil – if you look at the pre-independence period, there was so much contact between the Caribbean countries, through what are called 'hucksters'

in the Southern Caribbean and 'higglers' in Jamaica; [and] among professional groups, like teachers. My own father, who was a headmaster, was President of the Caribbean Union of Teachers. You had it among the trade unions, led by the Caribbean Labour Congress. So, the point that I'm making is that within the Caribbean, before independence, you had a welter of connections and therefore for Burnham, Caribbean unity was almost second to Guyana's independence.

SO: So, this then was an integral part of his attitude to the region: the value of regionalism, in addition to being a proud nationalist?

RJ: Yes, yes. And non-alignment. I'm going to use this phrase here: he had a phrase, "With countries of another language, we have a community of aspirations" – having most of us being ex- colonies, French, Dutch, whatever it is. It's a "community of aspirations." So, you have the Caribbean which is like this shaped circle, and then they had the Non-Aligned Movement.

SO: As you say, that larger entity. Like the G77, it's a bigger pond.

RJ: Yes. In that context, then, the relationships were in concentric circles. I don't know how to put it, but do you understand?

SO: Yes, I do. It's like a series of interlocking circles which have utility in certain places, for certain norms. They're not mutually exclusive in any way, but enable a degree of hybridity.

RJ: Yes.

SO: On the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s, I am aware of the decision to hold a Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers conference and that you hosted the first such conference here in Georgetown in 1972, which also saw the establishment of a Secretariat. It was then that the candidacy of Sonny Ramphal as the next Secretary General of the Commonwealth started to gather momentum.

RJ: He deals with that very fully in his book. [Shridath Ramphal, *Glimpses of a Global Life* (Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2014)]

SO: Yes, he does! I just wondered if you'd like to comment from your standpoint, because by that point you were Guyana's representative at the UN.

RJ: I was also a small part of this lobbying group. At the UN, I was at that time President of the UN Council for Namibia, and there was a meeting in Mogadishu, Somalia, where the OAU was meeting. So, I was going to be there in my capacity as President of the UN Council for Namibia. The decision was taken that John Carter – who was then our High Commissioner in London, and who Sonny says played a principal part in this – should also be in Mogadishu in order to promote the candidacy. It was an interesting time! I'd arrived there first. Now, hotel accommodation was difficult to find because of all these African countries attending, but I was there first and, coming from the UN, I got preference. When John came, he couldn't negotiate hotel space!

SO: [*Laughter*] That would be very frustrating!

RJ: What I was able to do was to get the hotel to move a second bed into my room. So, we were able – in close proximity! – to discuss how we would go about promoting Sonny's candidacy. I mean, it's an interesting situation.

SO: You make it sound a little like a cell for conspirators! [*Laughter*]

RJ: To go back to the main point, later on, I think, all the Guyanese missions were involved in at least ascertaining the view of countries on Sonny's candidacy. So, John and I were able to sound out people. It was a great thing for Guyana.

SO: Oh, yes. It was a very big thing for the next Secretary General of the Commonwealth to be from Guyana.

RJ: I was also in New York when he was trying for the Secretary Generalship. He mentions it in the book. In 1971…I don't know if he mentions 1971 in the book?

SO: No, but he did certainly covers his bid for the UN in the 1980s.

So, was the Commonwealth of any particular use in Guyana's dealings with Venezuela, over Venezuela's claim to the Essequibo?

RJ: Oh, yes. In terms of the claim by Venezuela, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the first line of defence. We had to use diplomacy in order to advance our case and – if I may say so – I think we did a damn good job! So, we had CARICOM first, and after CARICOM, the Non-Alignment Movement. We chose areas where Venezuela was not in force. Then, the first time we raised it with the Commonwealth that I can remember was at the Melbourne Conference.

SO: Yes, the 1981 Melbourne CHOGM.

RJ: Actually, it was a late decision. The Australians sent their envoy around the Commonwealth to help them to plan the meeting. At that time, we had not worked out a strategy and told them we hadn't. But now they had made us think about it. So, we had internal discussions and when we got to Melbourne, we got to see people. Forbes Burnham saw Mrs Gandhi. I did my own work and then we began to work with officials, with foreign ministers, and that's how we got the statement on the communiqué.

So, the Commonwealth has always been one of the collectivities on our radar. It was always seen as a collectivity that would give us support in dealing with Venezuela. And then, don't forget Britain itself was a signatory to the Geneva agreement.

SO: Yes, of 1966. [The '[Agreement to resolve the controversy over the frontier between Venezuela and British Guiana. Signed at Geneva, 17 February 1966]']

RJ: Yes. So, they should be our immediate ally, even though the enthusiasm may be muted because they have interests too. So, the Commonwealth has been very helpful and useful in our dealings. How should I put it? I don't want to say in our "fight", but in pursuing settlement of the controversy we have with Venezuela.

SO: Venezuela's claim poses an existential challenge to Guyana, given the size of the claim to the Essequibo.

RJ: Oh, yes. And from what I can gather now, we are suffering from their economic hostility. Anyway, that's another issue.

SO: But it's a long-burning issue, dating back to the late 19th century?

RJ: 1899. They had an arbitration treaty in 1897. It's a very curious history. It just shows that, as I say, the only thing that's constant in international relations is change. Because when Venezuela was making a lot of noises against Britain's colonial presence, they went to the United States for help. The United States had already pressured Britain into signing the Treaty of Arbitration in 1897. The judges named by Venezuela were American judges, and they had America counsel. And now look at Venezuela and the United States!

SO: Well, indeed! So, was the Commonwealth – as a supportive association expressing solidarity with Guyanese national interest – equally useful in your relations with Suriname?

RJ: Not to the same extent, but useful nonetheless. Certainly, as I understand it, we got a lot of help from the British in terms of documents – access to their archives and so on.

SO: In the context of the dispute over the New River Triangle?

RJ: No, in the context of demarcation of the maritime boundary. As regards Venezuela, I don't know if you'd call it a Commonwealth connection or a British connection, but we've also had eminent British lawyers – Sir Francis Vallat and, later on, Sir Ian Brownlie, who was on the ICJ – [who] were engaged by us to give us opinions.

SO: So, you didn't seek legal opinion via the Commonwealth Secretariat?

RJ: No, no.

SO: In fact, you went for British judicial opinion?

RJ: Yes.

SO: I know that the Legal Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat in the 1970s and also in the 1980s was enormously useful in providing constitutional legal advice on maritime boundaries. They also provided legal expertise for President Seretse Khama in Botswana's negotiations over mineral royalties with Anglo American.

