VOICE FILE NAME: COHP Mark Robinson (Part Two)

Key:
SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
MR: Mark Robinson (Respondent)

Part Two:

SO: This is Sue Onslow talking to Mr Mark Robinson in a second interview on Thursday, 8th August 2013, in a delightful garden in Ramsbury, Wiltshire. Mark, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me for a second time. I wondered if you could elaborate slightly on your comments in the first interview on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka in 1979. How much staff-work was put into the preparation for that meeting?

MR: An enormous amount. About six months before the meeting, Sonny Ramphal put together a sort of inner cabinet. That's not quite the right word, but it comprised a group of ten from all over the Secretariat with their various specialities – from Emeka Anyaoku to me. What we all had in common was an interest in the politics of Southern Africa, because that was the issue: there was no other major political issue. It was divisive in those days, let's be frank, between Britain and the rest of the Commonwealth. Although Australia and New Zealand appeared to be sensitive to the British view, they weren't as close to Britain as Britain would have liked them to be.

SO: This pre-dated the British general election in May 1979. So, Sonny Ramphal was looking at the British domestic scene.

MR: That is correct. He was looking to see where consensus might lie, but feared it might not be found given Margaret Thatcher's stated views.

SO: [Ramphal was] seeing that the position of the Labour government, by this point – after the 'Winter of discontent' and their particular position in Parliament – meant that there was an increasing likelihood that the Conservatives were going to be elected.

MR: In 1978, Sonny Ramphal asked Francis Pym if he would come and have a chat. Francis Pym brought Richard Luce and Sonny included me; it was just the four of us in his office and we went right to the heart of the issues and that was when, on departure, Francis Pym said, "Could Mark and Richard go on talking about these things?"

SO: Okay. So, in putting that team together with a keen interest in Southern African issues, obviously there were...

MR: It was people like John Syson and Roland Brown; Emeka, of course; Moni Malhoutra, of course; Mike Faber and Chris Laidlaw. And Chris Laidlaw, a former Captain of the All Blacks, had been recruited. We shared an office, even though we had to look at each other through binoculars across the chandelier. [*Laughter*]

SO: It's a very glorious office, I have to say, in Marlborough House.

MR: It wasn't that office. The first floor was closed in those days because of floor loading. This was only corrected when Marlborough House was closed for renovation. So, we were upstairs on the second floor above – on the right hand side as you look towards The Mall.

SO: How much travel did the group do around the Front Line states in the run up to Lusaka? Were you involved in any of the preparatory diplomacy to make sure that Front Line leaders would be sensitive to Mrs Thatcher's own first heads of government meeting, and to try and coordinate the diplomacy to chivvy her towards an all-party conference on Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

MR: Sonny was very personal with his heads of government and he would do that. I didn't actually go on any of those missions, although I'd always be briefed. He'd tell us in great detail what he'd achieved –what he had wanted to achieve, first of all, and what he had achieved. It was all about creating a consensus. It wasn't difficult to achieve the consensus – Britain excepted – but it needed to be consensus without hyperbole, so that Britain could buy in if it so wished.

SO: Yes. So, for your third Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1981, did you do much the same preparatory work? Was Melbourne expected to be contentious? After all, the Zimbabwe question had been resolved.

MR: Yes, but the South African apartheid question hadn't, and I forget where we were on Namibia but that was all coming to a boil.

SO: So, again, did Sonny Ramphal put together a preparatory group of the same type of people before the conference, because Southern Africa issues were very much to the fore?

MR: Always the same type of people.

SO: Having read the press publications about the Melbourne meeting, it seemed to be a much calmer Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Is that your recollection?

MR: It was definitely a calmer meeting. The tension, if it was tension, was that Malcolm Fraser always had ideas of his own and I will sum this up to you in one way. The preparation of the communiqué always started back in London and a tremendous amount of work went into it. We always knew there would be a row led by Dom Mintoff in Malta about Palestine and this would have to be worked into the communiqué. Consensus was not possible, so Malta fell into the "Most heads of government agreed…" category, although those that didn't were never mentioned! I would now call it a 'nearly consensus'. Of course, everything in the communiqué had to be by consensus. But Malcolm Fraser, at about nine in the morning on the final day, appeared and said, "Is Sonny here?" And he wasn't. He said, "Oh, this is my communiqué," and gave us a completely different draft of the communiqué. I read through it and I said to Sonny, "Malcolm's given us a fresh draft of the communiqué." I said, "It's extremely good, but it's never going to fly." He said, "Give it to me, leave it with me," and that was the last we ever heard of it.

SO: [*Laughter*] So, it was resolved?

MR: It was resolved, and we were back to our draft.

SO: But that was classic behaviour by Malcolm Fraser?

MR: In a way, yes. He wanted to feel he was part of...

SO: Well, he was *the* head, as host.

MR: He was, yes, but he was 'A Very Interested Head'. He wanted the meeting to be an outstanding success – which it was, which is why you have this impression there was no controversy. But then I can give you an example. We were at the final, all-night CHOGM communiqué drafting session, which I was at, but Moni, who had been in charge of the drafting, couldn't be in the final CHOGM session as Ramphal could only have two – Emeka Anyaoku, DSG, and myself.

SO So, you were the record editors, taking notes?

