VOICE FILE NAME: COHP (Richard Bourne)

Key:

SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
RB: Richard Bourne (Respondent)
s.l. = sounds like

SO: This is Sue Onslow, interviewing Mr Richard Bourne at Senate House on Wednesday 13th February 2013. Richard, thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin, please, by saying how you became involved in the Commonwealth?

RB: For me, it was something of a fluke getting into the Commonwealth because I'd been an education correspondent on the Guardian; I've been Assistant Editor, the number two figure, on New Society Weekly for five years; I'd been a deputy editor then the London Columnist for the Evening Standard when Simon Jenkins was the editor. I'd been fired from the Standard: it was one of their crises; and I then set up an education magazine and did some work for Channel 4 just before Channel 4 went on air. I set up with another person a pressure group called the Fourth Channel Development Education Group, which became the International Broadcasting Trust and which is still in existence.

And then in 1982, I saw an advertisement for the Deputy Director's post at the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington. I put in for it, found I knew a lot of the people, was offered the job, and that really introduced me to the Commonwealth and at that stage I stopped being a journalist. Obviously, skills that I have learnt over 20 years as a journalist did not turn to waste, but from then on I was actively involved in the Commonwealth. My job at the Commonwealth Institute for seven years I think was to be the programming deputy director; I was responsible for an African focus in 1984, a Caribbean focus in 1986, and a Pacific focus in 1988. These brought together educational and cultural activities. Some of them were highly ambitious; for instance, in our Caribbean focus we had 50 committees in towns up and down the country of black and Caribbean people, it was funded by Arts Council and by the Commission for Racial Equality. We had a Caribbean express train which visited 21 stations, as a roving exhibition. We were responsible for a Commonwealth Arts Festival linked to the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. They were a fairly disastrous, much boycotted, games but we had a Commonwealth arts event in the Waverley Gardens which was a huge success and we brought over a Pan-Caribbean theatre company and all kinds of things.

And then in 1989 I left the Commonwealth Institute. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office had been trying for some time to cut back on the Commonwealth Institute. At one stage when I first joined there, the FCO was probably paying more for the Commonwealth Institute than they were in their subscription to the Commonwealth Secretariat. Given priorities towards Europe, Mrs Thatcher's own attitude to the Commonwealth and all of that, the FCO felt this was unsustainable. So my job was going to be merged with another; it was going to become purely educational. I didn't want to do that so I took my money and ran. At that stage I really set up the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and I then ran that. I was briefly special advisor to the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1991 - 1992 for a big rainforest project in Guyana, and I went out with Chief Anyaoku to the Rio Earth Summit.

And then in the mid-90s I did two things simultaneously: I ran a Commonwealth non-governmental office for South Africa and then Mozambique to link Commonwealth NGOs with South African NGOs after South Africa re-joined (ditto the one with Mozambique was because I spoke some Portuguese, after 1995); and at the same time, I was running a big human rights education project out of the Institute of Education next door with partners in Botswana, India, Northern Ireland, and Zimbabwe looking at how teenagers in secondary schools understood human rights principles in the different curricula they were following. It was called the Commonwealth Values in Education Project, and was funded by the DFID. I produced an academic report as a result.

Then in 1998 I had money from the Foreign Office and a young bursar from the Canadian government to do a feasibility study for a Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit which I ran until I technically retired in 2005. And then because of problems really with the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, I found myself as Secretary for the Ramphal Institute which I still am. Somewhere in the late years of the first decade of the 21st century I became a research fellow here (at the Institute). Obviously I've gone on doing things with the Institute to the present.

SO: You described your initial involvement in the Commonwealth as coming from a fluke, but what else has provided the energy of your interest and dedication?

RB: Well, I think there are two or three things. First of all, I felt in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a common view that the Commonwealth was actually past it; that this was an historical relic. I can remember meeting a friend of mine, a former journalist, in a pub in Fleet Street in the early 80s. When I said I was Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Institute, he said, "Commonwealth, I thought that had finished." And it's ironic now because people say 'Sonny Ramphal, this golden age' and all of that; but actually apart from the periodic rows that were taking place, for many of the public and certainly opinion formers and journalists, the Commonwealth was not a big deal then. But I thought that this was a network, or a network of networks, and that it should be made to work harder; that it wasn't an historic thing, that it was something present and could do a lot more. My impulse to get involved with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the agencies which set it up was very much that the propagandists of apartheid were having a field day because they were saying 'Okay, we may be discriminating against black people in South Africa but look at all the other things that are going on as well

in the Commonwealth. And I shared a strong feeling that the Commonwealth had to address human rights more generally.

SO: So you were involved with Derek Ingram at the residential conference at Cumberland Lodge in 1987?

RB: Exactly, yes. There were various other people to who were quite key at that point: Carl Wright who was at that stage running the Commonwealth Trade Union Council, and a chap called John Torode who'd been a Guardian journalist and then a Daily Mail journalist. He was present and I can't remember who else was part of that little group. It was a review conference after the boycotted Commonwealth Games at which the question was 'What future is there for the UK and the Commonwealth, and what could happen within the Commonwealth to make it more saleable within the UK?' And our particular group after the conference broke down into working groups, recommended as top of the list a new initiative in the field of human rights for the Commonwealth.

