University of London

INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

VOICE FILE NAME: COHP David McDowell (Part Two)

Key:
SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
DM: David McDowell (Respondent)

Part Two:

SO: Dr Sue Onslow talking again to Mr David McDowell in New Zealand on Wednesday, 2nd July 2014. David, thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me again. I wonder if we could pick up, please, towards the end of our previous interview, where you had made reference to Arnold Smith negotiating with Idi Amin on the future of the Ugandan Asians. You pointed out in the notes that you kindly sent me that Arnold Smith didn't get the recognition he deserved for persuading Amin to let the Ugandan Asians leave the country with their movable possessions – that is, the things they could carry, rather than their capital wealth. At what point did Arnold Smith become involved in the negotiations on the plight of these Ugandan Asians?

DM: I haven't checked precisely which month in 1971 it was, but it must have been about halfway through the year. We were just getting increasingly distressing reports out of Kampala and one or two Commonwealth heads of government asked Arnold – I think Julius Nyerere, yes, was one of them – whether he could use his good offices and go and talk to Idi Amin and try and talk some sense into him. So, Arnold never used to need much encouragement to be active and so we flew into Kampala. As I say, we stayed in State House for nearly a week – four or five nights, four or five days – and met with Idi Amin once, twice, sometimes three times a day.

Arnold was using arguments obviously pitched to Idi Amin – as we then saw him – and was saying, "If you want your government to remain a member of the Commonwealth, then, you know, how you act towards your Asian citizens will be a crucial factor." And Amin took that on board; he could see the point of that. It was interesting. We very seldom had one of his advisers in the room. There'd just be the three of us, usually. Sometimes there'd be a

secretary-cum-translator, just to help Amin with the difficult or technical English words.

SO: Had you been asked by the Heath government or by Alec Douglas-Home for Arnold to use his good offices? Or was this a Secretary General's initiative at the prompting, as you say, of key African heads, including Julius Nyerere?

DS: As I recall, we did have some encouragement from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on this occasion. It wasn't always so, but I think they could see that Arnold's access to heads of government and access to Commonwealth capitals was a distinct asset. And they themselves thought it would be, I suspect, counter-productive for them to get too involved.

SO: Indeed. So, you weren't in any way liaising with the British Government on the granting of British passports? It was solely a question of using one-to-one diplomacy with Idi Amin to persuade him to allow the Ugandan Asians to leave?

DM: Yes, that was certainly what we concentrated on at that time. Most of the discussions were about that, and it became fairly detailed towards the end as we extracted a little bit more flexibility out of him. At first he said, "They can get on an aeroplane and fly any time." And we said, "Well, you know, there has been an investment by them and their predecessors and their fathers and grandfathers in this country over many years, and you can't just simply pack them on a plane and send them off."

SO: Did Arnold try and persuade Idi Amin that they should remain and that the persecution should stop? That they had, in fact, contributed markedly to the human skill capacity of Uganda and its political economy?

DM: Oh, yes. I mean, we had [made] that economic argument several times. The dependency of certain sectors – certainly, the commercial sector and the small business sector – but also the academic sector, for example. Makerere had a number of Ugandan Asian lecturers and professors, and Arnold pointed out that that would leave gaps, along with the gaps then filled by Ugandan Asian professionals in the health and agricultural fields. [These] could not easily be filled and certainly could not quickly be filled. I'm not sure that that was a very persuasive argument with Idi Amin.

SO: No, he probably felt it was a job creation scheme for Ugandans.

DM: Yes.

SO: Were you and Arnold ever concerned during these negotiations that you were dealing with an increasingly volatile African leader and that there was a possibility that there might be drastic measures adopted by the Ugandans to resolve this issue, such as the shooting of Ugandan Asians? In other words, to encourage forced flight?

DM: Drastic measures…

SO: I'm just wondering if you were ever concerned for the physical safety of the Ugandan Asians?

DM: Well, it always hovered there, I suppose. But you know, at this time it wasn't as manifest as it became twelve, eighteen months, two years later: that he was a guy who resorted to violence if he had to, and even if he didn't have to some times. So, at that time, it was not our chief concern. It was just hovering there as a possibility. But there was nothing to hang that on at the time and he was not making explicit threats, as such.

SO: Before you left the Secretariat were you aware or involved in any of Arnold Smith's exploratory contacts with Portuguese Africa or with the Portuguese government in Lisbon?

DM: No, I wasn't in on any of that stuff.

SO: I appreciate it may have come later, after the collapse of the Marcelo Caetano Government in April of 1974, in Lisbon, and then the consequent acceleration of Mozambique's and then Angola's independence. I just wondered if there had been any signs of Arnold Smith reaching out to Lisbon politicians, because he supported decolonisation in the Portuguese territories as well as the British territories.

DM: Not that I'm aware of, but it could well be so.

SO: Just before you left the Secretariat, the decade of Pacific Island independence had started. Fiji, of course, acquired its independence in 1970. Do you recall Arnold Smith ever reflecting that independence of these small island states was going to pose a different set of problems in terms of challenges to bureaucratic capacity, human resources and financial resources, and that the Commonwealth might have a new set of problems that it needed to address?

DM: Yes, he was quite familiar with the similar situation in the Caribbean. In fact, he lived there for a while, didn't he?

SO: Yes, in fact he had been born in Grenada. He was a white Grenadian.

DM: That's right. So, I mean, he was aware of what was, by then, a semi-historical issue in relation to the Caribbean. But of course, you know, the potential small island states in the Pacific were even smaller, a lot of them. I mean, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau…even some of the smaller Melanesian countries. We certainly had a lot of cerebration going on in the political division, the Secretariat's International Affairs Division, about the future of these states and whether the Commonwealth might offer an alternative, for example, global membership, as it were, which would then be adequate – in some cases – for the small island states trying to join as full members of the UN. I became involved when I was in New York in '64 to '68 in the negotiations and the referenda and the elections which led to the twenty thousand people of the Cook Islands becoming a fully self-governing state in free association with New Zealand, and that meant that they could move unilaterally to full

independence if they so wished. And, here we are, forty years later, and they still haven't moved in that direction…

SO: [*Laughter*]

DM: …nor have they moved to have UN membership.

SO: Perhaps there's something in that for Scotland! [*Laughter*]

DM: So, the debate was going on, certainly. It was curious because the British and the Americans were very apprehensive about this question of the emergence or the possibility of thirty or forty tiny states ending up in the UN General Assembly. Their needs were great but their resources were few, and if they were full members they would have a full vote – equal to large states. For example, when I was still in the New Zealand service – so, that was, let me see, about '67, when I was in New York – we had an inter-governmental, quiet, 'non-announced' discussion in Washington between the Brits, the Americans, the Australians and the New Zealanders. We sat around the table and we went through the list: which small countries might wish to achieve full independence and UN and Commonwealth membership. So, it was going on outside the Commonwealth circles as well as inside it, and the Americans were pretty twitchy about Guam and the Virgin Islands and what became Micronesia, and so on. And the Brits were, too. I mean, the Anguilla constitutional problem the next year [1968] was seen as an awful precedent in London and Washington.

We [New Zealand] were not like that. The South Pacific islanders are basically very rational, sensible people, and they were not seeking, at that time, full membership either of the Commonwealth or the UN, although some of them were attracted to the idea of the Commonwealth being sort of a half-way house to UN membership. But they knew they couldn't afford the cost of a mission in New York, which is a requirement of membership, and they weren't terribly interested in a lot of the big global issues which were discussed in New York.

SO: So, the question of representation at the UN was obviously expensive and problematic, but did this then give added focus and importance to the Commonwealth?

DM: Yes, and [*Laughter*] Arnold was consciously playing that card. There were certain cases where it made a lot more sense for them to join the Commonwealth – where, among other things, you could work on a regional basis. You didn't necessarily need to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meetings: there would be regional meetings, and the CFTC operated on a regional basis, so they would have access to the CFTC and so on. And at the same time, they could also become members of these UN specialised agencies without becoming a full member in the UN General Assembly.

