SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
CM: Caroline McMaster (Respondent)

SO: This is Sue Onslow interviewing Carolyn McMaster at the Lord Elgin Hotel in Ottawa on Monday, 25th March 2013. Carolyn, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please, how did you become interested in Commonwealth affairs in the first place? I know you were at the London School of Economics doing a Masters in International Relations in the 1970s and I wondered if this had any input in your later professional career?

CM: It did, but I would like to go back further and say something about the Canadian educational system. When I was growing up we used to be taught about the Commonwealth. Unfortunately that is not the case anymore. People are not taught about Canadian history either, but I think as a child going through school in the 1950s and 1960s you became very aware of the Commonwealth and exciting things happened in the Commonwealth too, with India and then the various African countries that started to become independent. My parents were always very interested in international affairs and we talked about it a lot at the dinner table so that sparked it. My interest in doing a thesis on Malawi at the LSE was prompted in a large part by the fact that my brother was in Malawi as a CUSO volunteer. I had gone out there to visit him and realised what a fascinating situation Malawi was in the mid to late 1960s. So that was probably my introduction to the Commonwealth. I continued that interest because it seemed such an unlikely grouping of countries. There was the colonial heritage but the fact that all those ex-colonies wanted to be part of this grouping as I was going through university was remarkable - and still it seems to me quite remarkable.

SO: How far do you feel for French Canada and English Canada, the Commonwealth in fact enables a plurality of identity for Canadians?

CM: It does and certainly in the times that I was a civil servant there was a very careful balance in Canada between support for the Commonwealth and support for the Francophonie; and this in a sense reinforced our identity as a bilingual bicultural country. Those of us who worked on the Commonwealth quite often felt that the Commonwealth got short shrift while the Francophonie got a little too much attention. But I think for a long time that was an important pillar of Canada's foreign policy; that we balanced those two sides of our cultural heritage. There used to be a joke in Foreign Affairs and CIDA that if there was any international organisation going we would join it! The lists of acronyms that had Canadian membership would go on for pages. In a sense

it was true, we were very outward looking and very internationalist for a long time. That was something, if you were at all interested in international affairs, you were brought up with. That was part of the Canadian being.

SO: Did your brother, as a Canadian 'Peace Corps' volunteer, …

CM: CUSO was actually before Peace Corps.

SO: It was indeed. Did he go into the Canadian foreign service as well after CUSO?

CM: He went into CIDA as well and then he went in the Foreign Service *de facto* because he became our ambassador in the Ivory Coast; but most of his career was CIDA, whereas I switched over half way through.

SO: So you joined CIDA in 1972 to work as a policy analyst at the policy branch and then in 1977 you joined the 'Anglophonie' or, as you said, the Commonwealth Africa branch.

CM: Yes.

SO: It already seems rather an archaic description - as a planning officer for Malawi. What had been your thesis topic at the LSE?

CM: Malawi's foreign policy.

SO: And it looked at both foreign policy and development?

CM: Yes. I was hired to be the planning officer for Malawi given that. Now there was a wrinkle in that I published my thesis and it had been banned - and so was I. So they were taking a bit of a risk hiring me to be the planning officer for Malawi.

SO: Who had banned it?

CM: The government of Malawi. It was on the banned book list, right under "More Joy of Sex". Unfortunately it did not increase my book sales.

SO: What had been your source base for doing your thesis research?

CM: Well, this is why I didn't do it as a doctorate, but did it as an M.Phil thesis because there were limited primary source bases. I did go out and stay with my brother and sister in law because my brother went back as the CUSO director to Malawi. I spent two months with them and talked to a lot of people informally, shall we say. I talked to a lot of former colonial officers who were back in the UK but much of my research unfortunately had to be secondary because you just didn't do research on Malawi.

SO: No, as you say, there would have been limited access to archival material.

CM: Yes, Dr Banda did not approve. In fact my book never got unbanned until he died. I got, however, forgiven – this was actually a bit funny.

SO: It sounds like papal dispensation!

CM: Well, it was because I went on a trip with Nick Hare who was then the director of the whole Southern and Eastern Africa programme and this was to see if I would be allowed back in. When we flew into Blantyre I was afraid that I might be on the next plane out. It turned out that Dick Matenge, who had been the Permanent Secretary of Education when my brother was the CUSO field director, was a very good friend of his. Dick Matenge was then a minister and he told Dr Banda it had been youthful folly on my part. He said this with a smile because he wanted to get me back in, so I was allowed in.

SO: What was your view of CIDA's role in Malawi when you started to become involved on the ground as a policy planning officer, rather than from an academic analytical view?

CM: I thought we were doing really interesting work and I thought Malawi, despite its relations with South Africa, was developing a very sensible economic development policy based on smallholder agriculture which the World Bank was supporting and a number of other donors were supporting. They had some very large projects as well which we were involved with – building the railway from Blantyre across into Zambia which was a necessity; but there was a lot of focus on smallholder agriculture, and smallholder living conditions, improving training, etc. I was quite proud of that programme.

SO: What was your particular view of Malawi's foreign policy? I appreciate this was not something that you could have publically articulated at this particular point - but Malawi was unusual, in its diplomatic relations with Rhodesia, and of course also South Africa.

CM: I think I first went out to Malawi being very purist and became much more pragmatic. Malawi, as did a number of countries, had so many migrant workers in South Africa, that they had a real interest in making sure those migrant workers had some sort of channel of communication between the two governments; and that was something that was certainly bolstered by the relationship between Malawi and South Africa in a way that didn't happen with some of the other countries that sent migrant workers. It was a very pragmatic policy. I think Malawi benefited from it and realistically I don't think that they were hurt by the fact that the countries around them disapproved so much about it.

SO: So there weren't unofficial sanctions which were levied against Malawi because of its highly distasteful foreign policy pragmatism?

CM: I think a lot of the other countries recognised that, given Malawi's level of poverty, they had remarkably few options. They couldn't take principled stands, unlike Zambia. Zambia, even though it squandered it, had a very productive resource base and they had more to fall back on.

SO: The Kaunda government also 'fell back' of course on Chinese support for the TanZam railway; but Malawi, as you say, didn't have the luxury of those choices, given its particular political economy at independence and lack of links with the outside area.