MR: No, that was done by our conference staff sitting to one side. I was Sonny's run-around-the-table man. President Daniel arap Moi proposed an amendment and Sonny turned round and said to me, "What on earth did he say?" I said, "Oh, I think he said something like this," and wrote what I thought it was down. He said, "Go and show it to President Moi and see if that's what he really said." So, I did, and Moi was delighted with it. Then I came back and Sonny said, "There's only one Prime Minister here who might have had a different interpretation. Will you go round and talk to Margaret Thatcher and see if she's happy with it?" She said, "I couldn't have written it better myself," I think, with a wink, so that was a storm in a teacup resolved without chaos or panic.

SO: Yes, but there were record editors sitting in at the meeting as well as the transcribers so...

MR: Of course, but the communiqué had to be approved by all the heads at the table, including any amendments which were few. These were cleared word

for word by Sonny, assisted by me. Only then were they given to the record keepers.

SO: So, that's how the smoother final versions were produced?

MR: The draft communiqué would have been drafted and approved by senior officials at the all-night session and long before that, starting in London. There was no opportunity to come back afterwards because everything had to be formally settled in the final session of the CHOGM. Controversial elements like the Lusaka Declaration were drafted either in retreat or, in the case of the Lusaka Agreement, by the group of ten, and not let near officials. This is why heads valued the retreat or that kind of caucusing so much. Without such a personal approach there would not have been a Lusaka Agreement.

SO: Mark, between Melbourne in 1981 and when you left, having been elected to be MP for Newport in 1983, what was the principal volume of your work?

MR: Well, my work was always the Secretary General's work, so Chris Laidlaw and I dealt with all his Secretariat correspondence. Not personal correspondence, [but] looking at final drafts of his speeches – you could not draft a speech for Sonny because he would always turn any material into his own speech – and inter-departmental communication. There were Ministerial meetings to which one of us would go in advance of the SG to make sure any problems were resolved before he arrived. There was also assistance for his Brandt Commission work to be arranged.

SO: He wrote his speeches himself?

MR: Yes, he would write his speeches himself; he loved doing that. He eventually got somebody called Clive Jordan [who] would come up with wonderful things for Sonny to put into his speeches, rather than writing the speeches, and he worked in the Information Division alongside Patsy Robertson and Nick Harman, who was the first Head of Information when I arrived. He was another very good guy, who was always consulted and who worked with Patsy Robertson and Charles Gunawardena.

SO: So, between 1981 and 83, then, the ongoing problem was with South Africa, how to support Namibian students, and keeping the pressure on the apartheid government. Do you recall any discussion about whether South Africa had a nuclear capability and whether this made apartheid even more problematic?

MR: No. I don't think there really was any. In a way, it was a bit of a red herring and in any event, the great powers were left to deal with that issue. In any event, when Mandela came to power, I understand he got rid of them all, having made clear he would.

SO: Sonny said that he had private discussions with Abdul Minty, Secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

MR: Yes, he would have done. Indeed, Chris Laidlaw worked closely with Abdul Minty, who was disappointed, I understand, by his lack of serious preferment when Mandela came to power.

SO: Abdul Minty had then moved to Norway to run his Campaign for Nuclear and Military Disarmament.

MR: But we knew the issue of nuclear weapons in South Africa was never going to come up in a CHOGM – end of story.

SO: How quickly were you selected and elected as an MP?

MR: Well, I was actually selected a month before the election and a week before it was called.

SO: So, you had to resign quite quickly from the Secretariat?

MR: No, I never resigned at that stage. I took leave of absence. We didn't follow the Foreign Office precedent. It was agreed that I would formally resign the day the election was called, but I wouldn't clear my desk and Sonny expected me to return to work the week after. He rang me up on the Saturday and said, "What am I going to do?" And then he said, "It's alright, congratulations. David Steel has been trying to steer someone called Stuart Mole my way." So, Sonny had a lot of luck. There was always somebody who would come in to replace a missing brick.

SO: And Stuart is a brick.

MR: Oh, yes. He went on. He was Emeka's man throughout, and we now work together on *The Round Table*, so that's nice.

SO: Mark, how far did you stay involved in things Commonwealth once you became a Member of Parliament?

MR: Well I did, to start with, because I, along with Tony Nelson, re-established a British-Canadian Parliamentary Group as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It had just been allowed to fall into abeyance, and considering they let us sit in a military jet to fly back from Canada, this was just common sense: "Why on earth has this been allowed to collapse?" We got two Labour MPs who were equally keen and got the whole thing up and running again with the full support of the Canadian High Commission. I went on to do a lot of work with the CPA, but this was cut short in my first term because I'd only been there two years when I was in the Government as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales.

SO: You were in that great cohort of Conservative MPs that came in in 1983, on the back of the Falklands War. I apologise, I should have asked you: how much did the Falklands campaign cause problems for the Commonwealth and within the Secretariat? Do you recall?

MR: No, I was on honeymoon when the war broke out.

SO: You must have thought it was a late April Fool!

MR: I sort of did. It didn't really feature. There were no special Commonwealth meetings on the Falklands, as far as I know. There may have been private ones. This was 1982, and I'd just got married, so I had a lot of leave. We had a two months honeymoon [and] went to Mexico. All I remember was a

Mexican boat man saying, “Oh, he’s British. Of course, we all support the Argentineans in this war but we hope the British give them a jolly good kick up the backside.”

