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Key:

SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)

SM: Mr Simon Murdoch (Respondent)

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SO: Sue Onslow talking to Mr Simon Murdoch in Wellington on Monday 7th April 2014. Simon, thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this project. I wonder if you could begin please, sir, by saying what was your view as a New Zealand diplomat, of the importance of links with Britain, links with the Commonwealth when you first joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in '72. Were these diminishing in importance because of Britain's move towards the European Economic Community?

SM: No. Not from a point of view of a foreign government because the effect of Britain joining the Community was to make New Zealand's traditional primary product trade to the UK more vulnerable; and the only thing that was going to protect that market from protectionist pressures led out of Europe, not the UK, was UK diplomacy within the community. So as New Zealand didn't have a seat at the table in Brussels, it was up to the British prime minister to basically negotiate with the Community to preserve our access to the UK.

SO: This was Geoffrey Rippon's responsibility.

SM: And Margaret Thatcher.

SO: But in '70-72?

SM: Well, I've leapt ahead, I'm not talking about '72. I'm talking about a period when I was the FPA for Muldoon and Muldoon was attending Commonwealth meetings visiting Britain frequently. And the point for us of the Commonwealth was that it was important to British Prime Ministers because it was a symbol of Britain's influence in the world. It was important to us to make common cause with British Prime Ministers because, in turn, the British Prime Ministers were going to Brussels and negotiating to protect our access, against Danish,

Irish and French protectionism. And we had no seat at the table directly in Brussels. The Community decided its trade policies and British Prime Ministers went to Brussels and argued to preserve our access to the UK market. So, paradoxically, even though on the face of it Britain's joining the Community was a "diminution" of our ties with the UK, the fact is that that UK advocacy for NZ trade access was critical to us especially at that time.

SO: So was there a particular Commonwealth Secretariat, or Commonwealth dimension to New Zealand policy on this?

SM: No, no. But in the politics of it, a Prime Minister like Muldoon would have a sense that he ought to be supportive of the British Prime Minister in the Commonwealth context because the British Prime Minister was supporting New Zealand's trade access. It was, 'I know this is something important to you and this is important to us'. Muldoon understood that the Commonwealth was becoming an increasingly difficult place for British Prime Ministers because of course every British prime minister was being...

SO: Hauled into the dock?

SM: Yeah. Raked over the coals at Commonwealth meetings, particularly over things like Rhodesia, and even South Africa. So for Muldoon it was, to put it in the negative: if a British Prime Minister felt abandoned by a New Zealand Prime Minister in the Commonwealth context, what would be the incentive for a British Prime Minister not to abandon New Zealand.

SO: So there was a *quid pro quo*?

SM: Well, an unspoken one. I'm really just trying to deal with this point about diminution because the impression people had of Muldoon was that he was sentimentally attached to Britain and the Commonwealth. But he actually was also thinking about this dynamic of finding a value proposition, which would persuade Britain to keep making a New Zealand case in Brussels. Is that okay?

SO: No, that's an excellent explanation. And so Muldoon was trying to use then the relationship with the British Prime Minister and also with Britain, as a lever against...

SM: European protectionism.

SO: Were you making common with the Australians? I know Malcolm Fraser felt very strongly about EC protectionism.

SM: No, because Australia lost its access; we didn't. When Britain entered the Community, it negotiated a special arrangement for New Zealand. So the issue every year was what quantum of exports, under what conditions, was going to be enabled by that special relationship, right? And the French, the Irish, the Danes and so on wanted to drain it. They had no interest in having New Zealand but they wanted the British market; they didn't see why New Zealand should be in any part of the Community market.

SO: So in terms of hard headed practical policy, in fact there was a need to maintain that access between Wellington and London, to serve New Zealand national interest?

SM: Yeah. It went on for years. It went on until the Uruguay Round of the GATT in 1988. That was the first time that there was an agreement to put a floor underneath our access to Europe. So between 1973-88, there was 15 years of a struggle to maintain a trade foothold in Europe for which British support was essential.

SO: Yes. The reason I raised Australia is because Malcolm Fraser emphasised in his memoirs that he was very keen on trade liberalisation, but also had a particular policy to oppose European protectionism. And so I just wondered if there was a degree of making common cause?

SM: Yes, we had to make a lot of noise wherever we could internationally about trade protectionism, particularly agricultural protectionism, and hope that that would have some resonance and restraining effect upon European protectionism. But the reality was that every year the quantities came up for renegotiation. And so while there was a value in generic anti-protectionist diplomacy, the fact is that on our own account, we still had to try to protect ourselves, directly, bilaterally. So we were not in the same position as the Australians.

SO: Thank you for making that important differentiation. In which case when you came to the MFA in the 70s, how much was there a general view within your department that the Commonwealth represented a useful platform for New Zealand's internationalist ...