CM: Yes.

SO: So you were based in Malawi from 1977 as first country officer?

CM: Yes, I wasn't actually there, but I was going twice a year.

SO: Then in 1979 you were transferred to the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland programme as planning officer?

CM: Yes.

SO: You were then posted to Pretoria as your regional base?

CM: In 1980, yes.

SO: That was a particularly interesting time, wasn't it?

CM: Oh, it was a fascinating time.

SO: Because that was the time of the transition of Zimbabwe to independence in April of 1980. So what are your recollections of Botswana's particular position, caught on 'the racial frontline', shall we say, in Southern Africa?

CM: They were doing their best to counter apartheid to the extent possible without laying themselves open to overt attacks by South Africa which, as they had seen in the case of Zimbabwe, South Africa was quite prepared to do. South Africa had no scruples about what it did in terms of, not exactly invasions, but incursions and infiltrations and judicious assassinations.

SO: That was all part of the South African government's specific counter insurgency programme – as you say, bomb blasts, assassination attempts, supporting the RENAMO dissident group in neighbouring Mozambique, and UNITA in Southern Angola. But how much discussion do you recall with higher level policy people in Botswana, Lesotho or Swaziland on these issues, or were these discussions among your Canadian diplomatic colleagues?

CM: It was more among the Canadians because I was really focused on the aid programme at that stage and the people I met in the three little countries as well were the aid people. We all talked about the dependence of the three countries on migrant labour, the fact that South Africa could turn the screws at any point. We talked about what was happening north of the border in Zimbabwe and how South Africa was clearly getting very edgy about that. Certainly I knew a certain amount about cross border activities, particularly with Botswana because that was a channel for getting people out.

SO: Was CIDA informally involved in any of that support for exiled South Africans who might be based in Botswana, or for the returning refugees from Botswana going back into Zimbabwe?

CM: Not then, we were a bit later. I am trying to remember when – when Zimbabwe became independent we started an aid programme and there were various scholarship programmes and retraining programmes. I forget when this is now.

SO: I am just trying to place this in context. As far as the liberation movements are concerned, a great deal of emphasis has been placed in historical scholarship on the role of the Nordic countries. Where would you place Canada on this pantheon of aid assistance?

CM: Not as vocal and up front, certainly not in the late 1970s or early 1980s. There was a lot of awareness of what was happening in South Africa and there was certainly a very strong church movement within South Africa to do something about, or within Canada, to do something about South Africa. But it wasn't until probably the mid to late 1980s that Canada as a government started to take any concrete actions.

SO: But that is more along a bilateral link you are describing, rather than as a multilateral, Commonwealth approach?

CM: Yes, I think we were always in support of Commonwealth activities. John Diefenbaker said in 1960 when South Africa left the Commonwealth – I think that was very much a Canadian sense that we thoroughly disapproved of what was happening in South Africa, but there were very long standing ties between Canada and South Africa and that we wanted to help in some way.

SO: Someone has described it to me that 'Canada, having no national interests in South Africa, could afford to have a moral foreign policy'?

CM: That is true, to some extent. We had interest in a funny way because there were particularly Catholic missionaries who were all throughout Southern Africa from the 1880s and 1890s.

SO: Yes, but did they have particular Canadian denominations?

CM: Yes. Robert Mugabe was trained by the White Fathers. And the White Fathers were very prominent in Lesotho, less so in Botswana because there isn't as strong a Catholic trend there, but there had been those sort of connections. There were the Boer War connections - that was the first war that Canada fought, in a sense independently, where we fought under a Canadian banner. So people remembered that.

SO: These historical touchstones are very important, which later generations tend to forget.

CM: The Pretoria Bridge over here on the Rideau Canal is named after Pretoria in South Africa because of the Boer War. There was a move a couple of years ago to change the name to some current politician and there was a huge outcry from local historians who said, "Do you realise what this is memorialising?" And people didn't.

SO: The politics of memorials?

CM: But going back to your point: no, Canada was not as overt and principled as the Nordics, nor as early. I think we became almost as principled as the Nordics eventually and probably in some ways because of the Commonwealth tool, we had two fronts on which to work.

SO: So Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland then were the focus of your work as a planning officer. What principally did this involve? Was this provision of agricultural technological assistance, developmental project planning? Was it assistance to schools, or assistance to construction of infrastructure?

CM: A bit of everything. We had projects with each of the universities which eventually hived off and became separate universities in the three countries. We had a lot of training projects – there was an organisation called the Institute of Development Management which had, again, outlets in each of the three countries. We supported it very heavily throughout the 1980s. We had a major development project in Lesotho, up the mountains in an area called Thaba-Tseka. They formed a new district, a ninth district of Lesotho, and we put huge amounts of money into that. Swaziland was always a bit of a third ranking among the three because it was just so much harder to do anything in Swaziland.

SO: Because of the politics?

CM: Yes, the very interesting hierarchy there. I think Botswana was in some senses our favourite because (a) it was much more independent and (b) there was a sense that they were using their development assistance wisely.

SO: That is very much part of the aid development literature – in which Botswana is held up as the case study of success as a multi party democracy and using its diamonds discovered 1966 in effective conjunction with De Beers, and these export earnings for economic development.

As Botswana was caught in the front line of the contest against apartheid South Africa which became increasingly embattled after 1980, was your sense then that this really did compromise the politics of the country? Or was Botswana supported by the Commonwealth in a particular way? Were you aware of anything like this?

CM: I know that they were open to refugees from wherever because I remember going to visit a refugee camp in 1982 at Dukwe. It was kept quite quiet I know because there were fears that because there were a lot of South African refugees there that there would be retaliatory attacks. I think anybody who worked in Botswana was always aware of this really fine balance they had to strike so that there wasn't a lot of declaratory policy on the part of the Botswana government; they didn't make grand speeches the way some of their colleagues further north did; but they did quiet things that helped people escape, helped people get training.

SO: Obviously they couldn't in any way provide front line bases for the ANC or MK?