SO: [*Laughter*] Back to things parliamentarian... So, having revived with Tony Nelson the British-Canadian Parliamentary Group, how were you able to put yourself forward for the Foreign Affairs Committee and take a particular watching brief of what was going on in the Commonwealth and the anti-apartheid struggle?

MR: Actually, that came afterwards. After my “controversial” maiden speech, I was summoned to see the Chief Whip who said, “That was a very good speech; you’re on the Foreign Affairs Committee.” That was Michael Jopling, if I remember correctly.

SO: So, you were courted?

MR: No, they’d been very slow forming the Select Committees because in those days, there was a House of Commons Committee of Selection and the Labour and the Tories would share out the slots and allow the occasional Liberal on – there were only occasional Liberals in those days.

SO: So, did you take any particular stance in the Foreign Affairs Committee on South Africa?

MR: It didn’t work like that; it was all enquiry related. You didn’t sit around talking about other issues, and of course, our first issue was to investigate why the American invasion of Grenada had ever happened and what really went on. We went out to Grenada and no sooner was I really through all of that than I was in the Welsh office and off the committee.

SO: When you were investigating the American invasion, could you call for papers from the Foreign Office?

MR: Oh, yes.

SO: You could call for witnesses?

MR: Yes. The Committee did, assisted by its Clerks, but it was really more interesting what we found out on the ground by talking to the Governor General Sir Paul Scoone, who’d been trying to get messages out – apparently putting messages into bottles and throwing them in the ocean. Essentially, his messages were smuggled out.

SO: Was Sir Paul Scoone also using other British diplomats, that you identified?

MR: He was using any track he could find, yes, but he didn’t have to be told. He could use his Caribbean colleagues. It wasn’t a sophisticated government; you could pick up the phone to anyone. And he could send messages out that might be taken by a person getting on a boat, getting on a plane. There were flights coming in and out, I think.

SO: Were there any particular surprises in your investigations?

MR: From my experience on holiday in the Isle of Lewis, it was island mentality. Everybody seemed to know what everybody else was saying – friend or foe.

SO: Did they really know, or did they think they just did?

MR: I think they just thought they did, but they'd all talk about it in the bar or whatever and I got some pretty accurate assessments of Maurice Bishop, the former Prime Minister who was killed, who had made a lot of friends among Commonwealth leaders at CHOGM. He was a very intelligent man. The Commonwealth was shocked by his murder, and nobody seemed to have much time for Bernard Coard or Mrs Coard. I think he came out of prison recently. They were regarded as a bit of a joke.

SO: Jokers with guns.

MR: Yes, jokers with guns, but no means of defence. I think I told you the Americans landed and the press landed first and watched the soldiers firing guns at nothing. This gave the word 'invasion' a new meaning.

SO: Ron Sanders was in New York as a Caribbean diplomat at the UN and so had a good view of what went on.

MR: I'm sure Ron was doing a bit of passing of messages, too.

SO: I think he was.

MR: Sonny's son-in-law.

SO: You then moved into government in 1985, in your first term, but then in 1987 your parliamentary career stalled as you were not re-elected.

MR: I was in the ministerial car one day and there was nothing the next. That's how it goes. I didn't even know that I was a minister for two days after the election. I was still a minister but nobody told me that, because you only resign when your resignation is accepted. The government always has to go on – there is no period where there is not a government.

SO: Yes, it's continuity.

MR: If government had changed power, then everybody resigns and that's why the incoming Prime Minister appoints their cabinet the same day or thereabouts, because departments have to be run or as Sir Humphrey would say, "Well, it had to be seen to be run by a minister even if they're not."

SO: You were re-elected in 1992 for Somerton and Frome.

MR: Nobody in Frome ever knows anybody from Somerton and vice versa. Nobody moves further west than they have to. Frome looks to Bristol and Bath; Somerton looks to Taunton and Exeter.

SO: Clearly a very divided constituency. You became PPS for Ministry of Overseas Development, Lynda Chalker?

MR: Yes. Normally, you have a year to re-establish yourself before you're ever asked to do anything. I was given a day. Lynda had no junior ministers and

she needed help because ODA was part of the Foreign Office, and this PPS would sometimes find [himself] doing what junior ministers would do if there had been any. Although, I was greeted off one plane by Sir Len Allinson in Zambia saying, "Minister, welcome to Zambia," and as we were walking quietly away because of all these big cars and important people, I said, "Unless something's happened in London, I'm not actually a minister." He said, "I know that, but they don't. Keep up the act."

SO: [*Laughter*] I did know that. Very good!

MR: So, I fitted naturally; Lynda knew that I had had four years on the Board of the Commonwealth Development Corporation before that, thanks to Chris Patten, which I absolutely adored. I was amazed to find that Indonesia was its second biggest programme, although not in the Commonwealth. I went right through Indonesia, through Irian Jaya and into Papua New Guinea, examining ten years of work in Indonesia. I was given the task because I was about twenty years younger, the youngest member of the Board, and the Chairman had got over the idea of having this political hack implanted on him.