SM: Well yeah it did. My first boss was David McDowell. David had been in the Commonwealth Secretariat and involved in the early 70s decolonisation which was the great work of the Commonwealth. Its great purpose was to transform empire into something sustainable. David had been with Arnold Smith all across Africa for the African decolonisations of the 60s; but decolonisation was just happening in the South Pacific in the 70s.

So David understood the whole framework for independence, self-government, for small emergent states. And he went on to become the first Director of a re-engineered aid programme, focussed on postcolonial development needs in the Pacific and East Asia. In the 70s there were two political issues underlying decolonisation in the South Pacific. How was it going to be done? What were the new political arrangements going to look like? And what were the economic prospects for these very tiny independent states? And already by the late 60s and early 70s, the decolonising aspect, the political experiment in Africa was starting to show strains. And so that kind of failure was an issue, a preoccupying risk. And the role that the Commonwealth could perform mattered. The (newly) independent states wanted to retain a connection to Britain. Now in a lot of cases, a lot of them were monarchies, don't forget. There was a deep attachment by their ruling elite to things British, by and large.

SO: David McDowell, then, was profoundly influenced in his approach by his experiences with Arnold Smith, the first Commonwealth Secretary General?

SM: Yes, because he'd been and seen decolonisation close up. So that was one issue: decolonisation in the South Pacific and the emergence of a regional

political order in the South Pacific. A big and important part of that was the future relationship with the Commonwealth Secretariat and CFTC. This was a development relationship and we were trying to promote all that. The second issue was South Africa.

SO: Yes. If I could just ask you on the question of Pacific Island decolonisation and regional political order: Malcolm Fraser put forward the idea of a Commonwealth Regional Heads Meeting.

SM: He did.

SO: The first meeting of CHOGRM was in Sydney in 1978, followed by meetings in India (1980), Suva (1982) and in Papua New Guinea (1984). And by the time Bob Hawke became Prime Minister, it seems to have fizzled.

SM: I went to a couple of them with Sir Robert Muldoon. I well remember the one in India, the CHOGM (in late 1983.) I might just say about Commonwealth regionalism: the regional construct of the Asia Pacific was in its early days then. When you look at Asia Pacific regionalism today you see quite a highly developed institutionalised format. It's a brand with some substance, Asia Pacific regionalism now, through APEC and PIF and so on. But back in the 70s it hadn't really taken shape; ASEAN was very new, the South Pacific Forum was very new, but the notion that people from the Pacific and Asia didn't want to go to CHOGMs and have them dominated by African issues, was quite palpable. I think Fraser was reacting to that. But Muldoon had a more sceptical view. He wasn't sure that the regional dimension was going to really add value, and he and Malcolm Fraser had some differences about that.

Anyway the meeting in New Delhi, and why I remember it, is that the regional shipping line, the Pacific Forum shipping line which was a ODA-created shipping line and a piece of serious infrastructure for the independent region, was in trouble. Anyway, there was a South Pacific leaders' caucus on what was going to be done to rescue the shipping line. And so the reason I remember it is that all the leaders came in and sat down; Fraser chaired it, which Muldoon didn't like very much, and in the typical way of the Pacific leaders, there were long silences and not much of being said. And then somebody would say something and somebody would say something else. And then after about three quarters of an hour or an hour or something they all said, "Well, that's it, we're finished, we'd better go now." So everybody got up and left; and I was sitting there trying to figure out what they agreed. [laughter] What had they agreed on?

SO: A classic example of a creative communiqué?

SM: It was, absolutely. That's the reason I remember it, because I was quite young at the time and I really thought, "My God..." And I carefully went back over all my notes and talked to my colleagues and we managed to construct something. Yeah so that was the regional meeting.

SO: But this whole idea of a Commonwealth regional forum, following decolonisation...

SM: Got overtaken eventually by the rise of indigenous Asia Pacific regional institutions. It did because their real interest was (regional). They didn't need the Commonwealth to enable them to talk to each other, either in the Oceania grouping or the East Asia grouping. Once ASEAN began to find its feet and it was already ... CHOGRM was just an idea which was briefly seen to be a way to do something about regionalism. But in the finish it actually wasn't.

SO: How much do you think there was also an insidious sense that this was the Second XI, that they valued the Commonwealth bigger meetings precisely because they could have access to larger powers: India, Britain, Canada?

SM: You mean, the small states?

SO: Yes.

SM: Well I think it was easier for the Small States than the UN, especially the small states of Oceania. And they had some real interests at stake. I would say that the small states of the Pacific did attach some value to CHOGMs. They could make their case for ODA, they could keep in touch with Britain. It was unlikely that a British Prime Minister would ever visit those countries. It's hard to imagine how small and new they were; and the shock of self-government. So I think there was a genuine value, and eventually the Small States and Small State vulnerability did become a central theme of the Commonwealth.