RJ: I don't know.

SO: I just wondered if there was a comparable supportive arrangement.

Sir, when Sonny Ramphal was elected Secretary General at the Kingston Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, you were President of the UN Council for Namibia and Guyana also had the non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

RJ: That's right.

SO: This seems to be a real point of Guyana 'riding high' in terms of its diplomatic exposure and standing.

RJ: It was not by accident! [*Laughter*]

SO: I'm sure it was not by accident!

RJ: It's very interesting. In 1979, I think it was, when Cuba was running for the non-permanent seat on the Security Council, we were not a candidate, but we were getting more votes than Cuba! [*Laughter*]

SO: People felt that Guyana should be the Latin American and Caribbean representative? [*Laughter*]

RJ: A lot of those were against Cuba. We had to formally notify the General Assembly that we were not a candidate.

SO: Oh, really? "We do not have our hat in the ring!" [*Laughter*]

RJ: We had decided that we would put our hat in the ring in 1981, I think. It was when the Protocol of Port of Spain was due to end.

SO: Yes, because you were elected to the UN Security Council in 1982/83.

RJ: What I'm saying is [that] our prime concern was [that] Venezuela [should] not get a seat on the Security Council again. [*Laughter*].

SO: There was clearly a 'Stop Cuba' aspect to those manoeuvrings!

What of the view of the Commonwealth from the UN?

RJ: First of all, the way the UN is structured is they have regional groups, like Latin America, Asia, Western Europe – what they call 'WEOG', the Western European and Other Group – and Eastern Europe. You have the Arab group. There's no common group that cuts across developed and developing countries and regions, except in the Arab group, in the Middle East. Later on, you got the OIC – the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Now, in that context, the Commonwealth in my recollection only played a role on an *ad hoc* basis around issues. For instance, they used the UN as a meeting place for carrying out Commonwealth assignments. Sonny had a Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa, and they would meet as deemed appropriate during the session when all the ministers were out there. They would then

arrange for such a meeting. When the Commonwealth had a committee on Belize, the Chairman was Minister Henry Forde of Barbados and they would meet. Within my recollection – and this is after I became Minister of Foreign Affairs, and this was during Anyaoku's time – in the preparation for the UNCED conference in 1992. When the Commonwealth was very concerned about the issues of small states, a group of Commonwealth small states countries was organised for the UNCED and they asked me to chair the meetings.

SO: Was that particularly because of the report you wrote in 1982 whilst at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? [*Safeguarding the Security of Small States* (Information Division, Guyana, 1982)] I just wondered whether your chairmanship of this group came out of your long involvement in security of small states issues.

RJ: No, that came out of Grenada. The Commonwealth then was given a mandate to advance the interests of Commonwealth small states. In addition to environment and development, the concept was growing, but it had not yet gelled. It was something that had been launched by the Caribbean countries – particularly by Barbados. There was a group of small island developing countries within the smaller states. So, I think Anyaoku felt the Commonwealth had a mandate in the context of UNCED to bring the small states of the Commonwealth together. They could promote their common interests at UNCED. I can't remember a Commonwealth meeting of the Latin American group, of the Arab group of the Non-Aligned group meets.

SO: So, it didn't have a permanent standing presence; it was more of an ad hoc arrangement convened on specific issues for collective action?

RJ: Yes. On issues that the Commonwealth had decided [would] need common action, like the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa convened at Vancouver. I sat on that committee.

SO: You did, indeed, with Joe Clark as your chairman.

RJ: Yes. He was very kind to me, after I resigned as Minister.

SO: Joe Clark gave me an excellent interview for this project.

Please, Sir, if I could just ask you to go back a little bit in the chronology. Do you recall identifying the emergence of this ad hoc Commonwealth committee arrangement at the UN in the 1970s? Or was this a later phenomenon of the 1980s, do you think?

RJ: 1970s, around that area. I remember there was a Canadian foreign minister named Don Jamieson.

SO: Once Sonny Ramphal became Commonwealth Secretary General in 1975, he developed even more of an international profile. Did you maintain particular contacts with him?

RJ: Oh, yes. We were always in contact. He was an activist and an interventionist! He was a committed internationalist, and he had very strong

and deep beliefs about what the international community should do. To my mind, he saw the Commonwealth as playing a role in bringing order into the international system and community. To my mind, that explains his work in such a wide field – in humanitarian law, development and security issues… He had a phenomenal personal commitment.

SO: Indeed. As well as energy, drive and charisma. Did you feel – or did you observe – any complicating factor in his determined internationalism in that he had worked so closely with President Forbes Burnham, who became something of a controversial figure in international relations as the 1970s progressed? I wondered if that affected how Sir Sonny was perceived by other international leaders and diplomats.

RJ: It's difficult for me to answer. I think I could venture an answer in terms of the domestic situation, which meant that the forces [that] were opposed to Forbes Burnham attached some of their hostility to Ramphal.

SO: Yes, I can understand the domestic environment spill-over effect. But I wondered if there was any sense of Ramphal's former close political links with Burnham being a complicating factor for him in international relations?

RJ: Let me be honest: I can't see it. I can't see.

SO: Sir, you became Foreign Minister of Guyana in 1978. You came back from New York and took over the political portfolio rather than the civil service portfolio.

RJ: Unexpectedly. Some of my closest colleagues in Guyana had inveigled against what I then considered my interests! They went to Burnham and I think they told him that they were not comfortable with my predecessor, and [that] they would recommend me. I'd already served five years in New York. After I had served three, I had told the President that I thought three years was a good term. I said, "If you want me back home after this, this is alright and you will find me not hostile to it. But I would like to do it for one more year because my last two years have been taken up with Security Council work. So, I really have not been able to attend as much as I would like to in some other UN work which, again, is in Guyana's interests." He said, "Okay." But then that was in 1977. When I came back in 1978, I said, "Well, I'm back." And then he dropped this bombshell on me. [*Laughter*]

SO: How long did you take to decide?

RJ: A couple of days. My family were still in New York. I had come down for the Heads of Mission conference. The irony was [that] my predecessor had left to go to Brussels for a meeting with the EEC, and he said, "Look, I want you to stay. I want to talk to you when I come back; there are some things I want to say." I said, "Okay," so I delayed my departure, and then Burnham called me!

SO: When you became Foreign Minister, how far was Guyana's policy against the white minority states of Rhodesia and South Africa a key foreign policy strategy? I am aware that in 1979 you attended the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Havana which helped persuade the

Zimbabwean liberation leaders Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe that they should attend the London conference following the Lusaka Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Do you have any recollections of that particular meeting in Havana?