SO: Mark, from your own particular perspective of being involved in the Commonwealth Development Corporation and working at ODA, how important was the wider Commonwealth family in helping to provide 'the warp and weft' of the threads of the Commonwealth?

MR: Well, the wider Commonwealth family is extraordinarily important because it gives much substance to the Commonwealth. There is hardly an area from health to architecture that doesn't have a Commonwealth liaison or NGO or civil society organisation, and we mustn't forget the IGO part of it. All contribute in their own ways.

SO: When did you become more active and involved in matters Zimbabwean? Was it after 2000 or in the 90s?

MR: Oh, no, only very recently. At the time of the signing of the General Political Agreement in 2009**,** Patrick Wintour came up with the idea of trying to do something on Zimbabwe and this is how the committee was formed. Then we got the support of Vijay Krishnarayan, the then-Deputy Director at the Commonwealth Foundation, and the Director Mark Collins, and then after the Trinidad CHOGM we got more support from the Secretary General than we ever expected. He allowed us to use Marlborough House for our meetings.

SO: Did you go to the Trinidad meeting?

MR: Yes. Of the recent CHOGM meetings, I went to Edinburgh, I didn't go to Nigeria, and then recently I've been to Uganda, Trinidad and Perth. Perth was constructive and fun.

SO: Going back to your parliamentary career, you had of course become PPS to Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, in 1995.

MR: Yes, and we talked a lot about the Commonwealth. We both were frustrated that the great mandarins in the Foreign Office would doff their hats to the Commonwealth but always appeared to have something more important to do in the context of international meetings. I think Ted Heath had drummed into

the Foreign Office the lack of Commonwealth relevance. His view was that the Commonwealth had had its time, really, and it wasn't very pro-European to be talking about the Commonwealth all the time – although he did leave the 'C' in the FCO. William Hague and David Howell have always talked about putting the C *back* into the FCO. It's a pity that resources for Commonwealth activities are reduced all the time, so it is now run on a shoe string.

SO: Douglas Hurd, of course, didn't go to the Auckland CHOGM in 1995 because...

MR: No, because in those days Foreign Ministers didn't go. This is very recent. Douglas retired and I went to the Treasury to William Waldegrave, but not for the reasons you might think. I went to help him through the agonies of the Scott Inquiry, when he survived a Commons censure motion by one vote.

SO: Did you continue to take an active interest in what was going on at the Edinburgh CHOGM in 1997? I realise you were on the periphery of another British CHOGM, but what were your observations? After all, you've been at the London CHOGM of 1977 and now, twenty years later...

MR: Very good question. I was enormously impressed by the Scottish effort. If it had been in London, it would have been a typical, cold Foreign Office [event]. I'd seen it with the Finance Ministers Meeting, and they weren't made to feel terribly important, whereas the Scots made everybody feel frightfully important. Commonwealth leaders love the Scottish. This was before Alex Salmond was in his heyday, but they loved the Scottish interest and we had it again. At later CHOGMs, I was often involved in Education. I'd been involved in many Education Ministers Meetings and was involved in the Edinburgh one which resulted in the adoption of the Teachers Protocol on Recruitment.

SO: So, were you involved with Steve Matlin?

MR: Yes, but you see, experience with Ramphal teaches you many things. The UK Education Secretary was Charles Clarke, [and he] arrived at Edinburgh saying, "We don't want to have anything to do with this thing." And we'd had a Commonwealth Consortium for Education meeting – of which I am the UK Chair – on the subject the day before and we'd practically drafted it, and so I said to Peter Williams, "Let's just show it to him. Do you know anyone who knows him well enough to give it to him?" So, Charles Clarke read it overnight and said to his officials, "I've read this thing; I'm not against something like this. I'm entirely in favour of it." Bang! We had consensus.

SO: Yes, as you say, in true 'Ramphal' style.

MR: But these events are very rare these days, because Don McKinnon's philosophy was, "You mustn't steer. Ministers must do what they want to do."

SO: Sir Humphrey Appleby would not agree with that at all!

MR: No, Sir Humphrey would not, but the Indian Civil Service training has instilled that into Kamalesh Sharma.

SO: Different political and bureaucratic cultures.

MR: Very, very different. Kamalesh Sharma is a charming man, so if I say anything that's negative, it's nothing against him as a person.

SO: It seems to me that each of the Secretary Generals has brought very much their national political cultures and formative experiences to the table.

MR: You see that in the UN, as well, although I think Ban Ki-Moon has really grown into the job in a way that many never expected him to.

SO: Yes, because the clamours of approval when he was appointed were certainly...

MR: Muted. What was that American Ambassador who was never confirmed? He was his baby…

SO: John Bolton. Just to go back to the Edinburgh CHOGM, what sort of access did you have at Edinburgh? Obviously you were not part of an official political team...

MR: Same access as civil society. It's improved since Ramphal's time. There's a civil society lounge; you get passes so you can rub shoulders. The freedom to rub shoulders in Perth was a typical Australian thing. We could get anywhere.

SO: [*Laughter*] Really?