CM: No, I think they turned a blind eye in part because their borders were so long that they couldn't patrol them anyway and certainly that border south of Zimbabwe was very porous. I remember one friend of mine who worked in Malawi on a railway project taking a holiday down at Victoria Falls at that funny little strip where Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa all meet and he said it was like the Keystone Cops. He would see every stripe of military going past.

SO: The Caprivi Strip?

CM: The Caprivi Strip, yes. At that point that, in a sense, it was a no man's land; it was just used by everybody as a gateway.

SO: As Pretoria was your regional headquarters - you said that you went off every month and spent an appreciable amount of time in each of your project areas - how much was there a sense that the National Party government was a stone wall for you? Did you have reasonable connections with South African politicians, or was this not part of your remit?

CM: It wasn't part of my remit. I think my political colleagues found it very difficult because we were regarded with a certain degree of suspicion because of the stances of our government. We probably weren't regarded with as much suspicion as the Swedes and Norwegians were, but we were certainly not …

SO: You weren't loved like the Swiss?

CM: No, not at all! The other thing I remember from that period is the sense that this was a government that was in for the long haul; that it was going to be very hard to dislodge it. It was a very efficient police state and I can remember one colleague of mine saying, "This is second only to Israel in its control and its security." Our phones were all tapped, our letters were opened. You accepted that.

SO: So the diplomatic bag was not secure?

CM: The diplomatic bag was okay, but regular mail was not.

SO: So there was a sense of surveillance, but then also what comes with that is a sense of self-censorship because of your concern about what might be said or written?

CM: Precisely. I used to go to a church in Soweto, an Anglican church that had a black and white minister. Now they couldn't stop me because I was a diplomat, but as soon as I went in the gates of Soweto I would be followed by a police car. You began to take that for granted. So when things started to unravel as quickly as they did, I was really surprised.

SO: But you were there before the revolt in the townships of 1984, and then leading up to this declaration of the State of Emergency?

CM: Yes.

SO: Did you have a sense that things were going to kick off at any time?

CM: Funnily enough, no because by 1982 I had moved to Zimbabwe. 1980 to 1982 you just had a sense that there was bubbling under the surface but it was so firmly held down. Things were so repressed that it seemed unlikely that anything was going to happen soon.

SO: Moving to Zimbabwe in 1982: this is in the immediate period before the Gukuruhundi campaign. What was your sense of living in Zimbabwe as a key Frontline State at this particular point and targeted for South African incursions and destabilisation?

CM: There was a sense that it was highly vulnerable and that they had to be very careful, which they weren't, and the retaliations came. There were beginning to be rumbles and dissent in Matabeleland and I can remember talking to the CCJP (the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace), talking to people from there and they were stars through that whole period in trying to bring to the public attention what was happening. But you could see the dilemma for the Western countries because they wanted to stand up against South Africa and here was Zimbabwe on the front line.

SO: Supposedly the example of a multi racial democracy?

CM: Supposedly the example of a multi racial democracy, supposedly. Well, it did help various liberation groups, sometimes more reluctantly than willingly. So people didn't want to criticise too much.

SO: This is one of the criticisms held against Britain - that they knew what was going on. Certainly when I was talking to the British Second Secretary, Roger Martin, in 2006, he was explicit that he was gathering information on the violence in Matabeland, but that powers higher up didn't or couldn't acknowledge the violence. He said his superiors (in Harare, and London) didn't want to know; but I wonder, was it knowledge that couldn't be admitted? I don't know.

CM: I think it was because it would have … I think particularly in Britain where there was still a lot more prejudice than in Canada and other countries about Africans' ability to govern themselves; it would have just reconfirmed a lot of existing prejudices and so that wasn't information that you wanted to have out very publically.

SO: Were you debating this with your other Canadian political colleagues, about bringing this to wider attention? You say that the CCJP were admirable in trying to bring it to the world's attention.

CM: I was back in Ottawa by the time this happened but I can remember seeing telexes come in from Harare about what was happening. I honestly can't remember if we made any public statements; certainly we would have made representations and I know we did have, even though it was highly discouraged, we did have people from the High Commission go down to Matabeleland and report back.

SO: After your short time in Harare you were then moved up to Nairobi as CIDA field representative and become head of aid in 1988. This is the time of course that Britain was increasingly at odds with the Commonwealth over the question of economic sanctions on South Africa – there was the acrimonious CHOGM meeting in Vancouver in 1987 when Mrs Thatcher caused a considerable stir because of her opposition; and the Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa was set up, but without Britain. Were you following this debate particularly closely given your Southern Africa remit?

CM: Yes, I was.

SO: Did you attend the Vancouver event?

CM: I didn't but one of my colleagues in Harare or in Nairobi went to be the liaison officer for the Uganda delegation because we covered Uganda from Nairobi and I talked to him a lot when he came back. It was fascinating and it was a time I felt very proud of Canadian foreign policy because we were taking I think a principled stand, both politically and in the Commonwealth. We chaired CFMSA for the whole time it existed.

SO: Yes, so it was under Foreign Minister Joe Clark's leadership. Were you as an expert policy analyst at this particular point, increasingly drawn into South African policy on economic sanctions or not?

CM: Not until I got back to Ottawa, no because Kenya, Uganda, Somalia which were the countries we covered from Nairobi, were enough of a task.

SO: Between 1986 then and when you came back to Ottawa in 1990 as part of the Department for Foreign Affairs and International Trade – DFAIT – as deputy head of the Southern Africa task force, was there a particular Commonwealth dimension to your work in Eastern Africa and the Horn or was this principally a Canadian bilateral approach?

CM: It was principally Canadian bilateral. We kept an eye on what everybody else was doing including the Commonwealth and we had very good donor coordination in Nairobi at that stage.

SO: So you were liaising with ODA …?

CM: Yes, as well as USAID and the World Bank and then there is the Nordics, Germans and the Dutch. We had a monthly meeting of all the heads of aid in the donor countries and that was very helpful. It was coordinated by the World Bank; they had a very active head at that stage – a guy named Peter Elgin who went on to found Transparency International. He was the World Bank race rep at that stage.

SO: So here the Commonwealth then was acting as a part of a multilateral development body, rather than under a separate Commonwealth identity?