RJ: I remember [that]. at the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers meeting in Maputo, January-February 1979, I had a *long* discussion with Robert Mugabe. It was the first time that we were really getting into Mugabe's head. I think they had already got into Nkomo's head by previous contacts, and my own report was about Mugabe – in terms of his fighting and so on. He was very forthright. I'm trying to think of the sequence. I have no recollection of the meeting in Havana. But I know that we were always working for unity among the liberation movements. We kept on good terms on both sides. My predecessor, Frederick Wills, also had relations with James Chikerema. So, I think that the contacts we had were with Nkomo and Chikerema, and after that, Mugabe.

SO: But you were promoting the unity of the Patriotic Front?

RJ: Yes.

SO: Sir, the reason I asked this question is because, as you know, in his book, Sir Sonny places great emphasis on the role of the Commonwealth in promoting Zimbabwe's final transition to independence.

RJ: Obviously. Correct, yes.

SO: I'm just trying to add a little more background detail. Sir Sonny obviously emphasises the importance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Lusaka, and yet it was by no means certain that the heads of the Zimbabwean liberation movements would agree to the all-party discussions in London. I know that the NAM meeting at Havana was very important in terms of persuading Nkomo and Mugabe to attend the Lancaster House talks.

RJ: Well, Burnham was always backing Sonny, but telling him how *he* felt. So, I wasn't privy to all these discussions. I would only know the results: that, "Okay, things are going to move ahead."

SO: So, the other big issues for the Commonwealth – from Guyana's perspective – were Namibia and Grenada.

RJ: I think the Commonwealth played a large role – I should say, the Commonwealth at the UN. The Commonwealth always provided the chairman of the Council for Namibia, the Committee against Apartheid, and the Committee of 24. I remember in the Kingston meeting in 1975, the section on Southern Africa was drafted by Salim Salim, Paul Lusaka and myself as three heads of the three committees of the UN. Salim was chair of the Committee of 24 [and] Lusaka was chair of the Committee against Apartheid, I believe. I was chair of the UN Council on Namibia. What I'm saying is that Commonwealth offered the roles and provided the personnel for committees on these critical issues. Nigeria held the post of Chairman of the UN Special

Committee Against Apartheid for a long time. First, you had Edwin Ogebe Ogbu [1972-75] and then you had Leslie Harriman [1976-79]. [And later, B Akporode Clark, 1979-81; Alhaji Yusuff Maitama-Sule, 1981-83; JN Garba, 1984-90; and Ibrahim A Gambari, 1990-94]

SO: You are making the point that there was a network of key Commonwealth diplomats in leading committee positions at the UNO.

RJ: Yes.

SO: Was the Commonwealth then an important facilitator on the Namibia issue?

RJ: Oh, yes. Well, after they had the agreement, the Commonwealth became helpful with things like the constitution.

SO: I am aware that the Commonwealth had provided training for Namibians in exile as well solidarity with Sam Nujoma and SWAPO. There was also diplomatic engagement from individual countries.

RJ: Yes, from Commonwealth countries: ourselves, Jamaica... Theo-Ben Gurirab travelled on a Guyanese diplomatic passport. One year, Rupiah Banda and I brought a delegation of the Council for Namibia to Guyana… I think that's in the book. And Burnham had proposed that the UN should pay for the SWAPO office. So, the Commonwealth has been helpful to these countries.

SO: Guyana's support for the anti-apartheid movement also included providing a staging post for Cuban troops going into Angola, as part of Havana's push to drive back South Africa and Pretoria's own support for UNITA in Angola. Was that controversial in the Commonwealth context?

RJ: Not as far as I know. The Americans didn't like it. Henry Kissinger told my predecessor, "You are giving the Soviet Union outreach into Africa."

SO: Really?

RJ: Yes. [*Laughter*]

SO: I'm sure I can imagine what your Foreign Minister said to that!

RJ: Kissinger said, "Now that I've dealt with Moynihan, how do I deal with you?" [*Laughter*] In the dulcet tones of his German English, [he said], "I understand that you have a formidable intellect."

SO: I don't think Kissinger would have been too happy by the response he got from your foreign minister then!

Sir, please could I ask you about Grenada and the Commonwealth? You've written about this at length in your memoirs. I'm not asking you to recapitulate this, but I would like to know your views about the Commonwealth dimension of that crisis from 1979 up to 1983.

RJ: Sonny's book is very good on this. Do you mean the Commonwealth as a collectivity, as an association?

SO: Yes, I do.

RJ: Well, the New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon was very fed up with the discussion in New Delhi about Grenada – as Lee Kuan Yew was about refugees in Africa, until Nyerere shut him up and told him how many refugees *he* was dealing with, and what was the population of Singapore! *[Laughter*]

SO: This was the time of the Vietnamese 'boat people'…

RJ: Yes, and I remember Thatcher said, "And they're leaving in awfully leaky boats!"

On the Commonwealth and Grenada, I know [that] Maurice Bishop was in Lusaka in 1979. I remember because I led the Guyana delegation to Lusaka. Douglas… I cannot be sure of his name. [He] led the Dominican delegation and St Lucia was led by their Foreign Minister, and we all were in Lusaka together. I held a lunch with them and we used to meet as the Caribbean 'non-heads' in Lusaka. But now and again, Maurice would come and join us because Barbados and Jamaica were not very friendly to Maurice. Barbados was unfriendly. Manley was friendly, but there had been a difference between them in the early stages. I think that Maurice saw value in the Commonwealth but he was also suspicious.

SO: Well, he was certainly suspicious that Britain would not protect Grenada against what they believed to be America's plan to invade the island.

RJ: Yeah.

SO: I know that Sir Sonny received a letter from Prime Minister Bishop in March 1983 – approximately six months before 'Operation Urgent Fury' – saying, in essence, "We believe the Americans are going to invade. I'm very concerned about this." The head of Political Affairs, Hugh Craft, passed this message to the Prime Minister's Office. The FCO told Bishop that, "These ideas are fanciful."

RJ: Yeah, the Americans held some exercises off the coast of Puerto Rico with names similar to Grenada and the Grenadines. But I think Grenada saw its connections more with Guyana then, and [with] Cuba, definitely. So, on the Commonwealth side, it would be Guyana, Trinidad… [but] certainly not those OECS countries. Belize had a particular self-interest, you know.