MR: It was very relaxed. I mean, the idea that a British Foreign Secretary would go and close the Commonwealth Peoples Forum! Hague did it absolutely brilliantly. You know, Britain were really playing their part in Perth. Kevin Rudd ran a 'Foreign Ministers meet Civil Society' [event] – again, another recent thing – so about thirty-two of us met the foreign ministers. Rudd made an announcement, "If you've got anything to say, put your water bottle on its side." He said, "I'm not going to call a foreign minister until you've all had your chance, so please be brief because we're short of time." Everyone got in, which was why I was able to raise the issue of Zimbabwe and got a good response from Hague and others. We did have one lecture from a head of government who was also a foreign minister from the Pacific, who shall remain nameless, about how annoying civil society can be.

SO: [*Laughter*] "It gets in the way"? "You don't want too much democracy"?

MR: Yes. Not the word they used.

SO: But at Perth, how much discussion do you recall there being about the choice of venue for the next heads of government meeting in Sri Lanka? Was that swirling around?

MR: Oh, it was swirling around everywhere except at the meeting! There was no issue. It had been settled in advance.

SO: It had been chosen at the Trinidad CHOGM?

MR: Well, no. What happened at Trinidad was that the Sri Lankans were quite forcibly persuaded to stand aside, but were told they could seek to have the

next one. Mauritius volunteered to have the one after, which some said, "That's just in case." But the Sri Lankans went into diplomatic overdrive: those from the developed countries who would have liked to have seen it somewhere else were steam-rolled. You can't go against the developing countries, and the Sri Lankans had lined up many of the small states in favour of going to Sri Lanka. It was not an issue; it was over.

These things are only discussed at the Retreat, and I think all that was said about Sri Lanka there was, "Thank you very much for the offer" – from the Sri Lankan President who would have proposed it. And it was a personal initiative by Kevin Rudd to step in as Prime Minister and say, "Hey, well, we'll do it in Australia," the time before. Mauritius wasn't ready to do the same.

SO: Being a long-standing Commonwealth hand, what did you think of the latest EPG, Eminent Persons Group?

MR: You mean, *the* EPG? There's never been one like it before. There was one on South Africa, but this was quite different. I think the group's name muddies the water in a way, except in the handling thereof. Well, it was a very effective piece of work, and a lot of us put submissions in. All our submissions are recorded. They did a thoroughly good job; they were a very good team and we couldn't understand the Secretariat's attitude of not releasing it until effectively after CHOGM, because the view was taken, "We can't release this without the authority of heads of government." At our meeting with foreign ministers, William Hague went out of his way to say, "We are deeply disappointed. This should have been released months ago because we would have liked all your views on it." So, there was a heck of a lot of tension about that, and it's very difficult to implement something like that as you need the agreement of all heads of government that are present. An awful lot got approved, but what does that mean at the end of the day? Very hard to say, except that where there is disagreement – such as that over the creation of a Commonwealth Commissioner of Human Rights – if there is no consensus, then the proposal will be shelved, as indeed it was.

SO: Is it just attachment to process and grand declarations?

MR: Well, we've got the Commonwealth Charter, whatever you think of it. I'm a great, great fan of the UN Charter, but it's not a UN Charter or anything like it. It's a lot of flummery and flattery. It does incorporate some of the documents, but we've got it and so we must love it, or that is what we are told.

SO: Mark, please, if I could ask you about staff reviews and the financing of the Secretariat, ministerial meetings and the Queen. So, the first of those questions concerns staff reviews and the financing of the Secretariat.

MR: We were in the lucky era, because whenever there was a review of the Secretariat we always came out with more – more staff, more money – and I think we got Secretariat staffing to the highest level ever. I think we were about 400 staff by the end of it. I remember Sir Mick Shann, who was the former Australian 'Sir Humphrey Appleby '– the former Permanent Secretary to the Australian Civil Service – was appointed head of the review. I knew him because we'd been in Zimbabwe together, and Sonny said to Chris Laidlaw and me, "Oh, Mick Shann's coming a couple of days early. Would the two of

you go and chat to him and just see what he wants to get out of the review and so forth?" [*Laughter*] So I said, "Oh, Mick, we'd like to know how we can help, what you might like to get out of this review," and he said, "Well, the first thing I want to get out of this review is dinner with you two. You're coming to dinner with me." And we sat down and he grilled us about the Secretariat and that dinner shaped the entire outcome of the review, which was entirely satisfactory. But in those days, governments realised that the Secretariat was delivering an enormous amount on a shoestring – particularly heads like Pierre Trudeau – and we could get much of what we wanted. You never get what you absolutely want: you always bid for more.

SO: Yes.

MR: The thing that was the jewel in the crown in those days – which I believe it no longer is – was the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, and particularly welcome was the Technical Assistance Group – or TAG, as it was known – which was run, I think, by Roland Brown in those days. It was sending experts to small countries and helping them do specific things. They were always given a choice of three, so it wasn't white colonials being forced on them. It was really appreciated, and funds for the CFTC were on the up.

SO: Do you know how that shortlist of experts was selected? Was there a directory that was kept, or was there a particular…

MR: There was a directory. Yes, I remember that now.

SO: Was there a particular pattern of any national contribution because that country had a skills pool?

MR: We left that to Tony Tasker and the CFTC. Tony Tasker – a wonderful man in a bowler hat and a rolled umbrella – was just magnificent. He was one of those old-fashioned, Colonial Office civil servants. At least I presume he was.