CM: Yes. I was aware from the 1970s of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation for which I have always had a huge admiration, and I have had

very heated fights with my colleagues in Canada and my friends in Australian aid about the way the CFTC should operate. I have always thought that the great value of the CFTC is that it could act quickly and it could do things in the short term, because in many of the countries - and this was especially true in the Pacific when I was posted in New Zealand - what they need is somebody for three months to help them draft a particular piece of legislation that will accord with a UN declaration that they have signed onto or to revise their banking regulations.

SO: So being able to draw upon an immediate network of particular expertise and to parachute somebody in to do a short-term project?

CM: Yes, it is hugely helpful and also they have access to that wide canopy of experts from around the Commonwealth, most of whom have the same governmental background. So you don't have to teach somebody about the parliamentary system or the rule of law; people understand that, even if it has been distorted by developments since independence.

SO: There is a shared set of administrative values and approaches, even if they are not identical?

CM: Yes, and the judicial systems are usually the same. We as Canada have done a lot in conjunction with the Commonwealth in judicial training and magistrates training, things like that, because it is an area where we have a lot of expertise and a lot of interest.

SO: So you are contrasting that then with a certain bureaucratic inertia in other international organisations?

CM: Yes, on the part of bilateral/multilateral donors. So when various major Commonwealth donors, ourselves included, have pressed the CFTC to become more heavily programmed, to project what they are going to do, it is totally counterproductive.

SO: Because you want something that is flexible, that doesn't attach quite so many conditionalities, that is more immediate?

CM: Yes, but it is harder to assess.

SO: Indeed, in terms of return on investments.

CM: Yes, you can't do a nice log frame for it and it doesn't lend itself to bureaucratic accounting back in administrative capitals. For a long time we were the top contributor in fact – maybe not, maybe Britain has always been more, but we have always been in the top three.

SO: This is again part of the politics of developmental aid?

CM: Oh yes.

SO: Something that was quite hard-fought, back in Ottawa?

CM: Oh yes, because when I was head of the Commonwealth section, which was from 2000 to 2003, this was when there was much more pressure being put on the CFTC and the Commonwealth in general to be accountable, to put up measurable targets, to do evaluations and so on and it was making me very nervous. I could understand you don't want your money being frittered away, but you have to be accountable to your political constituencies in Canada; but to lose that aspect of quick response which was so valuable and which no other aid agency provided, I thought was just heart-breaking.

SO: **Was this a long fought battle for you?**

CM: Yes. I kept losing too. By that stage I was fighting my colleagues in CIDA but I was fighting them on the basis of having spent a lot of time in developing countries and seeing the need for somebody to be able to get an expert out there within six weeks, which the CFTC could.

SO: And a truly knowledgeable expert, not a World Bank project officer who read his brief on the plane?

CM: Yes.

SO: Just going back to your position in 1990 when you took the assignment in DFAIT on the Southern African task force: you have said elsewhere that this group was responsible for the implementation of most of Canada's South Africa policy including sanctions and assistance to South African NGOs through the Dialogue Fund. Could you elaborate on that?

CM: The Dialogue Fund – I am trying to remember when it was set up, I think it was in 1989. It was a fund that was intended to promote dialogue among the groups in South Africa who wanted to work for peaceful change because by then we recognised that, apart from the church groups who had been working all along, there were clearly elements within the Afrikaner community that did not want to have a conflagration. They wanted some sort of peaceful transition to a different type of government. So this Dialogue Fund was mainly for meetings and travel; it brought trade unionists to Canada to talk to counterparts here. We funded a number of scholarships, we funded meetings in South Africa and outside South Africa of various NGO and church groups with government groups or with Afrikaner groups. It was a fascinating and totally novel approach.

SO: So this is really facilitation of civil society, rather than formal governmental links?

CM: Yes, it was totally unusual for Foreign Affairs. We had never done anything like this before.

SO: So where did the idea for the Dialogue Fund come from?

CM: It came primarily I think from Joe Clark, but from a number of people around him as well and from the embassy in South Africa who had been very quietly active in making connections with groups in civil society and trying to find out what they needed to promote change. What they said was, "We need

opportunities to get together with other groups, to get together with government officials if necessary, with Afrikaner groups in some place that is secure and doesn't have political overtones."

SO: It sounds a variant of what the British Ambassador, Robin Renwick, was trying to do by actually providing space around his invitations to dinner at the British Embassy.

CM: For people to go into corners.

SO: Exactly. So this was neutral space that you were providing so that differing and highly fragmented communities then could make that personal contact with a shared goal of trying to secure peaceful transition. So how big was the Dialogue Fund? How much money was invested?

CM: It wasn't huge because it didn't need huge amounts of money. Again, I will try to dig this report out that we did and get it to you. It wasn't more than about $5 million.

SO: Was that from the Department of Foreign Affairs' own budget – i.e. it didn't have to go through Parliament so it didn't require legislative approval?

CM: I don't think it did.

SO: I am just wondering if this was Canada trying to operate below the radar, to act as a facilitator rather than necessarily trying to claim any great moral input?

CM: As the years went on we became much more vocal about it and claimed more credit for things that had happened; but certainly in the early years, it was very quiet and very much under the radar.

SO: Was this up and running when you came back to Ottawa in 1990?

CM: Yes, it was. We also had things through the aid programme that were more aid related but mainly scholarship programmes for Southern Africans and then as things changed and we got into the transition phase there was a much larger aid involvement. We had a very large project that was through the IDRC – International Development Research Centre – and that provided help particularly with the drafting of the new constitution. That went on for three or four years and it was spearheaded by a man named Al Johnson who had been our Deputy Minister of Finance. He had come from Saskatchewan where he had been part of the Tommy Douglas socialist government that brought in Medicare; then he ended up as head of the CBC and then when he retired this came up and he just leapt on it. He was, I think, hugely influential in showing South Africans some of the pitfalls of constitution building, particularly when you have got what is effectively a federal system which they refused to say was a federal system, but it is a federal system.

SO: It is indeed; it is not a unitary system.

CM: It quacks like a duck…! The other area where I think we had a huge impact was in the Bill of Rights and the various human rights components that are in the South African constitution. I remember one South African saying to me, "What we really like about you is that you don't tell us what to do the way the Americans and the British do! You say, we tried this and it didn't work and we tried this and it worked with limitations and this was quite successful." But we never prescribed, we just laid out examples.