I'll tell you the story. When they were having the CARICOM meeting in Trinidad, it was meant to begin at night. I was sent over in the day to do a *recce* of the situation. One of the people I spoke to was George Price, who was my good friend. I went to see him. He used to call me 'Mr Rashleigh'. He said, "Ah, Mr Rashleigh. I'm glad you've come!" He said, "You know, I was coming down on the plane. Tom Adams and Edward Seaga took me off the plane in Barbados and told me how there might be an invasion of Grenada." He was very worried and he said, "I have the British planes – the Harrier jump-jets – and some British troops, and I told them, 'I don't want to be part of

that. I can't do it.'" He asked me to convey his position to PM George Chambers. Antigua had their Foreign Minister, Lester Bird: he wasn't too happy with what was going on, nor was the Foreign Minister of Barbados, Louis Tull.

SO: I know that Tom Adams faced quite a fight in his cabinet on this issue. Dame Billie Miller, who was in his Cabinet at the time, told me of the tensions and the debate over what was the best thing to be done.

RJ: Well, you see, there was tension between Tom Adams and Maurice Bishop beforehand.

SO: I didn't know that.

RJ: Yes. Tom Adams said something to him once – I was there – and Bishop made reference to the fact that Tom Adams' father had been to a meeting in Paris where he praised British colonialism.

SO: Oh, dear.

RJ: [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] Yes, I can imagine that went down like a proverbial lead brick.

RJ: So, I think Maurice's solidarities, his links – 'solidarity' is the word you're looking for – [his] solidarity, first of all, with Cuba, and on developmental work, not necessarily from the Commonwealth, but from countries like Middle Eastern countries and so on. And he was afraid, as you pointed out… Britain… He couldn't….

SO: As I said, Britain passed a message back saying, "We think your concerns about invasion are fanciful." This is in the spring of 1983.

RJ: I see.

SO: Yes. So, did both President Burnham and yourself go to the New Delhi Commonwealth government meeting?

RJ: Yeah. Burnham never said a word on the issue.

SO: Did he not?

RJ: A number of things happened, I think. He left the running to Chambers as chairman of CARICOM. He wanted to avoid a situation in which he would disagree with Jamaica and St Lucia in that forum. He said not a word on the issue.

SO: Had he conferred with Sir Sonny beforehand about keeping quiet?

RJ: Maybe. I don't know.

SO: I'm just thinking… So, Sir Sonny was faced with a serious diplomatic challenge. He had to manoeuvre through this minefield.

RJ: Yes, I also remember that Geoffrey Howe asked to see me before the meeting, and the one thing that he raised was Grenada. I told him, "We did what we had to do." And I got the impression that he was bringing a message from the Americans.

SO: Really? That's interesting that you recall him giving that impression. Whether he was or not is something else, but to convey that impression is an interesting thing.

RJ: Yes, because at the end of it, I said to myself, "I wonder why he wanted to see me?"

SO: Well, Howe felt particularly raw because he had made a statement in the British House of Commons where he led his audience to believe that there was going to be no such invasion. Then, when the news came through very shortly afterwards, it looked as if the Americans – and this is the height of the Cold War – had run roughshod over their key ally in NATO by neither forewarning nor consulting London. Grenada was a Commonwealth country and the Queen was head of state. So, it was taken as indicating Washington's view of the insignificance of the 'special relationship', as far as Britain was concerned. Tempers really did run very high. Howe was also considered to have deliberately misled the House of Commons, which is a very big deal in British politics.

RJ: Yeah, yeah. Well, I've seen the transcript of conversations between Reagan and Thatcher.

SO: Do you know, the fascinating thing is, Sir, that when you read those transcripts in the Thatcher archive, it gives the impression, "Goodness. That sounds very cosy." Yet if you listen to the voice recording, it gives a very different impression.

RJ: I see.

SO: In the voice recording, Ronald Reagan is talking quite quickly, and begins by saying, "I think I need to throw my hat through the door before I come in." And you can hear Mrs Thatcher say, in rather a sour tone, "Oh! I don't know about that." The speed and tone of Reagan's voice, and the fact that he is the only one speaking for quite a while, underlines that he knew he had to soothe some very ruffled feathers, indeed. That does not come across in the transcripts. But at the end of their conversation, Thatcher conveys the strong impression of, "Well, this is the Cold War", and she took her political friendships very seriously. So, Britain had to say, "Right, we move on."

RJ: Very interesting. We live and learn!

SO: I tell my students, "Facts are facts, but perception is reality." Surely it's perception – and the information that you have – that shapes diplomatic activity?

RJ: Well, yes. Daniel Patrick Moynihan had a great quotation about that: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] That's a great line!

Sir, I don't want to go on about Grenada, as you've written about this at length in your memoirs and in your chapter in the Kenneth Hall volume. ['Intervention and Non-Intervention: CARICOM in Action' in Kenneth Hall (ed.) *Intervention, Border and Maritime Issues in CARICOM* (Ian Randle Publishers, 2000)] But how long, in your view, did it take for the dust to settle in the region?

RJ: In the region?

SO: Yes, and also in the Commonwealth?

RJ: [*Long pause*] It is as if time solved the problem, you know? Then, all differences came home. I remember, for instance, Burnham and John Compton were good friends at one time… But then, I had a better relationship, towards the end, with Compton than Burnham. He told Compton once, he said, "But you do not talk to me nowadays!" [*Laughter*]

SO: Sir, in your view, how important were personal likes and dislikes in Guyanese political relationships and diplomacy?

RJ: It's more so in the Caribbean. We are small societies, where everyone knows everybody else – but don't take that too literally. They have connections. Compton, for instance, used to come here and bring his family to Guyana in the colonial days. They would come over by coast boat. So, I'm very intrigued by the kind of connections that used to take place in colonial times, without any official prompting or anything. The guy who was a judge from Dominica, who led a Commonwealth election mission to Kenya, he was saying that before independence, as a professional, he could work in any Caribbean territory without the need for a work permit, whereas after independence, he had to get a work permit.

SO: Your friend Neville Linton made reference to these existing colonial contacts and networks: the acculturation and socialisation of education and patterns of movement. Neville described these as operating within 'colonial silos', so the British colonial world had different views of the French colonial world in the Caribbean, and the Dutch element, and the American element. Neville's description was, "We absorbed the attitude of the coloniser towards the other colonisers. So, we didn't like the French!" [*Laughter*] That was how he put it. Are you suggesting there was more of a communality of the Caribbean world, whereas Neville feels it was more fragmented?