SO: Yes, they could be special members.

DM: So, Samoa joined the WHO and FAO, for example, many years before it thought of joining and becoming a full member of the UN, which it did eventually.

SO: Did you feel, in any way, that the South Pacific Forum was an alternative venue for discussion and that it should be brought further into the debates of the Commonwealth? Or was it precisely because the Commonwealth had this over-arching membership and role – this diversity, this ability to combine "the sovereign elephants with the sovereign mice" – that its authority shouldn't be diluted?

DM: I'm trying to think back, because I was in on the discussions when we first set up the Forum – or helped set it up – and we didn't see it precisely as a subset of the Commonwealth, or even as a sort of regional Commonwealth body. Because, you know, there were French territories in the area, there were American territories, and we did not necessarily want to exclude them from South Pacific regional institutions. And we were thinking long [term]: we were thinking of French Polynesia and we were wondering where the federated states, where Micronesia, would end up, and so on. So, although it was extremely helpful that most of the original Forum members were Commonwealth – or former colonies of Britain, anyway – with all sorts of language and educational and legal links, we didn't, in New Zealand, tend to see it solely in Commonwealth terms, because there was the complication that there were a number of non-Commonwealth candidates that were around.

SO: Just thinking about this question of the French territories…Do you recall the genesis of Arnold Smith's ideas of reaching out to *La Francophonie* and trying to establish diplomatic and cultural contacts between Marlborough House and Paris?

DM: Oh, yes, he was very active on that front. You know, being a Canadian, a French speaker and a French Canadian diplomat by extraction, as it were, he was very active. At first, there were reservations on the French side. Then they realised that the Commonwealth was a precedent for *La Francophonie,* and a number of highly informal contacts took place. We would be flitting through Paris for some reason or other and there would be an informal discussion at the Quai d'Orsay, and then even when we were in the field, occasionally – I'm trying to think of what country it was where we ended up talking about it. I suppose it was probably Canada itself, as well. We were talking to the Canadians about it, as well. But Arnold was thoroughly in favour of *La Francophonie* and thought that it was a very good way of engaging the French and keeping them engaged in a positive way.

SO: To what extent was he – very diplomatically but still, consistently – encouraging them to make it more than a culturally-based organisation? Obviously, *La Francophonie* is more than that, but it seems to have acquired quite early on, in the 1970s, very much a cultural emphasis, in contrast to the Commonwealth, which was adopting a political emphasis and a developmental emphasis. I'm wondering if Arnold Smith was seeking to prod the French in that direction as well?

DM: I think he trod pretty carefully. It was a bit of a minefield. He thought [that], if the French got the idea that it was going to become something like the Commonwealth, on the political front, that that could well frighten them off!

SO: [*Laughter*] Rather like the kiss of death, yes.

DM: So, nearly all our discussions with them would start with Arnold describing the Commonwealth. They would ask, "Tell us how the Commonwealth works. What does it do?" And Arnold would give a very practical and very objective description. He wasn't pushing this as a model for the French, but in the back of our minds was the thought that it made sense. And they did develop beyond the cultural side in terms of technical assistance and security, although that was probably a bit more bi-lateral than under the *Francophonie* umbrella.

SO: David, you left the Secretariat in December of 1972, before the Ottawa Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. I understand from your notes that you accompanied Norman Kirk, the New Zealand prime minister, as part of his delegation.

DM: Yes.

SO: What was it like seeing the Commonwealth from the other side, so to speak, rather than being a ComSec insider? Did it give you a slightly different take on the diplomacy of the Commonwealth? Its particular approach, its informality, the role of heads?

DM: [*Laughter*] Between you and me, I was fulfilling two roles because, in the evenings, after whatever the function was or during the various functions, I obviously linked up with all my old mates in the Secretariat.

SO: I was wondering that! [*Laughter*]

DM: One night, for example, we sat down…who was there? Jim Maraj, do you know Jim Maraj? Assistant Secretary General on the education and communication side. There was Patsy Robertson and me and there was Emeka Anyaoku. Anyway, the next day the heads of government were going to be discussing Arnold's future. So, we discussed it – Arnold's future.

SO: [*Laughter*]

DM: [*Laughter*] And guess where the idea of Sonny Ramphal came from? From Jim Maraj! From Trinidad and Tobago; he's from Trinidad. He said, "What about Sonny Ramphal?" and I said, "Brilliant idea!" Jim Maraj went to see Forbes Burnham and, by breakfast time the following morning, Forbes Burnham had agreed.

SO: I have wondered consistently where Sonny Ramphal's candidacy came from, and I've picked up from talking to people that he had impressed Indira Gandhi in the Non-Aligned Movement meetings – in other words, the 'prince had won his spurs' in other international discussions and fora – and so it had been Mrs Gandhi who had persuaded Forbes

Burnham. But you're saying it's a Commonwealth network of officials that stitched international diplomacy and leadership!

DM: Maybe we are talking of parallel processes.

SO: David, actually what you're highlighting here is a network of officials – the powers behind the throne. It's the network of officials who were feeding up ideas. As a diplomat, as an international civil servant – which you later became – how useful was this Commonwealth connection for diplomats but also for senior officials?

DM: I regard it as a huge plus, for me, in my subsequent bilateral work and in the IUCN. I mean, I could wander into a Commonwealth capital anywhere in the world and I can nearly always find somebody with a Commonwealth connection in the Foreign Ministry whom I had worked with either in New York, where I've done two stints, or in London itself, in the Commonwealth Secretariat, or elsewhere. For example, I wander into Mrs Gandhi's office as New Zealand's non-resident High Commissioner and her private secretary and I know each other. He and I were on the [United Nations] Fourth Committee from '64 to '68 – we knew each other extremely well, because you sit down together for six or seven hours a day for about four months of the year. Our wives knew each other. And, you know, I got in to see Mrs Gandhi even when our Prime Minister Muldoon and she were at loggerheads. I got in to see her three days after I arrived in Delhi, and the Australian High Commissioner – who was resident – had been waiting for a month to see her! He was furious! And why? Because I talked to Chinmaya Gharekhan and said, "These are the sort of things I would like to discuss with her." And he said, "I know that she wants to discuss something with you, too" – because of the Fiji background, you see? So, I got in to see Mrs Gandhi and we had a very good discussion. She threw Chinmaya out at one point, and it was just her and me for half an hour discussing Fiji, because one of her protégées, Soonu Kochar – who had also been in the Commonwealth Secretariat; she was in the International Affairs Division when I was in the Secretariat – Soonu and I both ended up as High Commissioners in Fiji and she and I saw a lot of each other. I knew the background to why she had been [designated] *persona non grata* by the Fijians and Mrs Gandhi wanted an objective view as to what had actually happened and whose fault it was. I knew sufficient for her to be reassured by it. Then we got onto other matters.

SO: So, that was also the occasion that there were issues on the Antarctic Treaty System. Mrs Gandhi was reputed to be helping to undermine it and encouraging Dr Mahathir of Malaysia's opposition to the Treaty.

DM: Yes.

SO: Could you give me some details about that? Is this an accurate reflection of Mrs Gandhi's opposition, or was she trying, in fact, to manipulate events to India's advantage?

DM: Well, it was commonly understood in Antarctic circles – and, you know, it's pretty important to us [i.e. New Zealand] – that Mrs Gandhi was being influenced by Mahathir, and Mahathir was against the Antarctic Treaty. I had a brief which said, "Thou shalt raise the subject", and say what a wonderful

exercise in international understanding and working together and co-operation the Treaty is, and we hope India will think about it – i.e., revise its attitude. I just opened my mouth and said, "Could we talk about the Antarctic Treaty, Prime Minister?" And she said, "Yes, we're going to join." I nearly fell out of my chair! [*Laughter*] So, I got from her [the reason] why: because the Antarctic lies to the south of India as well, if you go straight down the Indian Ocean. She said, "Next summer we will be putting a research station in Antarctica", which is a requirement of the Treaty – you have to have a research programme to become a member. "We're doing that", she said. "You should go and talk to my friend."