SO: Mark, during your time at the Secretariat, do you remember the particular issues between balancing the necessity of making sure you involved as many people across the Commonwealth while also making sure that you acquired the people with the necessary skills? That's quite an appointment challenge.

MR: It was always an appointment challenge, and I suppose it's because there was still a lot of people around who'd worked in Africa and those skills were around. I remember bumping into somebody I knew and said, "Oh, what are you doing in Malawi?" He said, "Oh, I'm just running the Central Bank." But of course, those skills aren't there anymore. There are skills, but they're much more expensive, for instance.

SO: I'm also thinking about appointments to the Secretariat itself, given the need to make sure that one balanced regionalism with national input, 'Old' Commonwealth with 'New' Commonwealth, small states…

MR: [It] went on all the time. [There were] two initiatives I was involved in: one was we had these regional CHOGMs for small island states in the Pacific, and the other was setting up the Women and Development Division in the Secretariat, which was run by Dorienne Wilson-Smillie. You might think it a bit strange as I

was still a bachelor in those days, setting up the Women and Development department! But that's the way these things go, because Sonny always wanted these things very carefully led by people close to him. He didn't like the idea of anything going wrong, but he always knew good people, and if he didn't – I think Dorienne came through CIDA – if he didn't, he always knew people who did.

SO: How closely did you stay in touch with the Secretariat when you moved to Parliament?

MR: Not at all. I didn't have time. I got in closer touch with Emeka in my second term, when I was doing things with Lynda Chalker, which is why he was delighted when I got the CPU job. Then we'd meet twice a year at the Travellers' Club and have lunch and discuss matters.

SO: Chief Emeka had to confront a considerable contraction of Secretariat funds when he became Secretary General.

MR: And he had more enquiries from ABC Countries per square inch – always wanting to cut funding. Well, now they just don't know any other word except, "How can we reduce this budget?" – which wouldn't be big enough to fund the cafeteria in the UN Secretariat. I used to say the cost of UN car-parking in my speeches about the Commonwealth!

SO: It seems to me that in terms of providing skilled knowledge at very short notice and sending experts in to identify need, the Commonwealth was extraordinary value for money.

MR: You see, in those days, the reason Sonny decided to have two Assistant Directors – I don't think they have Assistant Directors any more – in his office was so that for ministerial meetings one of us would always be with him and the other would be in the office. So, there was always continuity in the office. When I say [one of us would] "be with him" – like at the Education and Law Ministers meeting – I would be expected to be there five days before. My instructions were clear: "Things will be going wrong," Sonny would say. "I want you to make sure that they're not going wrong by the time I arrive." That was my role, and that sometimes meant, actually, putting the covers on the tables [*Laughter*] or making the venue look good.

SO: So, you were 'the A-team' going in?

MR: We were the A-team – of one – going in, mobilising people. But people like Professor Sir Kenneth Stuart, who was in charge of the Health Department – he's still going, I think… He's someone you should talk to, who'll probably have…

SO: I have talked to him, but only on the telephone. I tried to involve him in the Commonwealth Secretariat Witness Seminar I put together.

MR: He used to wheedle his way into Sonny's little teams. I turned up in Arusha [and] absolutely nothing had been organized. I've never seen so much chaos in my life. We had three days to turn it into a working meeting. [It was] a five day meeting; we'd finished in three and I went off with Sir Kenneth and six of the ministers to the Ngorongoro crater! [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] It's beautiful there, too.

MR: Those were the days. Sonny always wanted to make sure things were running smoothly, but every Ministerial Meeting was different. Kutlu Fuad, who ran the Legal Division, was a master at running a successful Law Ministers Meeting, and the social activities after Law Ministers [Meeting] were among the best. I had a wonderful evening dancing with Elspeth Howe on the Jolly Roger in Barbados. Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the British Lord Chancellor who was of the 'Wee Frees', was enjoying himself as much as anyone on the Jolly Roger [*Laughter*], but I don't think he had any of the rum punch.

SO: Possibly not! Did you know much of Sonny's campaign to be elected to the UNO?

MR: Yes, I was the New York part of it – I spent three months in New York during the General Assembly, helping him with it. We had some very good inside support, like Sir Brian Urquhart. Of course, I'd worked with them all, knew them all, but I had to very circumspect. I'd left the UN Secretary General's office, but of course the Secretary General was trying to be re-elected to a third term and all the key people knew exactly what I was doing there. They'd say, "Mark, how are you getting on?" They would also feed me information, and it was clear that China was never going to let Waldheim have a third term. In the end, his campaign was embarrassing. The election was conducted in the Security Council and Waldheim was vetoed twice. Pérez de Cuéllar just slipped straight in; there was a consensus around him. After Waldheim, Perez was the first name to be put forward and he got it, so other candidates like Ramphal were not voted on. But we knew by then that the British wouldn't support Ramphal.

SO: Why not?

MR: Zimbabwe.

SO: You think it was the ultimate payback for the way Zimbabwe became independent in 1980?

MR: Yes. It was before the Falklands war. I was probably there, in New York, for the 1981 and 1982 General Assemblies.

SO: Okay, but did Ramphal try again?