SO: After the invasion of Grenada and the Delhi Heads of Government meeting?

SM: Well yeah. I was at that, when Mrs Charles spoke. I heard her speak. In the general debate, there had surfaced quite a groundswell of 'Oh, the Americans have over reacted and this has just been a piece of ...

SO: American imperialism?

SM: Not quite imperialism, but I think the sense that the military action was a piece of political theatre was in the air. It wasn't being directly talked about as plainly as that. Mrs Charles got up and she said, "I want to correct that, and tell you about what happened to me and about what happened to my country." And in effect, what she described was a new kind of security risk; in these very small states it's possible for - and we now know perfectly well with Haiti and places, and even more so in Africa - it's possible for a small state to be hollowed out by non-state actors, if they're well organised. It could be a criminal group, it could be a paramilitary organisation, it could be any number of things. But Mrs Charles turned the mood around completely. She said, "This is what really happened" and you could have heard a pin drop.

SO: John Compton also stood up and said, 'You know that a small and determined force could overwhelm mine.'

SM: Yeah, so small state political vulnerability also began to be put on the agenda a bit. It was quite moving actually listening to her. I went to two CHOGMs with David Lange, in Nassau and in Vancouver. In 1983, where was I?

SO: Well, you were assistant head of Asia Division, and you went as Political Counsellor to Washington.

SM: In my memory, and no, my memory's right, it was in the Bahamas that Mrs Charles spoke. And there was a bilateral afterwards with David Lange. And Mrs Charles was a former dental nurse and she said, "Ah, you've got a wonderful school dental programme in New Zealand. Do you think you might be able to help us with that?" And Lange was quite sympathetic to, and my memory is right. It was in the Bahamas.

SO: What was Robert Muldoon's general view of the Commonwealth?

SM: He wanted the Commonwealth to be involved in the decolonisation and in the post-decolonised new order in the Asia- Pacific. He felt that it was important that Britain remained engaged with its former colonies in the South Pacific region, directly and through the Commonwealth and he was very strong about the economic vulnerability of the small states. So on the one hand, he had a sense that there was a role in creating the new post-colonial stability and economic viability in Oceania. On the other hand, he was aware our sports contacts with South Africa were constantly drawing ever closer scrutiny. And there's no doubt that Ramphal and Anyaoku, as DSG under Ramphal, were the bearers of critical views from the wider Commonwealth leadership – and warnings, both formal and informal. Public opinion in New Zealand was slowly strengthening against apartheid. The Commonwealth was under Ramphal and Anyaoku was increasingly one of the leading international voices.

SO: Did you at the MFA have an opinion? Did Muldoon voice an opinion on the Gleneagles agreement as a sports boycott?

SM: He created the Gleneagles Agreement.

SO: Yes, he did help to create this.

SM: The Gleneagles Agreement was an attempted diplomatic fix between the good of isolating South Africa and what seemed to Muldoon and his party and some parts of public opinion in New Zealand, and the equal good which was countries have the right to play sport with whoever they want. "Just because you played sport with somebody doesn't mean you agree with their racial policies" was the sentiment of the sports bodies, who saw themselves as non-political. So an attempt to strike a fine balance between those two things.

SO: Had he gone to the Gleneagles retreat with that in his pocket?

SM: Well, I didn't go to Gleneagles, but my boss in the DPMC did. In the end the Gleneagles Agreement turned on that phrase about 'will make all reasonable effort to dissuade'. This phrase was a deliberate ambiguity. Of course the predominant feeling in the Commonwealth wasn't that you should just dissuade-passively; it was that a government should actively withdraw from sports contacts. And Muldoon was arguing that he wouldn't do that in our democracy, that the sports bodies had rights; and the key difference was between a government using its state powers to prevent any contact occurring, and a government stopping short of doing that and using limited persuasive means to talk the sports authorities into not doing something. So the Gleneagles agreement seemed like a way for New Zealand to remain inside a Commonwealth consensus about sports contact with South Africa. And it eventually came to grief on the fact that when the moment came for them to become strongly dissuasive of the rugby union, he went on television

here in New Zealand and said that they should think twice. So that didn't seem like strong dissuasion to anybody.

SO: Was this the source of much debate within your department?

SM: Ah, huge, yes. It was the other big issue. Massive.

SO: Was there a divide between you officials? Was there agreement that you as a Department should seek to persuade your Prime Minister of the international politics of this?