SO: I presume you mean the Brahman scientist who was going to be leading the initiative?

DM: That's him, yes. He was head of what they are now starting to call their Antarctic division!

SO: [*Laughter*]

DM: Amazing things. So, I went off that afternoon and talked to him. I got Gharekhan to ring ahead and transmit the message that Mrs Gandhi had talked to me about it, and so he opened up and told me the whole story.

SO: What impression did you gain, David, as a top New Zealand diplomat, of Mrs Gandhi's attitude and commitment to the Commonwealth as a vehicle, as an ideal?

DM: I warmed to her on this occasion. This was a very warm interview. I was there for well over an hour and we talked very freely about issues such as Fiji and one or two other issues which touched on the Commonwealth. She saw the Commonwealth as a relatively minor but potentially useful association for India. She did of course see things in a totally South Asian context, as you would expect from an Indian prime minister. So, at the point where Arnold was trying to get something going in relation to the East/West Pakistan war, and to get a peaceful resolution, she simply put the kibosh on it, as we say. You know, she stopped it dead in its tracks. She stopped that attempted mediation by Mrs Bandaranaike, for example. But, you know, if I were her, I think I would have done the same, in her position. Given Indo-Pak relations, and how central it is to both their foreign policies, having a chance to split Pakistan down the middle would have seemed to be an absolute blessing.

SO: Indeed, because that would weaken your principal antagonist.

DM: Exactly.

SO: So, anything that could in fact reduce the power and standing of your antagonist is going to be in your fundamental national interest.

DM: Yes, within reason. So, at that point, the views of an institution like the Commonwealth probably seemed irrelevant to her.

SO: Yes. I've always wondered about the extent to which India, the most populous nation within the Commonwealth, rather than having a foreign

policy centre is, in fact, much more susceptible to the pressures of its states and the Chief Ministers exerting pressure on the centre, rather than necessarily the centre telling the periphery what to do. With states bordering on Pakistan, Bengal versus east Pakistan, Tamil Nadu when looking at Sri Lanka, in fact, the dynamics of Indian foreign policy are more complex than many Commonwealth observers or, indeed, international relations specialists appreciate.

DM: Yes, that's true. India, as you know, is such a complex of religions and ethnic groups and tribal groups – let alone castes. Those realities are still there. Heaven alone knows where this new chap's heading.

SO: Well, indeed. Although I have to say, I've been reading some more positive opinions of Prime Minister Modi than the scaremongers during the election would have had us believe, which is to the good.

David, I had asked you about accompanying Prime Minister Norman Kirk to the Ottawa meeting as one of his chief advisers. You've sent me a note talking about the dynamic between Norman Kirk and Edward Heath. Was Heath again radiating British distance and disillusion with the Commonwealth as he had done at the Singapore meeting? You were there when Pierre Trudeau came up with his idea of a retreat. Were you permitted to accompany your Prime Minister to that retreat as one principal special adviser or not?

DM: No, I didn't go to the retreat. I sat in on the closed sessions of the conference itself, where heads of government are allowed to have one adviser only, and I sat in with Kirk then. But I didn't go to the retreat, which was up in the Laurentian Mountains somewhere. I think Frank Corner, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, went up there. Yes, he did; I certainly didn't. But the closed session itself was fascinating.

SO: In what way?

DM: Well, in my note about Kirk I said that it really is an 'old boys' – and, these days, one or two 'old girls', as well – club. And it is never more real than when they go into those closed sessions. And Trudeau was very good. He turned to Kirk and he said, "You've only been in office for a few months and what are you facing?" Kirk said "Ah, two problems. I've got to knock the public service into shape, so that they work for this government. They have to realise there's been a change of government and for twelve years they've been under a Conservative government. And, secondly," he said, "I've got too many backbenchers. I had a landslide victory, I've got too many backbenchers and I don't know what to do with them."

SO: [*Laughter*]

DM: And Heath was rather good. Heath said, "Oh, set up dozens of select committees…"

SO: [*Laughter*]

DM: "… and put them on the select committees and make them work. Keep them out of mischief that way," he said. [*Laughter*] And that's exactly what Kirk did! He took that advice.

I mean, that's the sort of discussion that occurs. Everyone roared with laughter and there were other helpful contributions on the subject. Then they got talking about the public sector, the public services, and how do you actually get them to change from working for one government to working for another with different policies. We were supposed to be a neutral and independent public service, as ours largely was in those days. But when there was a change of government the new people were very suspicious about the public servants.

And later on, that series on television *Yes Minister* was very funny but it did not reflect the NZ reality at the time – all new Ministers believed it was true! Totally based on fact. That series, I think, came to New Zealand after Norman Kirk but successive prime ministers and ministers since then have been absolute devotees. Very destructive in terms of relationships between the public sector and the politicians – not funny!

SO: Woah! It hit a nerve. [*Laughter*] Of course, we find it deliciously funny in this country.

DM: Well, it is in many ways and it may be more accurate in the UK context. But I remember wandering in to meet my new minister when I became Head of the Department of Conservation years later. I had my three deputies with me and we were all wearing grey suits and ties and looking very solemn, and this guy looked at us and he said, "Oh. I'm from the government. I'm here to help you." [*Laughter*] I mean, he was mocking us!

SO: [*Laughter*] He didn't say, "Now, which one of you is Sir Humphrey?", did he?

DM: No, but his first words to his new Chief Executive were mocking! Well, you know, I wasn't very Sir Humphrey-ish and I took my role as a public servant very seriously….

SO: Ok, diversion. David, Norman Kirk was also very concerned about nuclear testing in the Pacific at that particular Ottawa meeting. Please, could you give me some detail about the way that Heath was handling that? Of course, Britain went into the EEC and acceded to the Treaty of Rome in 1973, so it may have been particularly sensitive to French opinion and French policy.

DM: Heath was very concerned to head off us, the Commonwealth, having a view on the subject, let alone reporting and going public on it. And Heath called Kirk in and thought he was going to, you know, dress him down. Well, you know, Kirk was not a guy you could easily dress down. He was tough and he was articulate and he believed, actually, that having the French testing their dirty bombs in our back yard was not a nice thing, and he told Heath as much. Neither Heath nor Douglas-Home addressed the reality of French actions as seen by the South Pacific states but they argued on the basis of Commonwealth precedent. They said, "We don't pass resolutions or things

like that which attack friendly states like France." To which Kirk, of course, said, "France is not a friendly state to us." Anyway, neither of them shifted their position and it all came out in the meeting. Finally, with no thanks to either Trudeau or Lee Kuan Yew – who [both] really, I think, regarded it as a storm in a teacup – we finally got a statement that didn't actually name France, but everyone knew who we were talking about. We did not get the sort of statement we wanted but Kirk played it superbly in public. [*Laughter*] He burst out on to the stage in the Chateau Laurier Hotel, threw his arms up in exultation and cried, "We won!"

SO: To an expectant press corps! [*Laughter*]

DM: And there were five hundred correspondents and televisions cameras whirring away, and he got to the media before Heath did, which was very interesting. Heath was usually pretty fast on his feet. The London papers said, "New boy bests Heath" – that was one of the headlines. The press painted it as a victory for Kirk over Heath! [*Laughter*]

SO: Well, that was the quiet suggestion of Frank Corner, wasn't it? On the way down to the press conference. To play it as a victory?

DM: Yes, yes.

SO: Very astute indeed. So, David, after you'd acted as Norman Kirk's adviser, were you his private secretary in his office?