MR: No, just that one time. If he did try again, I didn't know anything about it, but I don't think he did. Perez was succeeded by Boutros Boutros-Ghali. His second term was blocked and Kofi Annan slipped in. The Americans realised they had made a terrible mistake with Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who had a hotline to God, and of course Kofi had been a lifelong member of the UN Secretariat. I think he used to attend meetings at the Carnegie Endowment study group for the bright and the best, which they were foolish enough to ask people like me to be a part of.

SO: Mark, I haven't asked you – and this just before we come onto the Queen – about your observations on the final transition of South Africa to black majority rule. Did you have an inside view?

MR: Well, only from the side of the British Foreign Secretary, as I was his PPS. It was a completely different atmosphere. We had de Klerk to work with. I remember the Foreign Secretary called me into his office and implied that my role as his PPS was to be suspended, "because I'm going to ask you to do something that no Foreign Secretary has ever asked a PPS to do," he said. "There's this Dutch organisation called AWEPA who are putting together an observer group, and Neil Kinnock is going to be on it. I want you to be on it." He said, "If you ever have to call me, I know you will have failed in your mission, but your sole role is to keep Neil out of trouble." It was hectic and you just went [where] you were told. There was no time to liaise with other delegations or give feedback to government delegations.

SO: To what extent do you think the Commonwealth will change after the eventual demise of the Queen?

MR: I don't know. There might have to be some adaptation, but whether a successor will provide the same type of glue… I think glue is the best way to describe it. It's a highlight, I believe, of the time spent in London by most High Commissioners – the access they get to HM through diplomatic receptions at the Palace. You don't get that in any other country, and some of their non-Commonwealth colleagues are extremely jealous when they hear of them going to these things. But you see, it's like the royal yacht *Britannia*. John Major wanted a second *Britannia*, because it was a wonderful marketing vehicle. I remember *Britannia* sailing into New York for the Bicentennial and having to sort out which side of the Queen the UN Secretary General, Waldheim, would be sitting. Would he be on the right, and Governor Hugh Carey on the left? It was vital to Waldheim that he was on HM's right! I thought, "Who the hell do I talk to this about?" I went and talked to Brian Urquhart, and Brian said, "Leave it to me." He said, "I thought this would be the case. Ivor Richard's well ahead of us on this. They've got it right, which means Waldheim is on the right!" Ivor Richard was the British Permanent Representative at the UN when I was in Waldheim's office.

SO: So, Mark, from your long view then, how and why do you think the Commonwealth has survived?

MR: It hasn't had any difficulty surviving.

SO: Some argue that its longevity is because of inertia.

MR: No, commonality – whether it's law, whether it's language, whether it's agriculture, whether it's local government. Common threads – that's what causes it to survive. And soft power. The House of Lords is doing an enquiry on soft power and the Commonwealth plays a good part in that.

SO: Richard Luce is also leading a debate in the House of Lords in the Autumn on the Commonwealth.

MR: When the Commons focused on the role of the Commonwealth, I gave my evidence and was actually grilled on soft power because of Commonwealth scholarships. When I was in Mauritius last year for the Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting, the Secretary General of the ACU invited me to a reception for Commonwealth scholars and these people were on the board of things like the Oceanographic Institute and soft power was everywhere.

Commonwealth scholars have gone on to have all kinds of jobs – cabinet secretaries, head of businesses… One recently became Governor of the Bank of England, namely Mark Carney, who is a Commonwealth scholar. He was very good on the radio this morning, did you hear him?

SO: Yes, he was very measured indeed. So, in terms of those common threads, do you see those common threads wearing thin in the future?

MR: No, I don't. What I see as wearing thin is [that] there's such a pressure of international meetings. I can see heads of government starting to say, "What are we getting out of these meetings?" They can't be shortened any more, and of course the younger the leaders get the more disassociated they are from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth still has to sell itself. The French are still jealous…

SO: *La Francophonie* is not the same.

MR: I also think – and Patsy wouldn't agree with me at all – but I actually think we ought to think about Observer Status.

My nephew, who used to work for the Foreign Office – they call it "the other side of the river" – jumped ship. That's the word. He was told, "Never darken our door again!" He said to his mentor, "I don't know why you're saying that. I'm the best asset you could possibly have right now." Of course, he's quite right, and his boss has been promoted three times by death – natural causes, of course! He works for Prince Mohammed of the UAE. They came and had a look at the Commonwealth – I wrote a paper for them – and they got so taken aback by a delegation of one hundred Nigerians turning up, and Nigerians turn up everywhere in large delegations, and they got a bit nervous about the thing. Amazingly, they've got Observer Status with *La Francophonie*. They would have been interested if there had been some kind of way, at least, of putting their toe in the water by getting Observer Status. Of course, all these Gulf states are eligible in the old context of Britain's position in the Middle East. I might be quite wrong here, but I think that the British colonial powers never rated the Arabs.

SO: It was informal empire, wasn't it? Rather than formal empire.

MR: Yes. They were thought of as a 'lesser species', in a funny sort of way. The other thing, in the modern world, take Jordan. I know a bit about Jordan, because I shared a room with Prince Hassan at Harrow. I was his shepherd and my brother was King Hussein's shepherd. I don't know why these things are hereditary. [*Laughter*] He told me all sorts of interesting things about Jordan and its relations with the Palestinians, but Ramphal said this to me: "We just simply do not want the Commonwealth to be drawn into the Middle East equation." And yet Palestine is quite interested in membership, and then there is Somaliland also interested, but I doubt there will be much progress, if any.