RJ: No, I'm not. My thinking is about the Anglo-Caribbean: that's what I'm talking about. But also, if you look at Guyana and Suriname, one characteristic that surprises me is that if you come from America – or from any Latin American country – you'll say that those two countries drive on the wrong side of the road! Well, that's a legacy of when Britain was in Suriname. Now, to my mind,

Suriname is Dutch. But we still have that characteristic there. So, Guyana and Suriname had that same characteristic. Guyana and Suriname are called the 'continental Caribbean'.

SO: Yes, you're not Latin American countries. Sir, when President Forbes Burnham died in 1985 and President Desmond Hoyte took office, was there an appreciable shift in Guyana's attitude, involvement or engagement in a Commonwealth context?

RJ: No, not at all. Hoyte just carried on Burnham's policy. The Iwokrama project was developed by Hoyte – that was an idea that was incubated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SO: Indeed. So, was this your brainchild?

RJ: Yes, when I was running the Ministry. I will say my officials and I incubated it. The idea came from a kind of mishmash. For me, the idea started with the G7 meeting in Houston, when George HW Bush was President, and there they had taken the decision that they should work for an international convention on tropical forests. I said to myself, "Who the hell *are* these people? They've cut down their forests and now they want to come and tell me about my forests?" It sounded almost something like that. And then I began to think about it more, and then I decided to start talking to other people from Forestry and people from other parts of the government. From that emerged this idea of what could happen. In Guyana, because of the nature of our forests, you can't clear fell them and we have over the years developed a system whereby, with certain species, you can only cut so much out of so many hectares. So, we were already on a sustainable basis and so that's there already. So, we said, "Okay, come and see what we're doing, but have it under the Commonwealth auspices." We persuaded Hoyte to raise it at the Kuala Lumpur meeting. Then, when Anyaoku became the Secretary General, the idea was pursued. So, that's a prime example of how the Commonwealth could help.

Another way the Commonwealth can help is when you have development issues: through the Commonwealth Foundation [or] the CFTC. I remember, for instance, when our sugar industry was really going good, and Kenya wanted technicians. Some technicians went from Guyana to Kenya. Those are unsung benefits of the Commonwealth.

SO: Without a doubt, Sir. Both the Technical Assistance Group, TAG, and the CFTC were designed to facilitate South-South collaboration through the most appropriate experts.

RJ: Yeah. And also North-South.

SO: Well, indeed. Well, West-South.

RJ: Yes, yeah. And you had this on the non-governmental side; for example, you had Zena Daysh from CHEC, the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council. All of them were Commonwealth officers and they made a contribution towards UNCED. The Commonwealth Foundation links the Commonwealth NGOs. You have the Commonwealth Youth Programme. Don't forget the

Commonwealth Development Corporation; very important. And then there are the other arms, like the lawyers, the attorney generals…

SO: The Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association… All of those, as you say, are Commonwealth-accredited civil society actors.

RJ: Yes, that's right.

SO: Yes. It seems to me that the Commonwealth was something of a pilot fish in supporting these civil society actors. So, when international relations really began to open up after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, this era saw the real flowering of their activities. Yet these international civil society actors were already well established within the Commonwealth context.

RJ: Now we have 'uncivil society', like Al Qaeda. [*Laughter*]

SO: Yes, if you talk about 'non-state actors'!

RJ: Non-state actors, eh? [*Laughter*]

SO: Oh, yes. Some Commonwealth governments now seem to interpret 'civil society' as shorthand for organisations or associations that promote human rights and LGBT rights, and can be particular suspicious of their activities. So, the description 'civil society actors' has become somewhat distorted in some governments' minds.

RJ: One of the guys at the Human Rights Association gave me a beautiful phrase. He wrote a beautiful phrase about how, "One of the functions of civil society is to mobilize indignation." That's beautiful.

SO: Yes, it is. I wrote down the phrase that you yourself used: "There are several perceptions of the words 'civil society'. The term is used to refer to non-governmental or non-profit organisations and unions [which demonstrate] a concern with the way that politics, economics, military, and social power is exercised, rather than the pursuit of power itself."

RJ: Yes. Civil society is the mediating power between the mega structures of the state and of the marketplace.

SO: Sir, please, could I just go back to the issue of South Africa...

RJ: Sure.

SO: ...because this was surely an extraordinary combination of the state and the marketplace with the anti-apartheid struggle. Please, could you reflect on your view of the contribution of the Commonwealth towards the ending of apartheid in South Africa?

RJ: Oh, I think it's huge. It was tremendous. Let me mark some signposts. You have the Gleneagles Agreement of 1977. You have the Commonwealth

Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, CCFMSA, and you have the Eminent Persons Group with Malcolm Fraser and General Obasanjo and all that flowed from that. To that, you have to add the actions of individual Commonwealth countries acting within the context – not solely, but acting also within the context – of those signposts and all the implementation part of it as contribution of the Commonwealth. On the other side of the coin, look at the way in which the people who were subject to apartheid have rated the actions of the Commonwealth: Mandela, Tambo, all of them have spoken in great praise of the Commonwealth. Look at Mozambique. It's a reflection of the actions of the Commonwealth in terms of what was done in Southern Africa and involving Mozambique. Mozambique also has a high regard for the Commonwealth.

SO: Of course, Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995, after the country's first all-party elections and South Africa's formal re-admission.

RJ: Yes, [they] joined the Commonwealth.

SO: Those who used to work at the Commonwealth Secretariat have commented to me that the contribution of the Commonwealth to the final transition to black majority rule seems to have been forgotten by the present ANC government. It appears that the ANC's political need for legitimacy emphasises the domestic 'armed struggle' and downplays – or completely ignores – the contribution of the wider international community, of which the Commonwealth was a key part. So, the Commonwealth's contribution seems to have been completely eclipsed.

RJ: No, I don't think we should be saying that. Look, for anything like that, the main task was for the people who were affected, and what others do is to help those people. That's the way I see it: the Commonwealth was *of assistance*. There's no secret in that. Right now, the ANC aren't expressing their gratitude, but they have done in the past.

SO: True. Perhaps then it's a lament that an aging crop of ANC leaders and the current set of politicians have forgotten that assistance. I think that's the essence.

RJ: Yes, absolutely…

SO: Yes. But as you say, you can't be eternally grateful.

RJ: Unless there is an occasion to be reminded of it. For instance, two of Mugabe's secretaries were trained in Guyana. When they trained here, we had a system where, when the original ones come for training, they had to do a period of attachment to a house in the area, and one of them was attached to my house. And then she eventually became a Secretary of the High Commissioner of London. Once, when we had a Foreign Ministers meeting in Harare, I went to see Mugabe. He was meeting the heads of delegation, so Mugabe said, "Just a minute; don't go yet." And he said something to an aide and then a girl came out. It was one of the girls who had been trained in Guyana!