DM: No, I was a Foreign Service officer and remained so. But Kirk had an instinct for foreign affairs issues and had sent me off to Africa a few months before to do a job relating to African participation in the Commonwealth Games in Christchurch. En route to Ottawa we spent two days in Hawaii and talked Commonwealth issues for most of that time. And he got it. He understood it. And he played the Commonwealth Game superbly in Ottawa. At the start, the first three or four hours, he just listened and looked around; he talked to other heads at one or two functions beforehand, and then he started talking his common sense. He was a pretty passionate man. He really struck a note with the Africans and Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew said later that he was the most impressive of all Commonwealth Prime Ministers at that meeting. Lee Kuan Yew and he met several times after that.

SO: David, I'm fascinated by the number of times people I've interviewed have talked about people "getting" the Commonwealth. You've just implied Norman Kirk "got" the Commonwealth, and Mahathir, by the late 1980s, "got" the Commonwealth. What do you mean by that?

DM: When people first come to it, they think, "What's going on here? This is a bunch of formerly oppressed people – the ex-colonial territories of a great imperial power – and here they are, all still associating together and getting chummy and talking about all sorts of sensitive issues and playing games together." You know, they don't get it. [*Laughter*] And, I mean, the way I put it to Kirk was that, "There's no use cerebrating too much about how we got to here. What is important is to accept that this is an existing, working, practical network, which we can use and contribute to, and why worry about whether it's going to last five years or fifty? It's going to last as long as people still want

to use it." So, [*Laughter*] it's not a romantic view; it's a practical view. This is a network that works and it's a daily help to a number of countries – particularly the smaller ones, but not only the smaller ones. So, he understood that, and he felt that the meeting itself – particularly once all the officials were thrown out, or most of them…He was particularly impressed with how relaxed everybody was. I mean, even Heath inside that closed meeting was very diierent to the one who had dressed us down in his suite in the Chateau Laurier Hotel at the beginning of the week.

SO: That's interesting.

DM: Because, you see, it was a discussion among peers about their work. To whom else can you speak about how you become an effecient, effective head of government? And where better to find out than sit with a bunch of guys who are in the same position?

SO: So, what you're saying then is that the Retreat is really a leadership seminar?

DM: Yes, with very smart people. A high proportion of them are very smart. It's not just the retreats, though. During the conference they have closed sessions where they talk about the business of being a head of government. Not at every meeting, but if it comes up, or if someone requests it – and Trudeau was very keen on having a discussion about this. He said, "What's the point of getting these people together unless we actually have a really good talk amongst our peers and equals?" And they certainly did have. As I say, Kirk got some very good advice. Michael Manley had only been in office about a year, and Michael Manley got some good advice too. So, good fun.

SO: In his memoirs, *The Pacific Way*, Ratu Mara makes the point about going to a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and makes exactly your reference about it being an 'old boys' club. But Mara went on to say how surprisingly similar – no matter the size of the state – the challenges of leadership and governing were. Irrespective of the size of population, natural resources, [or] geographic position, there were common challenges to leaders. David, have you ever seen that in any other international forum?

DM: No, I don't think so. No, it's pretty unique, that angle. But here's a lovely quote for you. When I talked to Mrs Gandhi about Fiji for half an hour, at the end of that her conclusion was, "It seems that the smaller the country, the more complex the politics." Now, that, from an Indian prime minister, whew! [*Laughter*]

SO: I've always wondered about Parish Council politics being much more intense than, in fact, the politics at Westminster! [*Laughter*]

David, in 1980 you joined the New Zealand Election Observer mission to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe – which, of course, was moving to independence thanks to Commonwealth support for an all-party conference at Lancaster House. How were you selected for that team?

DM: Well, it was fairly logical because I'd done a lot of work with Africans in New York. And then I'd been around nearly all the borders of Rhodesia, as it then was, while in the Commonwealth Secretariat. And in New Zealand, you see, we had no posts in Africa at that time. So, I was sort of regarded [at home in the Ministry] as the Africa go-to person. And, you know, it was a pretty narrowly-based experience I'd had, but it was better than nothing! So, they asked me to go with two parliamentarians, a good young foreign service officer and an administrative fixer. There was only the five of us but we were there six or seven weeks. We went to fifty-five out of the fifty-six electoral districts of Rhodesia by helicopter and plane and bus and cars and so on. And we had a pretty good reading by the end.

Christopher Soames, the Governor, called in the professional diplomats at one point and he said, "So, who's going to win the election?" It infuriated the politicians that he asked us, not the politicos. We said, "Look, we've gone to fifty-five out of fifty-six electoral districts and it is very clear that about eighty-five percent of the women are going to vote for Mugabe in order to get peace. And they see it as the only way to achieve peace, and that's what they want. And that's why he's going to be the first prime minister." And Soames shook his head and he said, "Oh, no, Muzorewa will get there and blah, blah, blah." He was totally out of touch, but I think as a result of those talks, he must have got the same message from nearly everybody. He called Mugabe into his office for the first time the following day and they sat down and had a discussion. This was only about two days before the election. It was the first contact he'd had with Mugabe. Amazing.

SO: Yes, it was only two days before the poll began. He managed to strike up an extraordinary bond with Mugabe beforehand, which was critical, in fact, in preventing a coup against the election outcome. Because that was a pretty close run thing: the Brits had to dissuade the disappointed Rhodesian security forces not to launch a coup against the election result.

DM: Yes.

SO: Mind you, the Brits were also aware that the South Africans, too, were thinking of launching another coup at the independence celebrations. Fortunately, that did not come off.

DM: There was talk of them.

SO: Yes, there was certainly talk of them. There must have been. Salisbury at that moment was a pretty small network; there were over five hundred press corps covering the elections at that particular point, so it must have been a rumour mill.

David, you were appointed New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji in the late 1970s. When were you there?

DM; Yes, '77 to '80. I went almost straight from Fiji to Rhodesia.

SO: What was your view of Ratu Mara as a key Commonwealth Prime Minister in the Pacific? I know Fiji liked to represent itself as the 'hub of

the Pacific' by the late 1970s, but please could you give me some reflections on Ratu Mara and his views as a good Commonwealth man?

DM: [*Laughter*] It's difficult because he, again, was a very complex man, and the relationship between New Zealand and Fiji was quite fraught for a while there while I was High Commissioner, right at the beginning. We had two or three points of conflict: civil aviation and air landing rights, interference by New Zealand trade unions in the shipping between New Zealand and Fiji, that sort of thing. And although ours was an extremely good development assistance programme, he had his reservations about some aspects of it. So, it was a difficult first year or 18 months, but it all fell into place eventually and we became quite amiable. I can't remember him talking much about the Commonwealth, as such. He and I used to go off on the little government boat and go around the little Outer Islands, and he would take me along as a sort of – I don't know – sort of mascot or something…[*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] Because you could swim?

DM: No, because I loved fishing and so did he. We'd get carried ashore on these litters and things, and he would be superb. He would electioneer for eight or nine hours, then we'd go back on to the boat and go round the next corner and get our fishing lines out and start fishing! But in the South Pacific, the Commonwealth did not loom large in their day-to-day thinking. It was there, it had its advantages, but probably – at that time, anyway – the Pacific Forum was a more important institution in daily terms for the South Pacific states than was the Commonwealth as such.

SO: I had a question about the emergence of CHOGRM, the regional meeting for Commonwealth heads of government. Malcolm Fraser had this idea and set up the first CHOGRM, which met in Sydney in 1978. Do you recall what was New Zealand's view of the value of this smaller Commonwealth forum?

DM: I'm blank on that. I can't even remember it happening. I mean, I remember the meeting in Melbourne later, where Muldoon and Mrs G fell out.

SO: Could I ask you, please, did you witness Robert Muldoon and Mrs Gandhi having, shall we say, a 'set-to' at the Melbourne Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting?