SO: Carolyn, whom were you liaising with on the ground in terms of supporting constitution building? Is this part of the CODESA process?

CM: Yes.

SO: So with particular and key individuals within the ANC?

CM: Particularly Cyril Ramaphosa who was very close to this project of ours and Leon Wessels and Roelf Meyer.

SO: Was Albie Sachs also one of them?

CM: Yes. I remember, when was it, 1993 or 1994, Al brought a study tour to Canada of key CODESA players to look at our federal system and they came to Ottawa, they went to Toronto and they also went to Montreal and it was organized by IDASA – the Institute for Democracy in Southern Africa, which was a key player in the 1990s and the 2000s in promoting change in Southern Africa and they were key players on Zimbabwe too. That included people like General Viljoen on this study tour and Roelf Meyer, Albie Sachs and Brigitte Mabandla; it was a really fascinating group. I think it opened their eyes.

SO: What you are saying then is that you brought in not only key legal representatives of the ANC, but also members of the trade union movement? I am just thinking of Cyril Ramaphosa who had his own trade union connections, but also people from the National Party side?

CM: Yes, because I think we recognized all along this was not going to happen unless the National Party bought into it. Interestingly enough, Alison Redford – that would be a fascinating person for you to talk to – who is the premiere of Saskatchewan, was one of the legal advisers as part of this project in the mid 1990s and she has very strong memories of South Africa.

SO: Carolyn, were you aware whether the Australians were offering the same type of advice on constitution building? After all they too are a federation?

CM: I don't think they were because the Australians, as I became well aware of when I was posted in New Zealand, are much more focused on the Pacific – that is their backyard. They didn't have as strong links as we did to Africa. They were players there and they were certainly active but I don't think they had frankly as innovative a program as we did.

SO: You have made slightly critical comments of the Americans and the British - and I can fully understand that! - were you making political comments and representations on Mrs Thatcher and her interventions

to try to support the Inkatha desire for a greater degree of autonomy within the South African state? Was this causing policy angst in Canada?

CM: Yes, well certainly the role of Inkatha was causing policy angst everywhere. In 1994 when it looked as if Buthelezi was going to pull out of the election, I can remember going down to KwaZulu-Natal with our junior minister, Christine Stewart, to meet Buthelezi, as had everyone who had passed through South Africa in the previous six months, to try to persuade him to "play like a nice boy".

SO: I know that a key individual in the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, Moses Anafu, was known as 'Mr Africa' because of the thousands of air miles he totted up to try to keep Inkatha within the negotiations and election process, and his other involvement in conflict mediation elsewhere in Africa. Did you liaise with Moses?

CM: Oh yes.

SO: Extensively on this?

CM: Yes.

SO: So this is a key case then of the Commonwealth acting as an important facilitator below the radar - because this part of the story of the Commonwealth's assistance to South African transition really isn't known.

CM: I am trying to think of who the Canadians were who were in the Commonwealth at that stage. Bill Montgomery, who died unfortunately; was the head of CFTC. The Commonwealth never had a lot of money to spend but it had moral suasion and it had little bits of money again that could be used to facilitate, to fill gaps.

SO: How far were you aware that Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the new Commonwealth Secretary General, was another important facilitator, practicing his 'good offices'?

CM: I certainly became aware in the lead up to the Cyprus CHOGM in 1993 because that was when we lifted the sanctions and that was such a major step.

SO: Because before then Brian Mulroney had been very attentive to make sure that Canada didn't lift its economic sanctions before Nelson Mandela gave the go ahead. Senator Hugh Segal was quite emphatic about talking about that, from his viewpoint as Prime Minister Mulroney's Chief of Staff.

CM: Yes, there were many phone calls but I remember when Thabo Mbeki was at Cyprus, not obviously with any formal role but was certainly widely consulted.

SO: But you were then one of the key officials in trying to liaise with the Canadian stance on sanctions with the ANC. Were you a link person, or were you actually required to have any policy input on this?

CM: I had policy input. I was the person who wrote the memorandum to the Cabinet on lifting the sporting sanctions which was a lot of fun because I firmly believed that the sporting sanctions had a huge impact. People start to roll their eyes when I say this and say, "It was the financial sanctions." Financial sanctions obviously had a lot of clout but I think the sporting sanctions really got the Afrikaners where it hurt.

SO: I remember teaching a young South African Afrikaner undergraduate in the 90s and he said, "We want to be able to participate at international level." For a sport mad nation, not to be able to do this was a profound insult.

CM: Oh yes, it was, and we had a visit very early after the sporting sanctions were raised from the General Secretary of the Non Racial Olympic Committee of South Africa, Dan Moyo, and I took him around to meet various sporting organizations. That was such fun, his eyes were lighting up. Then of course South Africa participated in the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria which was, I think, a great coup for Canada; Brian Mulroney was out of power by then, but Mr Chretien enjoyed it.

SO: Well, still you could take a tremendous amount of pride in Canada contributing to this final victory. So in your position then as head of the Southern African task force, you worked on the question of sanctions and how to fine tune them, how to finesse them, and giving assistance to Southern African NGOs through the Dialogue Fund. Did your work involve any other aspects of supporting transition? You have also mentioned the assistance to the constitutional negotiations drawing upon the Canadian example. You weren't providing any administrative training for ANC officials, or any support for their economic strategy development, or discussions on the appropriate economic developmental approach of a post transition government?

CM: No, our focus was much more on the constitutional legal framework because other donors were involved more with the economic side.

SO: So were you collaborating with other donors to make sure that each of you dealt with your specific sector and that there was …?

CM: Trying to.

SO: Here I am giving credit to joined up thinking across the Commonwealth!

CM: As we all know, donors aren't always particularly adroit at coordination.

SO: Possibly not, but did you find yourselves working at cross purposes at any particular point?

CM: No, I don't think so. I think a lot of other donors recognized that we had something unique to give because of our federal structure and also because our Charter of Rights was so new and was a model.

SO: When was your Charter of Rights brought through?

CM: 1982.