SO: Oh. [*Laughter*] That's very nice.

RJ: Yes, so what I'm saying is that Mugabe hadn't forgotten.

SO: No.

RJ: So, unless the occasion arises…

SO: Sir, in connection with Robert Mugabe, once he became the leader of Zimbabwe after April 1980, one of the issues which is very striking is that the Commonwealth, having provided remarkable assistance to Zimbabwean independence, was then extraordinarily quiet – as was Britain also extraordinary quiet - on the killings in Matabeleland between 1982-85. In his memoirs, Sir Sonny attaches enormous importance to the Lusaka meeting, his diplomacy behind the scenes at Lancaster House and the Commonwealth election observation mission and monitoring force, all of which he presents as a triumph of Commonwealth diplomacy. So, this Commonwealth silence is really very loud. Please, could you comment on that?

RJ: I think that is regrettable. I think two things I would say is that the Commonwealth didn't do enough, I believe, to pressure particularly the United States in terms of what were its commitments, and also, they haven't been hard enough on Mugabe for what he's turned out to be.

SO: Well, the Commonwealth tried to be tough on Mugabe in 2002 – in its election observation mission report in 2002. PJ Patterson was head of the group that was trying to encourage Zimbabwe to remedy deficiencies in its political sphere and in human rights, and to be supportive while he did this. Yet the troika of Obasanjo, Mbeki and John Howard, along with Patterson, were unable to stop Robert Mugabe from pulling out of the Commonwealth.

RJ: But you're kind of dealing with one leg of the problem, you know?

SO: Do you recall knowing about the killings in Matabeleland after independence?

RJ: Oh yes, oh yes. I mean, wasn't it on the news all of the time?

SO: Yes, Sir, it was in the news. I heard about it when I was working in Kenya for the British Council. I also had friends in Harare who were saying, "This is what is happening."

RJ: It wasn't on the news?

SO: No, it was in the news as well. It was covered in the *New York Times*. But why didn't governments make public comment? Surely this would be a place for the Commonwealth Secretary General to speak out?

RJ: In fact, I remember one year when I was in New York – this is in the twenty-first century – I had then a very good friend from Algeria, a journalist, who

used to work in the FLN, the Algerian liberation movement of Ahmed Ben Bella. And Ben Bella had sent him to give Sam Nujoma his first AK-47. He also knew Jonas Savimbi. He became a very good friend of Andy Young. And Andy Young had worked a lot, while he was at the UN, on the Zimbabwe issue. And he, myself and Andy Young met and said, "Why don't we get in contact with some people to deal with the Zimbabwean situation?" But from both sides – that is, honouring the commitments that were made and getting Mugabe to stop these actions. But you are right. I felt very strongly.

SO: But, Sir, what happened to this idea of some kind of collective, discreet pressure?

RJ: We were three non-entities, you know? Andy Young was a private citizen by then. He had a consultant group.

SO: Carter had fired Andrew Young from his position as US Ambassador to the UNO, hadn't he?

RJ: Yes.

SO: For being a little too outspoken?

RJ: [*Laughter*] Yes!

SO: So, President Carter 'let him go'.

RJ: Yes. But you're absolutely right. Of course, by that time, I'd become convinced that we ought to do something. When we were doing something at the UN, the Cuban Foreign Minister – who was a very good friend of mine and had very similar views – sent one of his colleagues to me with a message: "The Minister asked me to come and see you. He understands that you are planning to do so and so." He says, "He asked me to tell you that many a commitment made at the delegates' lounge is not honoured in the committee room."

SO: Indeed, yes. And this was a classic example of it.

RJ: At the UN, I think there are too many pledges.

SO: Yes, and not enough follow through.

RJ: Anyway, I'm digressing…

SO: Sir, I am conscious that I have made you talk for a long time. As a general question, to start to wrap up this discussion, what is your remembered view of the value of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings? You made reference earlier to the 'non-heads' getting together…

RJ: [*Laughter*]

SO: ...at such things. But you couldn't go to the retreats, could you?

RJ: No, we did not go to the retreats. No, we couldn't. And on Southern Africa, not even real heads would go to that retreat discussion. I remember some would go. Ratu Mara said, "They don't want us!"

To answer your question, I think one of its values is its informality, which allows for a freer exchange across the board. Not just, "Now I give the floor to Mr So-and-So."

SO: The classic UN style. Yes, indeed.

RJ: As I was saying to you, with Lee Kuan Yew and Nyerere, when Lee Kuan Yew said, "Why are we discussing refugees in Africa?" Lee didn't understand the problem. I mean, we could talk like that.

SO: Yes.

RJ: So, I think that's a great thing. Also this idea that they would have the retreat, where some of them would be away from the glare of the public and then they'd discuss what they wouldn't discuss at the formal conference. I think the friendships develop.

I remember for the same Lusaka conference, when I was there, Nyerere's time to speak came. He began by saying, "This issue is so important that I wrote it down, because a careful word is better than a colourful one." Now, you can't say that at the UN.

SO: No, indeed. I know Lee Kuan Yew described these Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings as "seminars for world leaders".

RJ: [*Laughter*]

SO: High-powered, intellectual engagement, combined with a determined degree of spontaneity and also the private diplomacy of the retreat, facilitated by the Secretary General as well.

RJ: Yeah. And there are all those bilateral meetings, too. And bilateral meetings take place outside of the UN and in other places. Well, the Commonwealth has a spirit of its own. There is a spirit of, like, "I know you!"

SO: But did that start to break down during your engagement with the Commonwealth, just because it was getting bigger? In the 1970s, there was an expansion in membership with the independence of the Pacific countries and the growing number of small island member states.

RJ: That's true. When I become Guyana's Representative at the UN, I found a certain kind of formality about it – a 'formal informality' – whereas when we meet in the Commonwealth it is really informal.

SO: So, there was no unspoken code of behaviour [in the Commonwealth] that you might have at the United Nations? It's a different engagement?

RJ: Yeah.

SO: Please, could you comment on the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers meetings and the Commonwealth Senior Officials meetings, with their networks of support?

RJ: I saw that question on your list. You see, I don't have any recollections of any significance of those meetings – I really don't. I remember I went to one which was special in 1970. The Commonwealth had arranged a meeting of Permanent Secretaries in Singapore. Or are you talking about things that take place when the High Commissioners are in London?

SO: Well, the network of Commonwealth High Commissioners is yet another dimension, with their regular 'get-togethers' in post taking place in any Commonwealth country.