SM: No, it was a contest between influences. Of course the MFA advice covered the international political realities. But it was a contest between this advice and his politics which were realities also. Domestically, 50% of New Zealand, particularly rural and provincial New Zealand, didn't think the government should stop the rugby tour. And the other 50% did. So public opinion was very divided.

Ramphal came to call on him at The Berkeley Hotel in London in early 1981. It was Muldoon's favourite hotel; he'd first gone there after the war. When you got demobbed in 1945, they gave you a passage to England. A ship took you to England and then you made your way back to New Zealand. They gave them some sort of accommodation chit; he always liked to stay in The Berkeley. I was sat in the room and took the notes, from which to write up the record of the conversation, get him to approve it and send it back to Wellington. And then, on return, he'd interpret the discussion in a report to his Cabinet colleagues. What had happened in the conversation is that Ramphal had outlined to him the consequences for New Zealand of not fulfilling the spirit as well as the letter of the Gleneagles agreement. Ramphal said, "It would be a series of measures against New Zealand as a public mark of the Commonwealth disagreement with NZ policy, if you don't actively dissuade your rugby union from going ahead with this tour." Muldoon claimed that was outside the Gleneagles Agreement, but Ramphal said it was the meaning of it. And that exchange was recorded by me, put in the report to Cabinet and Muldoon came back to New Zealand, had a discussion with his Cabinet colleagues and went on television and issued this famous public appeal to "think twice".

That pretty much was the diplomatic crisis point because from then on, the rugby tour went ahead. We had massive civil disorder. I believe myself that Muldoon, knew very well what the risks were; faced with two kinds of rejection he just had to decide and make the best of it. He'd made his bed politically and he was going to lie in it; and he did then win the 1981 election by a very narrow margin. But I do think he was not just damaged in the eyes of the public, but I think he was damaged himself by the winter of discontent over the rugby tour in New Zealand. It was pretty horrific. Every Wednesday and every Saturday the police were clashing with protestors; it was a bloody winter.

SO: Was there any link that you were aware of between the New Zealand rugby union board and the British rugby union association?

SM: I think the rugby people in those days were pretty staunch with each other. "This is our game. Why should politicians interfere in it? Who is Sonny Ramphal to be telling us what to do?" There was almost no media coverage,

or, in those days, seriously credible mainstream voice in New Zealand about Africa. Pretty much for most New Zealanders of the middle and older age groups, what we knew about South Africa was we played rugby against them.

SO: Against the Springboks, yes.

SM: The consciousness of Sharpeville and Steve Biko and all those things wasn't deep or widespread in the public. It was held by people who were in principle morally opposed to apartheid. I don't really think it was, until probably New Zealanders began to get a glimpse of Nelson Mandela that public opinion was strengthening against sports contacts anyway. But unless people had lived in South Africa, New Zealanders didn't really understand apartheid as a concrete reality. People were opposed to it as an abstract evil, not as a system of discrimination. Do you understand what I'm saying?

SO: Yes, I do.

SM: Anyway so in 1981 over the rugby tour that was the moment when those things came together.

SO: So there was a sharp change, then, when David Lange becomes Labour Prime minister?

SM: Absolutely. Oh yes.

SO: Was there then a debate in your department about a push for economic sanctions?

SM: By the end of 81, or start of 82, I had left the Prime Minister's Department, and had gone back to the Foreign Ministry. I wasn't involved in that sort of discussion and then I went to Washington; and the only engagement I really had with Commonwealth things was because of the meeting in the Bahamas and the other was in Vancouver.

MFA raided nearby posts for people to go and make up the delegation. They tried to use people who had been to one before; a couple of them before and knew what they were doing. And so really from 81 to 87 or 88, apart from going to those CHOGMs, I didn't have a lot to do with the Commonwealth.

SO: So what is your recollection of the Bahamas meeting? David Lange described it as there being a tight inner group who were pressing Thatcher, and 'the rest were left pressing our noses against the window.' Is that your recollection of there being a core group that were trying to exert pressure on Thatcher for economic sanctions?

SM: Yes, I remember the drama over the communiqué and all that. In the finish, Mrs Thatcher was never bothered by standing alone in terms of her domestic politics.

SO: Not at all.

SM: And on an issue like this, I think she backed herself and others, that British public opinion would support her.

SO: Why was Lange left out of that group? It was Bob Hawke, Rajiv Gandhi, Brian Mulroney...

SM: Well, have a guess.

SO: Why?

SM: Because at that stage we were in the middle of our anti-nuclear rift with the United States, which was also a rift with Australia. And with Britain to some extent. It caused great difficulties for Australia and Britain. And both Thatcher and Hawke were very jaundiced about David Lange because of it. And I don't think they thought that he belonged; this was the heavy hitters, not the middle powers, nor small powers.