SO: So it really was very current in terms of recognizing minority interests and rights?

CM: Yes, that is when it was finally enshrined. That was the main focus because we also recognized that we are not a huge donor.

SO: So it was where to spend your money that it is most effective?

CM: Yes, and that seemed to be the area.

SO: You made reference to questions of trade union liaison and activity. Was the Canadian trade union movement in any way supportive of the South African trade union movement?

CM: Yes, in fact another person you might talk to – I can get you his phone number – is Paul Purritt who was the International Relations Officer of the Canadian Labor Congress through the 1990s. They had a project through the Dialogue Fund, again to strengthen trade union leadership and make it aware of how it can operate in a more normal democracy.

SO: I know from talking to Carl Wright, who was part of the Commonwealth Trade Union movement and then moved to Commonwealth Secretariat in the 1990s; his particular workshops in Zimbabwe in the late 1980s were expressly designed to try to give form and frame to administrative knowledge, expertise, trade union organization – it really was a skill set facilitation exercise. Were you involved in any of those types of training exercises?

CM: What we tended to do was, with the CLC project we gave them a certain amount of money; they said what they were going to do with it and they went ahead and did it and then reported to us. We didn't sit on them.

SO: At this particular point, we are talking about transition at the end of the Cold War and I know that as far as the labour movement was concerned, it had inevitably become tied up with left versus far left attitudes. There had been concern within the broader international trade union movements, which of course itself was split, about whether it might be problematic that the ANC as a broad church was particularly in thrall to the SACP – South African Communist Party – and the implications that this had then for the future complexion of South Africa. Was that also part of the policy discussions? I know that the Berlin Wall came down on 9th November 1989, but perceptions, attitudes and policies take longer to work out.

CM: Certainly there was concern within the Canadian government about the influence of the SACP and the influence of the SACP on the trade union movement and on the ANC in general. I don't think it was a concern felt as keenly perhaps by our neighbours to the south because we had never had that anticommunist paranoia that certainly the United States had, nor had we had the sort of spy problems.

SO: So Canada had never gone through its version of the Joseph McCarthy era, so there was not the same pathological concern about communism?

CM: No, not at all. We have maintained relations, warm and sometimes cool relations, with Cuba forever despite what our neighbours to the south think about that.

SO: It seems to me that the Commonwealth provided an organization which again gave differentiation to Canada within the international community against America?

CM: Yes, it did and we value that. We used to value that.

SO: Perhaps you will again.

CM: Perhaps we will again. And certainly Mr Chretien saw the value of the Commonwealth both on South Africa and then increasingly on Zimbabwe and a lot of our Zimbabwe policy was acted out through the Commonwealth. We ran the Commonwealth committee on Zimbabwe; he played a major role in Abuja trying to mediate between Tony Blair and Thabo Mbeki – not very successfully, they were at loggerheads.

SO: I realize that this is leaping ahead because you went down to Pretoria as Deputy High Commissioner and then headed Canada's working group in the build up to the 1999 Durban CHOGM meeting. Of course the Abuja CHOGM was in 2003. If I could just take you back through your career's chronology: as Deputy High Commission from 1994 and you had also been part of the election monitoring group at the extraordinary South African election in April 1994.

CM: That was one of the high points of my life, I think.

SO: In what way?

CM: Well, to see the value of an election in the eyes of people who had never voted before. I was posted in the Northern Province which had three former homeland territories and also had some of the most hard line Afrikaner areas in all of South Africa. In fact, one of the voting stations that we were supposed to monitor got blown up two days before the election in a town 20 km south of Pietersburg, Potgietersrus, and it was probably the most chaotic of all the areas of South Africa. The first day that we went around, most voting stations didn't have their supplies, the people weren't properly trained – we had gone through a training session in Johannesburg and so we knew more than some of the officials about how this ought to be run. But people stood there for 10 or

12 hours in the blazing sun because they were going to vote and it was just awe inspiring.

SO: So this was a Canadian election monitoring group; it wasn't part of the UN, it wasn't part of the Commonwealth election observers mission, it was Canadian?

CM: We had Canadians on all those ones as well. In fact we had about 200 Canadians throughout South Africa under various auspices – there were NGO ones, there were labour union ones – but we had a group of 25 people led by Christine Stewart who was our Junior Minister for Africa & South Africa and we had five groups, each group had three or four people, one person from foreign affairs or CIDA as a sort of minder and then two experts or MPs or whatever. Obviously with that small a group we were very strategically placed, we had two in the Northern Province and one in KwaZulu-Natal, one in Gauteng and one down in the Western Cape. We collaborated very closely, particularly with the UN, because they were everywhere but we also collaborated with the Commonwealth because they had the great advantage that they send their people out weeks in advance so they had a better knowledge of all the contacts and what was going on on the ground, so we had very close cooperation with those groups. There probably wasn't the need for a separate Canadian monitoring group but I think the Canadian government felt we had put so much into the whole issue of South Africa that we wanted to be there as a moral triumph and as a separate presence.

SO: So thereafter, what was Canada's particular input in the broad range of policies to continue to assist transition to post apartheid rule?

CM: We continued this constitutional project on for quite a while because they were still working through a lot of the arrangements with the provinces. We developed twinning arrangements with seven of the provinces, between our provinces and their provinces, which were I think quite helpful. Some were stronger than others depending on the interests of the premiers and the bureaucracies involved.

SO: So it was a bit like the British practice of city 'twinning'?

CM: Yes, it was. We twinned seven provinces with seven Canadian provinces and people went from South Africa to see how things were done in their twin back in Canada. Assistance was sent out, usually technical assistance, from the province to South Africa.

SO: So in terms of the personal networks again, which is so much the Commonwealth's strength, and exchange of expertise and knowledge rather than necessarily large sums of donor assistance?

CM: Yes. The other area where CIDA put money into was a project with the Association of Community Colleges of Canada which assisted a number of the community college level institutions in South Africa – and again provided training and mentorship and scholarships and so on. We did have a project with Economic Affairs, a small advisory project. Grant Hawes was my colleague who was the head of the CIDA program in the early 1990s here in Ottawa and then he went out in 1994 as a CIDA field rep to Pretoria so he

was there from 1994 to 1998, when he moved to Malawi. I can get you his phone number if you wanted to do a phone interview with him.