RJ: Are you talking about meetings of senior officials before a Commonwealth Prime Ministers meeting?

SO: Yes, I am. Sir, I am talking about all of these types of meetings, as well as the pattern of senior officials who accompany their leaders to meetings. Senior officials don't like their heads going 'off-piste'! They don't like them going away without their briefs. Officials can have common cause to get to know each other.

RJ: I remember Lord Carrington saying to me, "I have to leave, because I don't know what the lady [Margaret Thatcher] will say." [*Laughter*] I really can't remember anything more about that.

SO: Please, if I could ask the last question about the Commonwealth and leadership. It seems that, under the Guyanese Secretary General, the Commonwealth became particularly Secretary General-centric. By his own energy, drive and vision, Sonny Ramphal worked to ensure that the Commonwealth was 'helping the world to negotiate', although it could not negotiate for the world.

RJ: That's a good way of putting it. Well, I don't have much recollection of the role of Arnold Smith, in the sense that I was involved in the conference in Ottawa and the one in Jamaica. Now, one thing that I remembered about the one in Jamaica was the international economic question.

SO: Connected to the New International Economic Order?

RJ: Yes. It was connected to those principles, because President Forbes Burnham was a great speaker and there was a very good debate. Arnold Smith, the outgoing Secretary General, struck me as a civil servant who'd taken over the job, whereas Ramphal struck me as a 'non-political politician'.

SO: Yes, that's a very good way of putting it: a 'non-political politician'.

RJ: [*Laughter*] And Anyaoku was somewhere in between the two. Had he served before as a Foreign Minister?

SO: Yes, briefly – as Nigeria's Foreign Minister between 1983 and 1984, before his government was overthrown in a coup.

RJ: Yeah, but he was also a civil servant.

SO: Yes, he was. He had been at the Secretariat since 1966.

RJ: Combined, in their own respective ways, these Secretary Generals helped the Commonwealth [make] a mark. Sonny was the one that gave the Commonwealth the biggest mark on the international stage. Anyaoku kept on that tradition – maybe not to the same level but with different leadership. You have to be kind to Arnold Smith as well, because he is the one who started the whole thing.

SO: He set up the Secretariat as an international organisation. Sonny inherited that bureaucracy, as well as the policy space of the SG position and the latitude that came with that, yes.

RJ: Yeah. Sonny seriously is like a balloon: if you blow it up, it will expand! [*Laughter*]

SO: It's using the space – using the 'soft power' policy space!

RJ: [*Laughter*].

SO: But as you say, he's a man of his time. This was the Cold War; this was when international institutions at top level are hidebound or complicated by that ideological standoff. So, something like the Commonwealth provided a forum for a different sort of engagement and exchange.

RJ: That's right.

SO: Sir Sonny told me, in his interview with me, that his participation in commissions to debate the big issues of the day was highly deliberate, as debate in other high-level organisations was hidebound by the East/West divide.

RJ: People are shaped by their time and it would be very difficult to replicate Ramphal. The time won't allow it. Even if Ramphal were to go back there again, he'd be a different person. His output would be different.

SO: It would be. There are different challenges and needs in the international community.

RJ: Yes, and different opportunities. I say, "All hail to the Commonwealth!" They had these three Secretaries General [who all] wanted to give an effort – wanted to inspire it and keep it going.

SO: The one permanent attribute of the modern Commonwealth has been the Queen, as its head. What was your perception of the value the Queen brought by her particular style to the headship of the Commonwealth?

RJ: Here I have to try not to remember what Sonny said… [*Laughter*] I think the Monarch functions as an emblem of overall stability and continuity, and of unity in diversity. I see her value and her contribution in highly symbolic and functional terms. What she does, too, [is that] she provides the opportunity for a renewal of respect for order and dignity and decency. Not everybody benefits from that, but that's my view.

SO: But that doesn't imply a determination to reinforce the status quo. The Commonwealth has changed dramatically since 1949 when it was formerly founded, and since 1952 when she became head.

RJ: Yes, but not because of the monarch but because of certain circumstances outside the role. And also, in that welter of changes… [*Pause*] She has a presence, you know? I think it was in Lusaka that I met her, and I remember being impressed by... In some sense, the kind of head that you like.

SO: "The kind of head that you like"? Please could you put your finger on quite why?

RJ: Well, think of a headless institution… [*Laughter*] Like a chicken with its head cut off, running all over the place…[*Laughter*] You have a feeling…I don't know how to put it, really.

SO: A feeling that you're being taken seriously?

RJ: Yes.

SO: With courtesy and attention?

RJ: Yes, yes.

SO: I'm putting words in your mouth here, which I shouldn't be!

RJ: No, it's alright; they're good words!

SO: I think they're okay. [*Laughter*]

RJ: [*Laughter*] As I say, she's a good representative. If I had a monarch, she would be a good monarch. But then, forget her, forget the monarchy, and say she's the head of this association and the association needs a head of that kind. She's a worthy head of association.

SO: She's a world leader and she has media value.

RJ: Well, there she's also known as a normal person.

SO: She also has a great spirit of fun, a good sense of humour.

RJ: She's not Margaret. [*Laughter*]

SO: What was your perception of Mrs Thatcher's contribution or attitude to the Commonwealth? I'm talking about your perception. I read her papers and I can think, "My goodness: what industry, what engagement!

She clearly valued it!" But I'm just wondering how it came across at the time?

RJ: I should tell you, I first met Mrs Thatcher before she was Prime Minister, when she was Leader of the Opposition. Ivor Richard had brought her across – Ivor Richard was the UK Ambassador in New York. She came across to New York and he organised a dinner and invited a number of us. There were twelve of us – ambassadors – whom I think, in his view, represented a kind of cross section of views that Mrs Thatcher should be exposed to, Ivor being of the Labour party. And when we had the dinner and she left, I got the impression he was not satisfied with the questions we'd asked. It hadn't fitted his framework. But I found her a person of strong views – almost unshakable, you know?

SO: She certainly had a rather didactic style, although she could be persuaded.

RJ: Well, I'm telling you my impression of that time. She was a 'tough cookie'. [*Laughter*] When I saw her at the Commonwealth meetings, the word that came to my mind was often 'intransigent'. She wouldn't budge without a bloody fight.

I think there were some principles on which one could support her. I remember [that], at the time of the Falklands War, I persuaded President Burnham to call her and give her support on the grounds that Guyana could not support the settlement of the Falklands issue, except if it was done peacefully because of Venezuela. We had a self-interest here.

SO: You could not support anything that undermined sovereignty and non-intervention as a cardinal tenet of international law?