SO: In terms of New Zealand's anti-nuclear policy: Professor McIntyre on Saturday commented that David Lange was a phenomenal politician, with a brilliant brain, and a lawyer. Lange's wit was something that Professor McIntyre emphasised. He described how the New Zealand press corps made a pact amongst themselves to try to get through one of Lange's press conferences without laughing at any of his jokes; but that they never managed that, because Lange was so very funny. McIntyre also said he really questioned how much Lange genuinely believed in policies, or in political strategies. Does that square with your recollection?

SM: I don't think he connected viscerally with either the left or the right factions of the Labour party. I think he was not a great one for being an institutional insider. I think he saw himself as outside a lot of those kind of constructs. And I think he wasn't a conviction politician of the left or the right. He was inclined to take a less ideological view of things in some ways but he was very clever. He could present himself to either side as being in complete intellectual sympathy and understanding with their goals and objectives.

SO: That's an exercise in logic and argumentation.

SM: Yes, as an exercise in logic and argumentation. I think his natural instincts were... to have a lot of sympathy and empathy with the needs of the disadvantaged and the poor. That was his Christian upbringing. But I don't think he was ever committed to a socialist economy.

SO: Well no, because as Prime Minister, he brought in the factory and trade union reforms.

SM: Precisely.

SO: So was then the anti-nuclear policy the trade-off within the Labour party, for these reforms?

SM: No, I think the anti-nuclear policy was a touchstone issue for the Left and centre Left factions; and economic reform was the touchstone issue for the Right. And David Lange had to hold his government together so he moved between the two poles and did what he could. I think there's plenty of evidence that they held themselves together as a government for five or six years; but finally the tension between the two factions broke into the open and the party broke apart.

- SO: So you were Political Counsellor at the New Zealand Embassy in Washington, serving as New Zealand intelligence liaison officer at this particular point. Your government's policy must have made your job pretty difficult.**
- SM: Yeah, well it was what it was.
- SO: Yes. Were you involved in any of the negotiations? Was this government to government? Were you swept up in the growing standoff between the 'neither-confirm-or-deny' deterrence, and the anti-nuclear advocates?**
- SM: I had four years of that. Yeah. But it's nothing much to do with the Commonwealth that.
- SO: No, it wasn't; but on the other hand, you have said it had an impact in that David Lange was excluded from the inner circles of discussions at Nassau.**
- SM: Yes.
- SO: But it was a driving and key policy, polarising policy for New Zealand in the region?**
- SM: Yes, It was a genuine and deep rift with the world' superpower, and our ally/superpower. Yes, so it was pretty serious.
- SO: Yes, because Secretary of State George Shultz suspended intelligence sharing when...**
- SM: Oh yeah, yeah, that's correct. So a diplomat's job is to try and keep the two parties who may have reached a political impasse communicating with each other and talking to each other. And keep doors open and keep windows open, and keep negotiating and keep trying to promote negotiated outcomes to disputes. That's what we do.
- SO: Indeed. I worked with the British Embassy during the Falklands War, so I know how that works.**
- SM: Yes, so that's your role in the great game, to prevent a deeply felt political policy dispute from getting any worse.
- SO: So when did you start to feel there was an amelioration of international tensions; and this was less of a divisive issue between New Zealand, the United States and Australia? By 1986 Gorbachev had of course been elected First Secretary of the CPSU, and there was a progressive amelioration from the first Geneva Reagan-Gorbachev summit.**
- SM: That depends how you measure these things. One way that they are normally measured is by the degree to which the political leaders, senior political leaders of two countries, actually talk to each other and visit each other and receive each other. All of that is symbolic of the nature of the relationship. So as far as I'm concerned, the tide didn't really turn until after 9/11. The tide didn't turn until Helen Clarke visited Washington and Condoleezza Rice

visited New Zealand. That would be my judgement, and that was post 9/11. Up until that point it was a limited and overall less-than-properly functional bilateral relationship and had elements of dysfunction in it.

SO: Thank you very much for that reflection. You also went to the Vancouver Commonwealth Heads meeting then in 1987, as a product of ‘pulling in the troops from the region’ to help the Prime Minister’s delegation.

SM: Yes, yes.

SO: Any particular reflections on that? That was post the Eminent Person’s Group [EPG]’s visit to South Africa, Thatcher was under progressive pressure for both economic and financial sanctions; David Lange was still excluded from the inner circle of counsellors because of the anti-nuclear policy.

SM: You’ve got to remember that things like the famous Oxford Union debate were conducted on British soil. You must remember that from 1982 until the arrival of Gorbachev, Europe itself was in the grip of...

SO: The ‘second Cold War.’ I remember that very clearly indeed.