SO: Yes. When you were at the Secretariat, was there much discussion about whether Palestine could be drawn closer to the Commonwealth?

MR: No, it was too early. After all, we'd slid into the UN alongside them. I think I told you about Malta, who would always want something about Palestine in

the communiqué. So, to keep Britain happy, it came into the communiqué as "most heads of government agreed." You can look up the language, which was very carefully dreamed up late at night. You see, Ramphal wouldn't take an interest in the actual drafting, but the moment it came to "most heads of government", we couldn't put that in the draft without taking it to Ramphal personally – and I would, of course. The last night of CHOGM I wouldn't have any sleep. I learnt how to catnap for twenty minutes, because I would be running between Ramphal and Moni and the Committee of the Whole. They didn't call it the COW in those days.

SO: How important was Moni Malhoutra in terms of the workings of the Secretariat?

MR: Enormously important. He was the egregious right-hand man to the Secretary General. I only got an office close to the SG because he was promoted to Assistant Secretary General and wanted an even larger room. Before that, he refused to share an office with me or with Chris Laidlaw.

SO: He strikes me as somebody with a brilliant brain but who drove people hard.

MR: Brilliant brain. Yes, he drove people very hard and he drove himself very hard. The thing was that he was rather too secretive about things [that] you didn't need to be secretive about. In the end, when Moni became Assistant Secretary General and was travelling a lot, the backlog of paperwork built up. I remember Moni saying to me, "Look, Mark, you're not showing me any papers. You and Chris aren't showing me anything anymore." I said, "You haven't been here for three months," and he said, "Well, you could at least have left copies in my office." I said, "You wouldn't have been able to get in to your office." He said, "Alright, I concede." And the only way we got things cleared is it was a double act: Chris would pick up all the papers – I'd say, "You're stronger than me" – [and] I would go to the drinks cupboard and get the wine or whiskey out, and then we'd get the Secretary General to spend an hour and a half clearing the lot. We had already written notes on them and split aside the easy from the difficult.

And Ramphal was travelling; he was doing the Brandt Commission. I found that very interesting, because my first task in the UN had been to sit at the Under-Secretary General's table, or the table underneath him. I joined the Sixth and Seventh Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the New International Economic Order. I didn't know how to spell it when I arrived, but at the end of two weeks I was fluent in the subject with the help of people like Barbara Ward and Sir Robert Jackson. Brad Morse was very like Sonny. He'd see these great people and you'd see them too. Like Trudeau, wandering in and out.

SO: Just as a concluding point, this seems to have been very much the era of big ideas: of social justice, racial justice, the role of economics in development…

MR: Yes. Giving one example – I think I might have mentioned it before very briefly – the work we did on Distance Education in Namibia. Terry Dormer was the man in charge; he's still going strong if you want to talk to somebody about that. Terry ran the whole thing on a shoestring, and I immediately got

interested simply because I'd been the last person to see the UNTAG plan for Namibia before the Secretary General put his 'W' on it, which meant 'cleared'. Martti Ahtisaari was a great friend of Ramphal. Ramphal knew everything that was going on in Namibia at the same time as Ahtisaari, because it was a crucial liaison. I said to him, "Well, my bet is we'll get Zimbabwe sorted out long before Namibia is sorted out." And then there was a problem over Walvis Bay and Ramphal talked to other heads and said, "Look, drop it. It'll come our way, anyway. Just leave it: solve Namibia and then worry about Walvis Bay." Well, actually, de Klerk said, "You can have it." [*Laughter*] But the change came. Same as in Zimbabwe; the change came quickly. The Whites changed their attitudes very quickly. The most difficult ones – both in South Africa and Zimbabwe – were those who'd left Britain as Civil Servants and come to a lifestyle they'd never dreamed of. They were the ones who were completely opposed to change. Those who had come to Rhodesia most recently were the ones completely opposed to any kind of change.

SO: Mark, in your experience, even though Zimbabwe is no longer in the Commonwealth and hasn't been since 2003, is it still a Commonwealth issue?

MR: It will be welcomed back into the Commonwealth if the conditions are right and if it decides to apply. It's only an issue in that they've taken themselves out. The Commonwealth is not like the UN: you can't take yourself out of the UN, because an incoming government can simply represent its credentials. At the UN, you can only vote if you've paid your subscription, whereas in the Commonwealth you have to reapply. If SADC supported Zimbabwe's readmission to the Commonwealth, it would just go through *nem con* if the circumstances were right. Mugabe blames everything on Blair; I don't quite know why. "It's all Blair's fault." Mugabe's quite amenable to Cameron, but nothing further may happen while Mugabe remains in power.

SO: He quite approves of Tory governments, I've heard.

MR: Yes. He's like Nixon in one respect: he never trusted his electorate.

SO: Felt he knew better? I've heard Stephen Chan say that Mugabe has been remarkably consistent – it's just the rest of the world and Zimbabwe society which has changed.

MR: I couldn't agree more.

SO: Mark, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE PART TWO]