DM: No, I wasn't at that meeting. I did [see it] at the Delhi meeting later. I went with Muldoon from Wellington, because I was then… We had changed our High Commission [in India] into a 'non-resident' HC because of the break up between Muldoon and Mrs G. I was the non-resident High Commissioner based in Wellington. So, I went with Muldoon to the Commonwealth meeting in Delhi, but I didn't see much of it because I was again pre-occupied with bi-lateral things. He had one or two other people with him, so I used to tear off and see the Foreign Ministry people or the trade people or the carpet wool people or whoever it was I was having to see. But certainly, there was animosity there all right.

SO: Why did they fall out so badly at the Melbourne meeting, do you know?

DM: I think it was a compendium of things. There was the South African issue. She had had a run-in with Jack Marshall, who'd been New Zealand Prime Minister ten years before and who was always talking about 'bridge-building' with South Africa. Mrs G, in the Commonwealth meeting, said, "Prime Minister, a bridge, to be effective, must reach both banks." It was a wonderful put-down, but I don't think Jack Marshall ever forgave her for it. He just sat there and couldn't say anything. [*Laughter*] And I think there was a personality clash with Muldoon. He was not a very nice character, and I had a number of run-ins with him over the years. It was very easy to fall out with him because he could be very rude, especially to officials. The precise thing that triggered it in Melbourne?…I'm not sure. Maybe she even came, to some degree, to the rescue of Malcolm Fraser, because Muldoon was attacking him, too.

SO: Yes, I know that there was absolutely no love lost between Malcolm Fraser and Robert Muldoon. After you'd been non-resident High Commissioner in India, based in Wellington, that is when you went to New York as New Zealand Representative at the UNO?

DM: Yes, I went in '85. So, I had five years at home – after Fiji and Rhodesia – as Assistant Secretary. And I was Assistant Secretary for everything, as far as I can remember. I was the Americas, Asia, the Pacific, and I kept saying, "Is there anywhere else?" [*Laughter*] Europe and Africa were about the only parts I didn't have responsibility for!

SO: Can I ask you, then, what was your observation of the strain that David Lange's anti-nuclear policy in the Pacific put on New Zealand's relations with the Commonwealth?

DM: Well, it was affirming in the case of the South Pacific countries, of course. The South Pacific countries were fully with us. The Brits didn't like it, obviously, but there was a grudging support…not even grudging: there was support and admiration around much of the rest of the Commonwealth for what we were doing, and a sort of 'Good on ya, mate' feeling. It was Washington and London where the chief problem was. And especially Washington, of course; the Americans handled it very badly.

SO: Well, indeed. Did it pose a strain on the bi-lateral relationship between Wellington and Canberra? Because of the impact of New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance on the American nuclear umbrella and the ANZUS relationship?

DM: Oh, yes. Our relations with Canberra were really more tense than they'd ever been before. And they worked actively against us in a range of fora, and they made pretty clear to the Americans that the New Zealanders should be frozen out. And that's what happened, to a degree. I was Assistant Secretary for the Americas, so I went off with my boss, Merv Norrish, to Washington to try and work our contacts and see if we could make some progress and get some common sense going. But, you know, people whom Merv had known for all his professional career refused to see him. It was quite outrageous.

SO: When I interviewed Gerald Hensley, he remarked that New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance had certainly affected David Lange's position within the debates at the Nassau meeting on South Africa. Because there was

a sense of Australia/New Zealand tension, the small group who were trying to press Mrs Thatcher on South Africa had deliberately excluded the New Zealanders because of the sense that you weren't a reliable power in the Commonwealth. So, there was a spill over effect.

DM: I have no fix on that. I think Malcolm Fraser was, at the time, more pro-Commonwealth than the New Zealand equivalent, I suspect. And he was a good operator. He was sort of a brittle character, but he was also a good operator internationally.

SO: What was your view of Bob Hawke and his commitment to the Commonwealth?

DM: [*Laughter*] I'm just giggling because I remember a story which I can't tell you over the phone.

SO: David, we're going to have to meet for coffee when you and Jan are next in London! All these stories you can't tell me over the phone…

DM: Yes. Well, Hawke…I don't have a very sound basis for this, but I don't think he was very pro-Commonwealth. [That] is my impression. I can't really say that that's based on any personal observation.

SO: Ok, but that's interesting, if that was the impression and sense that was communicated to New Zealand, a close regional power. From your viewpoint as New Zealand Representative in New York, did you stay in touch with the Eminent Persons Group that went down to South Africa in 1986? I know that Malcolm Fraser and General Obasanjo, as co-leaders of the EPG, toured the United States after they'd been down to South Africa. I wondered if you'd met them when they came through?

DM: Yes, there was a funny thing that grew up – and it wasn't in accord with Commonwealth practice – and that is that the Brits used to call 'Commonwealth Meetings' of Permanent Reps in New York in the late 80s. I, being an ex-Commonwealth Secretariat hand, said, "This is not how it's done! This is going back to old colonial practice!" Anyway, the Brits did call a meeting and we were briefed by Obasanjo, but it wasn't a very interesting or exciting meeting because we were on different sides on a lot of issues, as Commonwealth countries, and we didn't meet together very often. I think that if we'd followed a practice that had been established – essentially by Arnold – of having meetings convened by whoever wanted to convene a meeting, and people who could come along would come along, and it wasn't just the Brits who were convening a meeting, we'd maybe have got more out of it in the UN context. Contacts were on a personal basis, rather than on an institutional basis or a country-by-country basis.

SO: The Commonwealth had observer status at the UNO by this particular point, so I'm interested if there was a Commonwealth presence or some degree of organisation in New York. You are implying that, in fact, it was the Brits who went against established Commonwealth practice and got together Commonwealth representatives. What was the view of the United Nations on the Commonwealth?

DM: Oh, well, of course, very antagonistic in relation to UDI, for example, in Rhodesia. In the Fourth Committee, which is the decolonisation committee – I was in that from '64 to '68 – I remember the Guinean representative, who was actually the permanent representative, talking after one of Wilson's [settlement] initiatives on HMS Tiger [in 1966]. He said, "This so-called Commonwealth…" He said, "This institution which twice, in the last two years, has duped African nations…" I mean, [*Laughter*] I remember his very words: "Twice, in two years, has duped African nations…", over the effectiveness of sanctions and the unwillingness to use force and so on. So, yes, the Commonwealth wasn't all that popular among non-Commonwealth Africans or, indeed, among Commonwealth Africans.

SO: But wait a moment, David. It could be said that this was *British* policy, rather than the Commonwealth. This was not the 'British Commonwealth'.

DM: Oh. [*Laughter*] You're right, of course.

SO: But you are making a very interesting connection.

DM: Well, it's a frame of mind, an approach, which people still had, you see. I saw it in different terms after my experience in the Commonwealth Secretariat, but most African nations in those days saw the Commonwealth as being a vehicle – to a degree, on the political front – or a forum for influencing British policy. I mean, that's a pretty narrow view of the Commonwealth…

SO: It's understandable in that Harold Macmillan had had this idea of the Commonwealth acting as a magnet for newly independent African states, so that they would resist the siren call of Soviet-led socialism. So, it's understandable why intelligent national representatives in New York might have still had that hangover view of it still being the British Commonwealth.

DM: Yes, well a lot of them did have [that view], and yes, it's understandable; but, it was out of date.

SO: When you were back in New York again – from '85 to '88 – was there still an attitude of it being the British Commonwealth? Or had there been an increasing and welcome maturity of view on the role and value of the Commonwealth and its separate identity as an international organisation?

DM: I think the role the Commonwealth played in helping to find a solution to the Rhodesian issue had improved hugely its standing in the UNO. There was still the running sore of South Africa, but Rhodesia was in many ways much more explosive than the South African issue.