SM: Exactly. So no British Prime Minister would particularly welcome another prime minister coming onto his or her soil and in effect indirectly offering a comparison between the British Government’s posture and a really activist anti-nuclear/pro-disarmament policy. Bob Hawke had an anti-nuclear movement in the Australian Labour party; they were full of admiration for David Lange and thought Hawke should do the same.

SO: But there was a passionate CND movement in the UK as well, and it was endorsed by the British Labour Party.

SM: Right. So Lange was appealing to groups that neither of those prime ministers wanted to give too much air time to, because they were both committed to the alliance with the United States, right? So you can see why they were jaundiced.

SO: Yes, Lange would have been regarded a ‘turbulent’ politician.

SM: Although he said, “We don’t intend to export our policy”, he used other countries as a stage for dramatize it.

SO: Yes, yes. I can totally see why they would have a rather dim view of that.

SM: Yes, yes.

SO: So you went back to New Zealand in 1987 and then became head of the Policy Advisory group in 1989. This was the era in which Mike Moore and then Jim Bolger became Prime Minister?

SM: Well, Lange resigned; Sir Geoffrey Palmer took over, and then when it became clear that he was unlikely to be able to win the 1990 election, the Labour Party abandoned him and Mike Moore took over the leadership of the Labour Party and was very briefly Prime Minister before losing the election in 1990. And then Jim Bolger came along. In 1990 Palmer had created the joint

Prime Minister and Cabinet Department; it was legally part of the civil service and politically neutral; headed by a civil servant appointed by our public service commission. The first CEO of this new department was David McDowell. He was appointed during the Palmer-Moore period. But David left to do an international conservation job and in 1991 I took over as the CEO, at the time very early on in the Bolger government and stayed right through the Bolger years.

SO: So did you accompany Jim Bolger to the Harare Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting?

SM: I went up to Victoria Falls to the retreat and sat around at the great Victoria Falls Hotel while the heads were out at Elephant Hills.

SO: Yes. I know that Robert Armstrong went to that meeting as well. It's not just a network of heads at a Commonwealth meeting; it's a network of their officials?

SM: Well, it's not really. This is the problem. CHOGM is, the only summit I know of where the leaders go in without an advisor to the retreat. In Asia and other parts of the world they have a leader plus one senior official; and in some places they even have a listening room where other senior officials can go and listen to the discussion amongst the leaders.

SO: To keep the leader on-side, and on policy?

SM: Well yes, but it does make some sense. I understand the history and thinking behind the CHOGM practice it but I never thought it was ever a really good model. I thought the Asian model better; you put leaders together in a room where there's not a clutter of officials, and you try to create conditions for them to talk freely and frankly. But they are leaders, and they may need some support of some sort or another. And they may even prefer it. By the time we had the CHOGM in Queenstown... my mind was well made up - that I didn't really care for this as convention.. sanctifying something ...

SO: In 1995?

SM: Yes, I said to Jim Bolger, "Well, I'm not prepared to have you go in there and chair that for two days without any support from us." I said, "You've got to tell Emeka Anyaoku that you want a senior New Zealand official of your choice in the retreat."

SO: And that was really quite an innovation?

SM: Well, I don't know whether it was, but Mr Bolger did it; I sat through the retreat. Anyaoku I think agreed with it.

SO: Informality? Getting heads together?

SM: I thought, "He's my prime minister. He's got a huge job on his hands because of the stuff about Nigeria - Saro-Wiwa's pending execution and everything was suddenly in diplomatic turmoil. And we had to run the whole multilateral meeting. And in our system the PM was also committed to the critical hosting aspect bilaterally and public media; appearance logistics etc. I always thought he needed an extra pair of eyes and ears; and it needed to be a New Zealand

pair of eyes and ears, not the Secretariat's. I didn't get in the way of Emeka, or anybody, but he was my prime minister and I wasn't going to leave him in that position; and so I went. And it's what Bolger wanted.

SO: Tell me: in the run up to this 1995 meeting, when was the offer made about having the CHOGM in Auckland in the first place?

SM: The retreat was in Queenstown.

SO: Yes, exactly. The CHOGM itself was in Auckland.

SM: The S-G approached ... when would they have approached us? I have a feeling that we'd actually been approached as early as Vancouver.

SO: Oh really?

SM: Yes. You know, "it's your turn coming up." John Larkindale (ex MFA, coordinator of the 1995 CHOGM) would know the exact answer to that, but we ourselves had begun to feel that it was something that was within our grasp logistically; we weren't too small to run this properly.

SO: Was there any sense also that this would be useful for New Zealand's renewed internationalism of the 90s?

SM: Yes, I think there was some kind of sense of an idea whose time had come; we thought we were big enough and smart enough; and it was the sort of thing we could do. And, of course, within four years we had the APEC (meeting) in Auckland as well. So yes, it was the first really big international conference ever held in New Zealand; the first really, really big one. And, apart from the private and public diplomatic drama of it, it was a logistic success.