RJ: That's right; that's right. And he says to me, "Why are you always coming up with these ideas?" Anyway, he phoned her. Afterwards, he was telling us, she said, "Oh, Forbes, that's so nice of you." [*Laughter*] So, I think there was a part of her that was reachable. You only had to know how to do it. It's only what *she* wants. [*Laughter*]

SO: One of the other powerful ladies in the Commonwealth whom you would have known was, of course, Indira Gandhi.

RJ: Oh, yes, Indira – Mrs Gandhi.

SO: Please, could you comment on your perception of Mrs Gandhi's view of the Commonwealth or of the value she attached to it?

RJ: No, I can't say anything from direct knowledge – only what I've heard. Certainly, Mrs Gandhi and I shared something in common.

SO: What was this?

RJ: When Sonny Ramphal indicated his intention to run as Secretary General, I'd written to Sonny saying to him that I thought he would make a more valuable contribution to international affairs if he remained Foreign Minister of Guyana.

I understand Mrs Gandhi had said, about the same time, "You will be more valuable to the Non Aligned Movement." I think Sonny did make a speech in which he made reference to both of those things.

SO: In his memoirs, he makes reference to Mrs Gandhi saying, "If you are going to take it, you have to shake it up." She wondered why he was taking a job in this 'backwater' association.

RJ: I see, yes. As I said, I can't give any direct knowledge of Mrs Gandhi's views. She attended the conferences, she made contributions, and they were valuable contributions. I remember, for instance, in Melbourne, when she had organised a meeting on the side for the Commonwealth countries that were going to the Cancun meeting. Someone was speaking – I can't remember who – and then she said to Burnham: "Forbes, you haven't said anything yet." And then he spoke and she said, "Oh, but that all sounds so beautiful!" I can't remember all he said.

So, I have a very good impression of Mrs Gandhi. I remember when we were in Zimbabwe for Zimbabwe's independence. She asked to meet Burnham – I have this in my book – with the specific indication that she was only going to have her foreign minister [with her], suggesting that she wanted to have a 'heart to heart' talk. What I found remarkable was the way they both let their hair down and spoke of their problems of government.

SO: Yes, indeed. Because the domestic situation for Mrs Gandhi at the beginning of the 1980s was becoming much more tense, following the period of Emergency rule she had instigated in the late 1970s [1975-77].

RJ: That's right, yes.

SO: I know some have argued that it was problematic for Sir Sonny, as Secretary General, that the largest democracy in the Commonwealth had brought in a state of emergency; all was not smooth in the Commonwealth house.

RJ: Well, contradictions are never absent from life.

SO: Well, indeed, and if you have a larger association, you're going to have more contradictions. Sir, please, could I ask, having stepped down as Foreign Minister of Guyana in 1990 – this is now 25 years ago –…

RJ: A long time.

SO: …what is your view of the value and the future of the Commonwealth now? You've written extensively on international diplomacy and the requirements of an effective diplomatic actor.

RJ: Well, there are several things happening. I think you have to look at what is happening within member countries of the Commonwealth and ask yourself whether you are getting new generations of leaders and what their values are. What are their objectives? What are their prime objectives? What are their world views, and do those world views have a role for the Commonwealth? Do they see the circumstances involving a role for the Commonwealth?

Speaking from the perspective of the Caribbean, I think now we have a generation of leaders in the Caribbean who don't have either the regional view or the world view of the generation of Eric Williams, Michael Manley, Burnham and Errol Barrow. Therefore, what will be possible for CARICOM is not predictable now.

Now, if the succeeding generation can be imbued with a sense of regionalism that is different from the older generation, then I think I can say something will carry on. It is the same with the Commonwealth. You talk about the biggest democracy, India. What is Modi's world view? I don't know the answer to the questions; I'm just asking. Having regard to the philosophy of his party and the nature of Indian society, how it's evolving… I don't know. So, I will answer your question with a question mark! Who would have imagined that you'd have had a Barack Obama? I think the present crop of Americans don't appreciate Barack Obama and don't understand what he's done.

SO: No. I'm totally in agreement with you.

RJ: I was saying on Sunday that if you think of what Barack Obama has done – say, on climate change, on sexual orientation, or what he is trying to do with fairness in terms of trade – he is very progressive. And even his approach to fundamentalism, his approach to the use of military power... I think I am kinder to Barack Obama than a lot of Americans!

SO: Sir, I agree with you.

RJ: You see, I have another line. The great powers are never constrained by the contradictions of their history.

SO: Yes, but smaller powers are.

RJ: They have to [be]. They're made to!

SO: The smaller powers are constrained by the contradictions of their history. Well, they carry their history much more immediately with them.

RJ: Yes. I was talking about John McCain and his colleagues and the way they trumpet American 'exceptionalism'. What do they mean by it? In a world where you're talking about globalisation, do they really understand how people feel for what they have done to them before?

SO: 'No', is the answer.

RJ: The answer is no! In terms of the Commonwealth, I would say that decolonisation applies not only to the colonised, but also to the coloniser. The coloniser has concepts of ruler-ship.

SO: So, just to connect that back to the Commonwealth, which started off as the 'British' Commonwealth, how far do you feel that Britain has gone through that decolonisation of the mind?

RJ: Well, they dropped the 'British' from the Commonwealth!

SO: Indeed, they did. But you can still have that hangover.

RJ: The vestiges are still there but some have gone. The fact of life in the international community now means that… You know, when you deal with the Arab world… Immediately after the OPEC price hike, when they wanted to get their money, they began to invest in Harrods and buy rare art works. Attitudes begin to change. But those old cronies in the United States, they don't see that change taking place. They tell Barack Obama, "We still have the strongest military in the world," which is true, but it can't be used as before.

SO: Exactly. Fernand Braudel remarked that America was extraordinary in that it achieved its independence before it had undergone its own internal decolonisation. And now, as you say, in terms of the rest of the world, it still has to unpack that 'decolonisation of the mind'.

RJ: Yes, that's a good truth. I mean, you get a Sarah Palin… It's difficult in most other countries to get a Palin to be nominated!

SO: Thank goodness! [*Laughter*]

RJ: Yes, I mean, that's why it's all so crazy. I was watching Fox News last night, and they were saying that it is time she gets a handle on her ideology. [*Laughter*] McCain picked her!

SO: You just have to shake your head in sheer disbelief.

RJ: But he doesn't take any responsibility for it.

SO: The Commonwealth as a 'non-ideological organisation', then? [*Laughter*] Sir, I think I should stop there, but thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]