SO: Why do you say that?

DM: I think that people recognise that the Rhodesian thing was much more basic and, in some ways, a more simple issue than the South African one. With the South African [issue], you couldn't expect the Commonwealth or the British to solve it by themselves – it wasn't their responsibility – whereas Rhodesia was

still a constitutional responsibility of the British in the view of most Commonwealth countries. And the Commonwealth had actually played a very creditable role in 1980 by bringing the parties together, providing a useful conference, setting a semi-neutral conference table, coming up with thousands of troops to protect or at least to help maintain security [in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe] and so on. You know, we paid for our own troops; we weren't paid by anyone. We had a whole battalion there, and they had a wonderful time, but it was very dicey.

SO: Yes, it certainly was.

DM: In the first few days…Well, they were flown down by British Hercules air transport down to the south, near to the Matopo Hills, and they were camped out on the bend of a river. They were told that five or six ZIPRA battalions would come out of the bush, and they waited twenty-four hours; nothing happened. Then someone wandered in and they talked to him, and two or three hours later the ZIPRA commander came in and then they all came in. And the ZIPRA commander said, "Would you please put your tents – with New Zealand flags on them – all the way around our tents, because otherwise the Rhodesian air force is going to bomb us." And so that's what we did. So, here we were physically protecting the ZIPRA battalions! [*Laughter*] How did I get on to that? [*Laughter*]

SO: You were talking about Rhodesia being a success story for the Commonwealth, and how it boosted its standing.

DM: As opposed to South Africa, you see. Okay, arms sales and things like that by the British to South Africa was a big issue, but somehow or other, people – I think, quite logically – identified the Rhodesian situation as purely a British and Commonwealth issue in the end.

SO: After the resolution of the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe issue and the unlikely success of the election and transition to independence, there had been a progressive breakdown and the violence in Matabeleland, and yet Rhodesia/Zimbabwe was still portrayed as a success story. Were you aware of the growing violence? Did this filter through diplomatic circles?

DM: There were rumours and there were press people who were writing about it, but they didn't have much access.

SO: No.

DM: And, you know, it was very effectively concealed for a very long time. I remember having lunch with Judith Todd at the Royal Commonwealth Society. We had lunch there and she was pretty upset about it, for obvious reasons. But no, I had no special sources of information, and by then I was either in that well-known African capital of Tokyo [*Laughter*] or I was running the New Zealand Prime Minister's Department, or I was in the IUCN in Geneva. So, my sources were a little meagre, in a way.

SO: Yes, indeed. So, just to recapitulate then… By the 1980s, the view of the Commonwealth at the United Nations had improved considerably because of the success of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

DM: Yes.

SO: How long did this warm afterglow continue for the Commonwealth, as far as the UN was concerned?

DM: Well, it was certainly there when I was there – '85 to '88. There was still the South African issue, of course. But it didn't lead to a sort of warming, [to] collegial action, co-operation, consultation or anything like that in New York. I'm just trying to think of why… Part of it was what I was saying before: that people had an outmoded view of the Commonwealth. But, also, people's attention was on other issues.

SO: From your point of view, did Mrs Thatcher's highly public stance of resisting economic and financial sanctions affect adversely the standing of the Commonwealth?

DM: I don't think so, no. I think that, by that time, the more sophisticated thinkers realised that she wasn't the Commonwealth at all. Nor was Britain the Commonwealth.

SO: No, indeed, but her stance on sanctions was very divisive within the Commonwealth, which could have damaged it outside.

David, please, could you give some reflections on your view of Arnold Smith as the founding Secretary General, and then the input and contrasting style of Sonny Ramphal as Secretary General? You've seen the Commonwealth and the Secretariat from the inside and also from the outside, as a leading New Zealand diplomat. How much do you think their contrasting styles of leadership were critical to building the Commonwealth as an effective organisation?

DM: Each was, I think, appropriate to his time. Fortuitously – or perhaps coincidentally – Arnold had to kick start the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The British had a very negative view of the role of the Secretariat, and people like Muldoon used to refer to Arnold and Sonny as the 'Commonwealth Secretary'. And he did it deliberately; he was saying, "Your job is to write the minutes." But that was a particularly offensive attitude and typical of Muldoon. But right at the beginning, Arnold's activism, his ability to persuade people, his straight out courage and stubbornness was really pretty important. Yaw Adu would crack his knuckles and say, "Arnold, do you think you really should do this?" And Arnold would say, "Yes, I'm going to do it." And off he'd go. Or off we would go! [*Laughter*] For example, we went off to Freetown at one point, in relation to Biafra, and we hung around there for about two weeks because Francis Nwokedi – who was Ojukwu's Foreign Secretary – was supposed to be turning up. He turned up eventually and we had a discussion. That was a bit of a gamble and it didn't produce much movement, but it meant that we were much better briefed and we had information which was useful. It was the sort of thing that demonstrated Arnold was prepared to take gambles and risks. He was prepared to just say

to the British, "Well, I'm sorry. That's not the view of most Commonwealth countries and so I propose to do this and that, and this and that." So, he was appropriate for that time.

But then the Commonwealth, I think, needed Sonny's more subtle approach. And he was from the developing world and someone who wasn't part of any one faction. So, it was a brilliant idea that Jim Maraj threw in [to suggest Sonny as Arnold's successor], which was where we started this conversation. It was a brilliant idea about Sonny, because we were going through the list and we couldn't think of too many alternatives. But the moment Jim Maraj said, "What about Sonny Ramphal?" I knew and I think all but one of the others thought it was absolutely right. Emeka had reservations but perhaps he thought it was Africa's turn. In any event, he succeeded to the job himself in due course. Of course, it was a loaded session. I mean, Patsy Robertson was there from Jamaica, Jim was from Trinidad, Sonny himself was from Guyana, I was from NZ – all small Commonwealth countries, and we could see the point of it. But Sonny was also different from Arnold. "Intellectual" is a loaded word, but Sonny was almost more [of a] moderate and reasoning voice than Arnold on occasion. Arnold was pretty straight up, [and] could be quite confrontational, whereas Sonny was able to generate the momentum which produced, for example, the Rhodesian negotiations in Lusaka and London. And the Brits couldn't ignore him as they did on occasion with Arnold. He was a lawyer and that counted a few times. Arnold was pretty charming, but Sonny was extremely charming and he won people over by a different means than Arnold. But they were both appropriate for their times, I would suggest, and both were highly successful in their own ways.

SO: You said in the notes which you kindly sent me that Arnold saw the Commonwealth as a [*reading*] "valuable multi-country, multi-regional, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural forum for resolving conflict, fostering development and having some fun together. There are not enough such associations, he used to say. Let's use the one which is already in place." But this then contrasts quite sharply with the British being lukewarm in these years and not using this vehicle. That's a puzzle.

DM: Ha! It's a huge puzzle. Time and again, I used to think, "What the hell are the British up to?" I mean, the Indian government was doing this so-called 'tilt' towards Russia at one point, and you'd sit down with a bunch of officials and Indian diplomats and they were still pretty pro-British under the skin. They sounded British, their argumentation was British, [and] a lot of them were British-educated. This was a huge asset, and the British would ignore them! To me, it's one of the enduring mysteries of British foreign policy over those years. Why didn't they use this institution, the Commonwealth, much more effectively than they did? And I've got no final answer. We could not understand that. And Churchill would not have approved. Do you remember what he said when asked about a choice for the UK between Europe and the Commonwealth? "If I should have to choose between Europe and the deep blue sea, I would always choose the deep blue sea," he said.

SO: I wonder the extent to which, firstly, it was precisely because of the growing preoccupation with Europe in the 1970s, Britain having joined the European Economic Community [in 1973]. You made reference in your first interview to Edward Heath …

DM: That's right.