SO: The drama in the run up to the meeting was New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance, and then Nigeria on the eve of the conference.

SM: Yeah. And it was Nigeria. It was a very, very difficult decision to suspend Nigeria. It was a wrenching decision for some of the African heads of state, including Mandela, because Nigeria had bankrolled and sustained ANC, and helped other frontline states as well. Nigeria had used its power and wealth and influence on behalf of regional consciousness in Africa.

SO: The news came through of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight other Ogoni activists just before the retreat.

SM: Yes, on the Saturday morning. They were all leaving Auckland at about 8 o'clock, for the retreat in Queenstown.

SO: How much was your prime minister, Jim Bolger, right at the front of the decision for Nigeria's suspension, compared to his position on the CMAG idea?

SM: He had to chair a meeting of the leaders where the question was right in front of him. There wasn't any possibility of dodging the question of what is this meeting of Commonwealth leaders going to do about Nigeria? And on the Saturday morning Jim Bolger had a very quick round of soundings of other

delegations and leaders as to whether the retreat had to be grasp this issue, or not. And they all said, "Yes, we can't avoid it." They all realised that there was a moment of truth and they would need to face it or lose credibility. It would be very damaging to the credibility of the Commonwealth if the leaders came out of their retreat without a clear and tangible position. This was no time for flimflam and I think Anyaoku was very influential in saying, "No, we've got to deal with this. There's no way that a bland communiqué is going to do the trick here." And Bolger felt that himself and so did most of them. So they spent the whole of the Saturday wrestling with the issue of whether they could reach a consensus to suspend Nigeria.

SO: I understand that Robert Mugabe was one of the leaders who took a great deal of persuading, because he felt there shouldn't be internal interference?

SM: Well, it was not just Mugabe. Jerry Rawlings, and others. All spoke more than once, several times, and they agonised; they went back and forth. And Nelson Mandela was of course very influential. Jim Bolger was a very good chairman of a meeting. He had a good ear and he was experienced in hearing what people were saying and not saying. His political instinct to summing up and just grabbing the essence of a consensus as it was forming was very good. And so he chaired them through an extremely difficult meeting to the conclusion they came to, and it was done more or less without any visible voting or anything.

SO: Consensus again?

SM: Well, it was an interesting example of the way you can achieve a consensus by the time nobody's got any sense of being unheard. People's decision not to speak again could be taken as an indication that they'd said all they wanted to say and they would not stand out against an emerging view. It's quite a subtle process.

SO: Yes, it is. Had you already drafted the idea of a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group?

SM: No, I can't remember the detail of that. My recollection is that that was being worked on in the margins by a group of senior officials. I think Britain, Canada and Australia may have been leading. John Major came to CHOGM but had to go back early because of Memorial Day in the UK. I remember because I went out to the airport in Auckland on behalf of the PM to farewell him on the Sunday afternoon before the communiqué was released. I can't remember who it was but someone else will tell you no doubt. I think that the Secretariat, who was the deputy secretary general then? For Anyaoku?

SO: Sir Humphrey Maud? Or Krishnan Srinivasan.

SM: Yeah, Srinivasan. So the Secretariat and a group of senior officials, including the British, South Africans, obviously, and others ... I think that somewhere in the margins of the communiqué drafting they were working on the CMAG idea because the whole issue of how to treat member states whose governments were rights violators and abusers of norms, going back as far as Idi Amin, had become critical to Commonwealth credibility.

SO: While you were CEO of MFAT (after you'd come back from being High Commissioner in Australia), how important was the Commonwealth as a platform for New Zealand foreign policy, and used to enhance either its bilateral relations with other Commonwealth states, or to boost New Zealand's international standing? International affairs had started to change considerably with the growing role of civil society.

SM: It's a summit. It's an opportunity for us, New Zealand, to engage countries and leaders with whom we have common interests.

SO: So did you think of the Commonwealth as an entity between summits?

SM: It has been and it still is in regard to some of the small states, and small and vulnerable states' issues. The great difference between when Muldoon was going to CHOGMs and Helen Clarke is that, for Muldoon, the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting still had some relevance. And you went to the Finance Ministers' meeting and you went onto CHOGM; and then you went onto the World Bank and IMF meetings in Washington and you could establish positions and seek to form diplomatic alliances with other countries to advance issues. You could start at a CHOGM, at a CFM and take them forward to Washington. You could caucus. But that was dying by the 80s- becoming increasingly irrelevant. The Commonwealth wasn't an economic construct.