SO: Thank you, actually skyping to him might be very good. Carolyn, what you are underlining here is actual practical policy, rather than being bound up in process and sweeping declarations like the Harare Declaration 1991 and the Latimer House Accords in 2003. This is actually much more implementation of effective assistance, knowledge transfers and also solidarity and support at a grass roots level.

CM: We were very supportive of a lot of the Commonwealth's other institutions, the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association, the Commonwealth Librarians Association, because they all came into South Africa and tried to do whatever they could to create links, create networks and provide support. One of my great regrets is that very few people know about that other level of the Commonwealth and how it operates, the informal Commonwealth.

SO: The Commonwealth after all is an extraordinary association; it has a remarkable ability to reinvent itself at points of crisis, but also has been in the constant process of evolution. Is the rise through the 1990s of civil society actors and non-governmental organisations which have a Commonwealth framework significant? People may pooh-pooh this and say 'oh well there are 87 organisations that have all got the label Commonwealth and they can't all be active agents in change and assistance'; but there are certainly those at the moment in different parts of the Commonwealth and in the different parts of the organisational structures which are doing very nicely, thank you. Even if at a top political level the Commonwealth seems to be going through one of its periodic cycles of angst. Would you agree with that?

CM: Maybe they did rise in the 1990s, I had the sense that many of them had been going on before.

SO: I am just thinking about how international politics is also changing. The 1990s after all is a time of huge flux in the international system following the end of the Cold War, and with the process of democratisation which is very much part of the Commonwealth's declared agenda from the Harare Declaration. This then opens up a different policy space within its councils for other actors?

CM: Yes, and I think some of the other actors would get occasionally a bit annoyed at the official Commonwealth because the official Commonwealth wasn't always terribly receptive to what the unofficial Commonwealth was saying; whereas the unofficial Commonwealth quite often had better connection in areas and had very useful comments to make.

SO: In what way? Was this part of your personal observations in the run up to CHOGM of 1999 in Durban?

CM: Actually probably not so much there, it was more when I came back to Ottawa to head up the Commonwealth section here. I had been aware in South Africa of a number of the informal Commonwealth organisations but when I took over the Commonwealth section, you learn about all of them because when

you do your briefing books you have to have a list in there and it is quite extensive. It is imposing – in fact, it is mind boggling at times.

SO: But it could be said also that the Commonwealth is remarkably adept at its networks, even if a particular association's organisational structure is two dedicated people in a back office of Uganda House?

CM: Oh yes, they are and it is very much on the basis of people knowing each other, thinking that is a good idea, I will just write so and so in Botswana or so and so in Fiji. Those links that are kept up whether it is the librarians or the engineers or magistrates.

SO: Does that count as diplomacy, in your view?

CM: It counts as diplomacy in the sense of increasing awareness among people of other parts of the world and what are the views of people in other parts of the world? And breaking down prejudices and barriers and preconceived ideas.

SO: So, as a facilitator to high level politics and diplomacy, but still an unseen part of what the Commonwealth does best?

CM: Yes, and that is where I think the Commonwealth is invaluable but it is so hard to quantify.

SO: Well, it is a classic soft power organisation in that sense, bringing its limited financial resources to very good effect, through excellent pooling of knowledge. Just to go back to Canada's policy particularly and your personal contribution on Canada's policy towards the committee on Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe started to go into meltdown from 2000 with the growing political crisis following the constitutional referendum and the parliamentary elections, then accelerating hyperinflation. The role of CMAG emerged from the Auckland CHOGM as a corrective for military coups, but increasingly there appeared to be a need for it to act in an assistant and corrective role to undemocratic regimes. How did you manage this particular policy? Were you fine tuning it, or were you indeed implementing it?

CM: Well, we were developing a Canadian position on what CMAG should do. We were in favour of a more activist interventionist role for CMAG than some other members were and we were trying through gentle persuasion, to put our views across to other members of the Commonwealth.

SO: How much resistance was there?

CM: There was a fair bit of resistance, quite a bit of resistance on the part of some members. That is where I got a totally invaluable lesson in time zones around the world because I was forever putting through phone calls to other members of CMAG and I remember waking Gareth Evans up. Unfortunately he had his cell phone and we didn't realise that he wasn't in Australia.

SO: Where was he?

CM: He was somewhere with a six hours time difference.

SO: I'll bet he didn't appreciate being woken from his sleep? But CMAG was also having to deal with the troika of John Howard, Mbeki and General Obasanjo at this particular point? There were also the issues of personality and dynamics between that triangulation.

CM: Yes, which was difficult to put it mildly and I think Prime Minister Chretien played a very helpful role there because he was trusted. He wasn't seen as having any particular axes to grind in the way the UK were seen. I think Australia had taken such a hard line that they were mistrusted by quite a number of the African countries; and Canada was seen as an honest broker to the extent that the Commonwealth came out of that without major damage. I think John Chretien can take a certain amount of credit for that.

SO: Is it unusual that he was particularly supportive of the Commonwealth, given that he is a French Canadian? Or was this very much in the Trudeau line?

CM: Pretty much in the Trudeau line. He saw the value of the organization; he was funnily enough always an internationalist. He liked the idea of an organisation where small countries had an equal voice; he compared that to the UN where small countries could get up and grandstand but what he liked about the Commonwealth was that everybody talked and you came to a consensus but you listened to everybody. You didn't say, "I am sorry you have got 10,000 people. We are not going to listen to you."

SO: Shades of 'How many divisions does the Pope have?' That sort of scornful attitude?

CM: Yes, and he found he got frustrated by the Commonwealth, he got frustrated by the Secretariat at times. But he saw the value of it, of its bringing together this really disparate collection of countries around the world that were facing a wide array of problems and this gave them a venue for looking at those problems from the different perspectives of the members; and trying to come up with statements and possibly actions that could be taken as an organisation.

SO: So how difficult was it for you to try to coordinate an inclusive policy in the run up to the Coolum troubles of 2002 and particularly Abuja in 2003, because after all there would be a lot of contested personalities and contested approaches in that particular Zimbabwe issue?