SO: …seeking to prove at the Singapore meeting that the Commonwealth was not a millstone around Britain's neck, and that Britain would genuinely be a confident power reaching towards Europe, rather than being held back by its imperial heritage.

DM: Yes.

SO: So, there was a bureaucratic focus on Europe, with the best minds in the Foreign Office focusing on Europe rather than the Commonwealth, but perhaps also a residual sense that Britain *shouldn't* try to dominate the Commonwealth, precisely for fear that it would still be seen as the British Empire at work?

DM: Well, I think that's a charitable interpretation.

SO: Well, I'm a Brit, I would come up with that! [*Laughter*]

DM: [*Laughter*] Yes, there were some Brits who probably had that consideration in the back of their minds, but I think it was sheer ineptitude, to a fair degree. Sheer ineptitude, plus the European factor.

SO: Sir Peter Marshall was really quite crisp in saying that he was the first leading British diplomat to be appointed to a senior position in the Commonwealth Secretariat. You made reference to four key Special Advisers in the Secretary General's office coming from New Zealand, and [there were] the four Australian Directors of International Affairs or Political Affairs. There were also important Indians that were dispatched to Marlborough House, although there are not such uniformly positive comments about these officials. And yet, there isn't the same bureaucratic thread running through the Secretariat from the British side.

DM: Well, let's see. There was… Bill Peters was the first head of the International Affairs division, [and he] was a straight FCO man. But you know, Arnold was making a point, I suspect, in all of this. His argument was that this was a multi-country institution and we've got to have some diversity of recruits. I can't remember any really good British candidates being turned down, for example. But I don't think they were putting their best people up.

SO: That's what I mean.

DM: It was an honour for a New Zealander or a Jamaican or an Indian to be elected to work in the Commonwealth Secretariat. It was a great privilege: I loved it. Whereas to [a British official]…It was based in London and the really top story was joining Europe and, you know…

SO: David, after you'd finished your time in New York, was that when you moved into the IUCN?

DM: No, because I came home from New York and became Director General of Conservation – the head of the Department of Conservation – and I ran that for just under two years. Then, totally against my wishes, I got moved to be head of the Prime Minister's Department and [asked] to restructure it. I did that for two and a half years and then I went to Tokyo from '92 to '94 and then I went to IUCN. I couldn't have even told you what IUCN stood for. Well, I suppose I could after a bit of time in DOC, but I couldn't have before the time in DOC – The Department of Conservation. And it was a New Zealand NGO who put my name up and rang me four or five times in Tokyo and said, "It's time we have a New Zealander in this job. You've got to go and do it," blah, blah, blah. And eventually I decided, "Oh well, I'll have a shot." I didn't think I had a dog's chance of getting it. But we went off, and it was a fascinating five years. When I finished in the IUCN, it was 1999 so I was into my 60s and I wasn't all that keen on going back into the Foreign Service. After running a global institution it seemed somewhat mundane to go back into the old service! So, I retired, but have worked part time ever since, and still am.

SO; David, please, could I ask… Given your long involvement as a leading New Zealand diplomat, international civil servant and consultant, how important do you feel was – and is – sport as part of the Commonwealth connection?

DM: Well, I think if Jan were here, she would chortle at that question.

SO: [*Laughter*] Why?

DM: Well, I think it's really important because I'm a great rugby and cricket fan – and a player, in my day, not that I was much good at cricket. But, you see, it's an instant conversation starter. I think I told you [that] in Laos, the head of the World Bank office was a Tamil from Sri Lanka, and he and I would talk cricket every time we met, which was twice a year. The first time we met, we'd sit down for ten minutes and talk about the cricket and what had been happening on the world scene between Sri Lanka and New Zealand. It used to infuriate the American colleagues of mine and they used to talk about these "ball and stick games". [*Laughter*] I was passionate about it, but every now and then, just to annoy them, I'd use an expression which came from cricket or rugby - like 'bowling a googly' – and I would then explain it carefully to the Americans, who didn't want to have it explained to them. [*Laughter*]

[Sport] is a great conversation starter, a great social thing and it's very Commonwealth. Rugby and cricket are both very British games which were exported to the empire, and look at where we are now! We're probably better at rugby, but the cricket is very South Asian at the moment. It's the Indians, the Sri Lankans and, to some extent, the Pakistanis who are the great exponents of the game and everybody here knows them and knows all the people. There's a lot of exposure in the New Zealand press about the rugby and cricket, and it's nearly all with Commonwealth countries. It's fascinating. And the Commonwealth Games is big news. I mean, it's all over the television here, about Glasgow being 69 days away or something…

SO: If I could just close up on your point about cricket… You were laughing about your Tamil colleague at the World Bank in Laos, but it established

a basis for personal liking and trust between you as two people from Commonwealth countries, which is important.

DM: Yes.

SO: And, if you had a crisis, you'd already had that point of communion.

DM: Yes, I knew I could ring Olango [the Tamil colleague] at any time of day or night, wherever he was, and we could have a conversation. We could have one off the record, because we trusted each other. We would brief each other off the record, and that would very often help break through a roadblock.

SO: You had started talking about the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, which are now approaching, but you were involved in private diplomacy around the Christchurch Games in 1974.

DM: Yes.

SO: Do you mind reading into the record your recollections about that?

DM: Well, it was in Easter 1973 – just before Easter. I had a huge job on my hands because I'd been handed over the running of the bilateral and multi-lateral aid programmes of the entire country. So, I had my hands full. Norman Kirk rang me up and said would I come over. So, I came over and he said, "What are you doing for Easter?" and I said, "I'm going to Gisborne to see my mother-in-law." And he said, "No, you're not, you're going to Africa." I said, okay, why not? You know, what had happened was that the Commonwealth Games were coming up but there was also a proposed South African rugby tour of New Zealand, and Norman Kirk had a dilemma on his hands. The politics of rugby in NZ is huge, because rugby is our religion. And Norman Kirk made a statement, a very careful statement, saying, "We are not going to [thwart] this tour, but we will make it clear that we will not be willing to welcome a South African rugby side to New Zealand until it is chosen on the basis of merit." Merit, not the colour of the skin.

Now, some stupid New Zealand press man read this over the phone to Abraham Ordia, who was the head of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, at two o'clock in the morning, Ordia's time – stupid thing to do anyway – and he didn't put in the proviso about being chosen on merit! So, Ordia called together his council and they said no African country will come to the Christchurch Games. So, Kirk wanted me to go, hunt down Abraham Ordia and give him a letter from Kirk and talk to him about the whole background of the thing, and then go to other Commonwealth countries across Africa and set out what, in fact, was a very proper and very courageous statement by Kirk.

SO: Yes, because the Games without Africans would be meaningless.

DM: Absolutely meaningless. So, I went off anyway, and I went to Ghana first, and then I went to Nigeria and there, inevitably, I was able to find one of my contacts in the Foreign Service from my New York days. We'd been in the same committee together and he got me a meeting with the head of the Foreign Service, who was very suspicious about what I was there for and

demanded to see my passport and so on. But, anyway, they agreed eventually to set up a meeting with Abraham Ordia, and he and I achieved a meeting of minds. He told me what had happened – that he hadn't been told that the selection of the South African team had to be on the basis of merit. We had a game of tennis and a couple of bottles of beer together and he said that he would go back to the Supreme Council.

SO: Kirk had also wanted to keep it quiet, hadn't he?

DM: That is true, yes. In case it didn't work, I suppose! [*Laughter*] Anyway, I then flew across to Kenya, and was going to go down to Dar es Salam and Lusaka and so on. In Kenya, they intoned this formula of theirs that the Supreme Council would decide – it was not for governments or foreign ministries to decide – and so I cancelled the rest of my trip, went straight home and then about two weeks later we got a letter from Ordia saying that they had reversed their decision and Africa would attend the Commonwealth Games. And that was gratifying.