This didn't diminish its political summit value; and in a curious way, it was enhanced, as decolonisation moved on to a post-colonial order in Oceania and various problems were emerging like Bougainville, the Solomons, trouble in Vanuatu, and of course Fiji. Besides political troubles, all of them were experiencing economic constraints of one sort or another. The notion that small states, particularly small island states, needed more attention; their vulnerabilities were no less and indeed maybe greater than some of the traditional LLDCs. I do give the Commonwealth some credit for pushing that idea into the international consciousness. Being involved with a second generation of political leaders in the small and vulnerable states of the Pacific, and other parts of the world, is a bit of a brand for the Commonwealth. But for us – NZ - in the Asia Pacific region, now that Asia Pacific regionalism is so well institutionalised and has its own structures and architecture, we don't need CHOGMs or CHOGRMs to talk to likeminded countries in the Asia Pacific.

SO: So what do you then say for the Commonwealth going forward about its viability and its areas of activity? What would be your take as the foremost senior civil servant on New Zealand's foreign affairs?

SM: I don't have an answer to that, Sue. A lot's been made this being the age of globalisation and networking. Civil society networks have a deeper value maybe than they once did, and the Commonwealth still stands for something about particular kinds of forms of government. It does stand for what you might call, at least to some degree, 'the open society': tolerance and openness and so on. Core principles. So I suppose it can contribute to the values debate. But that becomes very sensitive too; New Zealand and Pakistan don't necessarily view politics or governance or how do you keep your country upright in the same, or even similar terms. It's a very different question if you're living in Pakistan from living in New Zealand.

So you can only take so far, in practice, the idea that arising from the core principles there's a set of commonly applicable values. And I don't want to take it too far. I have a feeling that nothing lasts forever and maybe what will happen is that in 50 years' time, if there are changes in constitutional relationships with Britain and the UK, with all the talk about republics and Australia and New Zealand.

SO: I was going to ask, how far do you feel that the Queen has been that 'invisible glue' for the Commonwealth? And what does that say for the headship going forward?

SM: Well, I think there's something to be said for it. There are plenty of things you hang on to; you're not quite sure of their residual value, but faced with the choice of actually not having them versus having them? No New Zealand Prime Minister that I've worked for has ever said, "I think we should be out of the Commonwealth." And I don't see that happening.

SO: How much did you, given your very senior position in Foreign Affairs, value having a New Zealand Secretary General?

SM: Well, I've got a lot of time for Don McKinnon. He'd been a very good Foreign Minister so I was glad for him personally. I felt he would succeed but within limits not of his making. I thought it might be very difficult for him personally to be credible in Africa and Asia, just because he was "old (white) Commonwealth". Emeka (Anyaoku) had a lot going for him in that respect, and so did Ramphal for that matter. And I didn't think the Commonwealth as an international political institution was capable of being lead forward to a new and more golden destiny; it was a question of 'Could it find a limited but nonetheless reasonably positive, value proposition in international (affairs), in the crowded world of international relations?' Could it cleverly, carefully and wisely, play itself into being part of solving a recognised political dispute or problem, and then deliver? It's like anything: if people are actually looking for a way out and a Commonwealth Secretary General presents himself, maybe something will happen? And that's all to the good. So it's around that informal dispute resolution possibility that you think 'Maybe, yes, maybe it can have some occasional and incidental, but serious role as a dispute resolver or mediator.' I can't get much beyond that.

SO: I'm aware that McKinnon, while Secretary General, was faced with and put forward solutions to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands, political upheaval in Fiji, and also supported small states against the OECD.

SM: On the Bougainville peace process, he legitimately deserves his share of credit for when he was New Zealand's Foreign Minister. It was important to involve the Commonwealth and others, but the grunty part of Bougainville was done bilaterally by New Zealand. Australia couldn't do it. The Solomons, however, was an Australia/New Zealand stabilisation intervention. And East Timor was an Australia/New Zealand plus important others stabilisation intervention. What I'm saying is that in all three cases, I don't think you can attribute any of them to multilateral or plurilateral diplomacy. Sure, the UN and the Commonwealth, to some extent, and even ASEAN and the PIF to some extent, might be considered important legitimisers of these sort of operations. And indeed we wouldn't do things unless you can be reasonably sure we were going to have some of that. You can't just do these things; you've got to have consent and legitimacy for them. You can't just go around the world

landing on people's doorsteps and saying, "We'll fix your problem for you." So external legitimisers and support is very important: if you've got the consent and the permission to go in and stabilise; or bring post conflict stability, or restore order, or whatever you want to call it. You've also actually got to be able to carry it out.

SO: You need the 'hard power' which the Commonwealth, as a 'soft power' organisation, doesn't have?

SM: Thank you, yes, well put. That's what I wanted to say.

SO: Thank you very much indeed, Simon.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]