CM: It was difficult. It was very difficult, yes. Particularly with the Australians.

SO: Why? Because John Howard was taking a particularly robust line?

CM: Yes, and normally you think of Canada, Australia, New Zealand as being fairly consistent and coherent in their approaches to most issues, but certainly on that one it was not.

SO: Why do you think it was that Australia was taking such a robust stance rather than a more finely tuned approach to try to include Zimbabwe?

CM: I would not really want to comment. I think quite often, frankly, policies on issues like that are very much governed by the personality of the leader and I don't think John Howard had a lot of time for the Commonwealth.

SO: So there could have been an exasperation factor that kicked in?

CM: Yes, an exasperation frustration factor that had kicked in. I think he was getting to the point where he wanted to shake somebody, as frankly we all were; but it was what was going to be the most productive way of reaching an end that didn't destroy the Commonwealth and maybe had some impact on Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe took their marbles and went home.

SO: What of Don McKinnon's role at that particular point? It seems to me that having read his memoirs - despite his best efforts and he really was chipping away at the coal face on this particular one - that he would sympathize more with the element of Antipodean frustration at African obduracy.

CM: We shared the frustration too and we had a lot of support for Don McKinnon because he worked his butt off. He and Amitav Banerji put themselves in positions where they were yelled at, where they were ignored, where they were insulted and they just kept on trying hard. More power to them. But it was hard.

SO: You also mentioned the fall out at the Abuja meeting with Tony Blair who of course left early and then made that very unfortunate statement to the press.

CM: Yes, well when that happened, we all just thought that it was, you know …

SO: Really counterproductive?

CM: Yes. There were times when during that period, Coolum to Abuja, when we wondered if the Commonwealth was going to survive this. It would survive but would it be just totally destroyed as an organisation that had any credibility in terms of adhering to principles.

SO: The paradox is that just as Southern Rhodesia had done, so Zimbabwe proved toxic for the region and had also proved enormously problematic for Commonwealth cohesion and what it stood for.

CM: Yes, but I remember in Coolum one of my colleagues and I did the first draft of the statement on Zimbabwe and then it was a matter of Mr Chretien and the other leaders who were pressing for it, persuading the rest of the Commonwealth leaders to buy into it. For us, I think, because we had been so involved with the South Africa issue, it was so important that (a) we take a stand on Zimbabwe but (b) that we try to keep Zimbabwe within the fold so that you could work on it.

SO: Consensus again?

CM: Yes, consensus again, but there are some minds that won't be changed and Robert Mugabe's is one of those.

SO: This was as much a failure and an affront to General Obasanjo, as a committed Nigerian diplomat and African leader, who had contributed to the 1986 EPG in South Africa, and was contributing again to the Troika.

CM: Oh very much so, yes, and we felt that he handled it with huge dignity and wisdom, and there are some things that you cannot control.

SO: No, indeed. Then in December 2003 you were of course posted to New Zealand, as Deputy High Commissioner: now with a remit for the Commonwealth Pacific countries, with Fiji top of the list.

CM: Yes, I think there was one stage where I wrote a telex on Fiji every day when we were leading up to the coup which was the only coup I know that has been delayed so that they could do the army-police rugby game!

SO: So that they could get that derby out of the way first and then Rear Admiral Bainimarama launched the coup! Obviously you were very much a Southern Africa specialist, having dealt with Southern Africa issues which caused huge tensions within the Commonwealth's councils. How much importance would you attach to the troubles in Fiji for the Commonwealth since 1987: its three coups in the late 80s, repeated coups at the millennium, and with yet another recent hiccough on the road democracy under Bainimarama?

CM: Well, certainly with the creation of CMAG, Fiji became a continuing thorn in the flesh. I think for many Commonwealth members until South Africa became a democracy, very few people focused on democracy in any other part of the Commonwealth; and then I think the Commonwealth woke up to the fact that with the Harare Declaration there were principles that had to be applied broadly. Then I think Fiji did begin to loom a little larger on the scene but I think most of the Commonwealth, with the exception of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, look at Fiji and just sort of shake their heads that it can continue in this strange way that it has through so many years.

SO: Sir Ron Sanders has made the point that growing Chinese American investment (the latter because of its regional geopolitical agenda and trying to manage China's rise in East Asia and South East Asia), is in part responsible for Fiji's resistance. To a degree, Fiji doesn't need democracy encouraged by the Commonwealth because it has got alternative sources of funding and it can pursue its own road without necessarily paying such close attention to the Bill of Rights. Much the same model, I think, is also playing out in Sri Lanka with the rising Chinese investment there. Now there is a great debate of course about the association of democracy and development; do you need democracy for development? For the Commonwealth as a values based organisation, seeking to facilitate and encourage democracy and democratisation, this is problematic.

CM: It is and with the increasing role of China it is going to be, I think, even more of an issue. I saw the Chinese influence beginning in Africa but then when I was stationed in New Zealand it was so clear what was happening,

particularly in terms of things like fishing rights and control of natural resources. It is alarming.

SO: How much do you think there is also a misperception about the coherence of China's strategy? You are a supremely well placed policy analyst and long term observer; how far would you agree that the perception of China is that of a monolith, rather than in fact a much more fragmented and disjointed economic actor? That in reality there is a marked lack of strategic thinking in Beijing, and little strategic coordination with individual actors and entrepreneurs, state owned organisations, state enterprises with highly varying access to state bank cheaper funds? How much do you think that there is a misperception of an all-embracing Chinese move into Africa and the Pacific, for what is actually a much more partial and imperfect stop-start engagement?

CM: I think in Africa and the Pacific it is more monolithic because I think there is a policy direction. Now there are many actors and some of them go off on tangents, but I think there is a direction that the Chinese government is pursuing deliberately and the small islands are perfect to be picked off.

SO: They are particularly vulnerable, as you say, in terms of necessary legal expertise and the fact that they can't police their territorial waters. How do they deal with incursions when there is illegal fishing or illegal exploration or sticking the Chinese flag on an outcrop 12 miles from Manila harbour?

Carolyn, thank you very, very much indeed. If I could follow up with other questions, that would be excellent.

CM: Yes of course.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]