SO: Well, indeed. As Kirk's private emissary, you were critical in persuading the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa to give its endorsement to those Games. So, you really did save the Games.

DM: Yes, in a way, but it was Kirk's strategy. Initially I got irritated with Ordia. I mean, he was a lovely man, he had a beautiful voice and he was very smart and wise. But he was suspicious at first about my credentials. I finally said to him, "How long have you been involved in this question of the South African rugby tours and participation in the Commonwealth Games?" And he said, "Oh, a couple of years now." And I said, "Well, I jeopardised my career in the Foreign Service by demonstrating against the 1960 tour" – the New Zealand Tour of South Africa. He said, "So, you were in the Foreign Service at the time?" I said, "Yes, I'd just joined the year before," and he said, "Where did you demonstrate?" I said, "Outside the Parliamentary reception for the New Zealand team." He said, "Was your Minister there?", and I said, "Yes, the Minister and the Prime Minister." And I didn't tell him that I actually knew the Prime Minister quite well because an aunt of mine was one of his electorate secretaries or something. And so I said, "I am pretty instantly recognisable in a crowd," and he said, "Ah, so you risked your career?" I said, "Yes." And, you know, the whole tone of the meeting changed at that point, because he suddenly realised that I was ideologically on his side and we got on like a house on fire after that. It was great fun and we had a lot to talk about – all sorts of issues and history and so on.

SO: If I could ask you, please, your view of the Queen and her headship of the Commonwealth? How much value added do you feel she has brought to the Commonwealth? Could you reflect on her particular qualities as Head?

DM: I'm a great fan. Instinctively, I suppose I'm a republican, but I'm a great fan of the Queen as Head of the Association, as Head of the Commonwealth. We used to go and brief her twice a year – Arnold and I, or Emeka and Arnold, or whoever was around – and she would go right through the list of people. You know, not with notes; I mean, right off the top of her head. She would ask, "How is Dr Banda?", "What's the internal situation now in Zambia?", or, "What

do we think about developments in India?" And she had a compendious knowledge, particularly of the Commonwealth leaders. She knew them all and she was fascinated. She was interested. She insisted on coming to practically every one of the Commonwealth meetings, and it wasn't just grace and favour stuff. She would sit down and there would be an occasion where one was able to talk to her, and I've got a photo here of all the High Commissioners in Delhi, for example, sitting down with her. So, she'd ask to see the Commonwealth High Commissioners in Delhi. But it was the breadth of her knowledge and her ability… It was a very personal interest she has in the institution, and I think, in many ways, she'd have a more informed and, in my view, more realistic view of the Commonwealth than you could say of a number of British diplomats. She's one of the great assets of the Commonwealth.

SO: What do you feel about the future of the Headship? Derek Ingram wrote thirty years ago that he felt that the Commonwealth was grown up enough: it had a Secretary General and so it didn't need a formal Head. I'm just wondering about the future, when Elizabeth II is no longer with us, whether you feel that, in fact, there are debates or value judgements within the Commonwealth that it doesn't need a formal Head?

DM: Well… It was an inspired idea at the time. But post-Elizabeth there is a case for change.

SO: The phraseology was that the Head of Commonwealth would be the Monarch, a superb piece of drafting in 1949 by Burke Trend, who was the British Cabinet Secretary.

DM: Good guy.

SO: So, that's how India as a Republic remained within the Commonwealth.

DM: That's right. I think there should be a Head like that, but it may be that the next evolution would be for that Headship to circulate, and you get a very distinguished successor to fill the Queen's shoes.He/she doesn't have to be British – far from it.. So, I mean, a meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government could change that and say, "Oh, well, the next one will be blah blah from blah blah." And maybe do a five year stint, region by region, or something like that. And, you know, that would help again with making the concept of the Commonwealth more commonly understood. I think the only deficiency of the Queen's performance is that she's British! [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] Yes.

DM: She's a charmer, too.

SO: Other people I have spoken with have all talked about her with such personal warmth, saying she is charming, knowledgeable, amusing…

DM: Yes.

SO: At the risk of being disrespectful, she comes across as being a very interested and engaged 'Granny' to everyone, and they value that enormously.

DM: Yes. I think it's going to be a problem when she either hands over or passes on. And it may be that it will have to be some sort of adaptation of that Headship. As I say, it could be a strength.

SO: It's not, though, just the Queen. How much do you feel that the Commonwealth's diplomatic energy and effectiveness is tied directly to heads [of government]? It seems now that too many heads don't actually see the Commonwealth as an entity. In earlier days, when the Commonwealth was considerably smaller, it was a pilot fish in international summitry, but by the time the Commonwealth had grown from twenty-two countries in 1971 to fifty-three, surely it has become too large and too diverse to be an effective vehicle?

DM: I think you could argue exactly the opposite. The more diverse and the bigger, the more useful it is. No small country would want to be dependent on any one of the great powers or the super powers or anyone else. And so being a member of a network like this that reaches out and encompasses so many countries, now, is a great asset.

SO: Does it risk duplicating the UN?

DM: It's nothing like the UN. The UN is a huge institution and it's totally institutionalised, as it were, whereas the Commonwealth is very flexible and has relatively limited functions and preoccupations, but they're pretty useful to a lot of us.

SO: Kris Srinivasan said to Matthew Neuhaus, former Head of Political Affairs, that the Commonwealth really didn't make a difference – that it was not significant as a hard power organisation, it couldn't make any critical contributions on disarmament or nuclear negotiations or international terrorism, and therefore, in fact, as an international organisation, it was something of an irrelevance. I wondered whether you feel that, in fact, it's quite the contrary: that the Commonwealth's secret strength is that it operates most effectively below the radar – that quiet word, the relative invisibility, you going as a personal emissary?

DM: Yes. I think you can carry that too far because… Well, take the Rhodesian thing again: that wasn't below the radar – that was right in the middle of the radar screen. So, there have been occasions – you know, in relation to Fiji and Nigeria and so on – where it has been very public what it has been doing, and pretty positive. So, I think "below the radar" is a little bit misleading, in a way. We keep saying – and always have for the last fifty years – that we should do a better job of publicising and selling the institution, but that's not the way it operates. If you got Saatchi & Saatchi to sell the Commonwealth, it wouldn't really go down very well.

SO: [*Laughter*] Other interviewees that I've spoken to have said that the very value of the Commonwealth is shown through the number of countries that would like to join it – that [these countries] feel it does raise their

visibility; that it could act as a vehicle or a platform for their national interest as small or medium ranking powers. So, that interest is validation of its importance in international affairs.

DM: Yes, and its respectability. Because of the Harare Declaration, it's a qualification for countries which are going through a period of transition. It's a qualification to get Commonwealth membership. That's a development that, since the time I was in the Commonwealth Secretariat, wasn't anywhere near as exclusive as it is now.

The Fijians are pretty keen on resuming full membership when their elections are over in September, and that's dramatic. I've kept in touch [with developments in Fiji] quite a bit. It's one of our favourite places anyway, and we really enjoy the Fijian people. We go out there at least once a year and just stooge around. We go and see our old mates in Suva for a couple of days and then spend the rest of the time on the beach, which is lovely. But twice, when I've come home, I've written a note to politicians, to our leaders, about it, because I have not thought that we or the Australians handled it particularly subtly. You know, too much preaching and too much ignoring the good things that are coming out of it. This new constitution, for the first time, gives all the people of Fiji a vote. They didn't have a constitution at independence that did that. They had a constitution which, in effect, gave two votes to some people and one vote to another person, or no vote at all. The tricky factor is still the role of the military and whether they really will accept that the executive and the legislature have control of them and that they have to fall into line. Well, we shall see.

SO: Indeed, we shall see. David, thank you very much indeed for a very wide-ranging and lengthy discussion. I'm very grateful for your patience.

[END OF AUDIOFILE PART TWO]