SO: How much inter-governmental support was there for this initiative or was it very much driven by, as you say, those dedicated few?

RB: Initially there was not much inter-governmental support. Originally we made a presentation to the Vancouver CHOGM in 1987 which was backed by three non-governmental bodies - the journalists, the trade union council and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association. After that, we were trying to get a bit of money together in order to do a survey which was published in 1991, called 'Put Our World To Rights'. At that stage we had quite a lot of negativity from the official Commonwealth Secretariat. I always thought that Sonny Ramphal and people around him did their damndest to kill it at that stage.

We approached two people to lead a group: one was Malcolm Fraser and one was the former Governor General of Australia whose name I can't think of at the moment, a lawyer who died not very long ago. Both turned us down - I think they'd both taken informal soundings at the Secretariat who had discouraged them from getting involved. Fortunately, however, Flora MacDonald, a former foreign minister of Canada and a feisty lady who believed very strongly in human rights issues said she would take it on, and on the back of her involvement, Canadian CIDA put money in which meant that we were funded for a couple of years which was initial funding to get us off the ground. We formed a very good representative group chaired by her; and we worked with a couple of professors, the guy who in the end did most of the editing work - I was the director so I was behind the scenes but helping on the editing and actually wrote a bit of it - was Yash Ghai, and he's the effective editor of 'Put Our World To Rights'.

Then we were lobbying to have a human rights charter or statement adopted at the Harare CHOGM. We were disappointed by the results of Harare; we thought that the Harare Declaration was just another windy thing that leaders would agree and forget about on the plane going home. It was just an initiative by that stage with five Commonwealth bodies involved, and the question was should we pack up and go home and say have we done as much as we can? Or should we institutionalise ourselves? And we chose to institutionalise ourselves, and in 1993 the main office moved to Delhi. It had been around the corner in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in Russell Square.

SO: Going back to your point about the Secretariat which you felt was very resistant to this human rights initiative: was this because it represented an implicit challenge to the Human Rights Unit within the Secretariat?

RB: The Human Rights Unit was very small and there had been a year in which they hadn't anybody in it. It was being used as a football by Sonny and the people at the top of the Secretariat who were trying to get some more money out of the ABC countries; and there was a row going on behind the scenes. In fact, the person, I think she was Acting Director, a woman called Madhuri Bose who was part of a small group including myself and people from some other human rights NGOs, who were meeting together in the run-up to the Harare CHOGM basically to lobby and to work out how to lobby to get recognition of human rights at the Harare meeting. In fact, although we didn't recognise at the time that we'd been quite successful because, as I say, we all thought we'd probably failed.

Actually it was not a failure; as these things go, we didn't do badly! For a start, Bob Hawke, the Prime Minister of Australia, had got a copy of our report and in the main meeting with other leaders he banged it down on the table and said, "What are we going to do about this?" And Mulroney, the Prime Minister of Canada, got involved in a stand-up row with President Arap Moi of Kenya; basically Mulroney said to Moi, "We're not going to go on giving you money. My taxpayers won't stand for it."

SO: But you didn't know about this row behind the scenes?

RB: We didn't know this stuff until well after. As I say, we were just doing our thing really. We obviously lobbied individual delegations, because we've got people from seven countries on the group that had produced 'Put Our World To Rights' including obviously Flora as a Canadian. It had a British guy, a trade unionist; it had a New Zealand lawyer, it had Soli Sorabjee from India who was currently out of office, he had been and would be again Attorney General. There was certainly an African as well, and there was Billie Miller from Barbados.

SO: How was this group identified and drawn together? By Flora MacDonald?

RB: No, by me. I did it on the basis of negotiation with the individual supporting NGOs. So, for instance, I went to the Commonwealth Trade Union Council and they produced this chap who was actually running the Musicians' Union in Britain. I also obviously wanted an international balance of countries, so that's how it was done.

SO: Were much of your energies directed also at persuading the Secretariat that your views and your agenda were complementary rather than contradictory?

RB: You have to remember that the Secretariat was on the cusp of change then, because Sonny finished prior to the Harare conference and it was Emeka's first. You also have to remember what the international situation was: Mandela had been released and in 1989 the Wall came down; rather stupidly Fukuyama was talking about the end of history [*Laughter*] and there was triumphalism, particularly in the United States. We were not particularly

shooting at the Secretariat, we were much more concerned about the attitude of governments but on the grounds that basically it was the governments who were running the Commonwealth, rather than the Commonwealth Secretariat. But actually Emeka was operating in a quite different way and in some ways he was a very conservative man, Chief Anyaoku was also wanting to ride the democratic wave at the end of the Cold War. So he or his staff were producing the wording for the Harare Declaration. We didn't think it was very strong at all, and actually although there was stuff about fundamental human rights, we were sceptical about the references to democracy.

SO: Did you submit your own draft?

RB: No. We had just submitted the big report. We did prepare a statement: I can't remember how we described it, I think we were calling for a human rights charter or something of that kind. I don't think we produced a draft. I mean, it was pretty clear as to the ground that we thought should be covered. We listed eight priorities for a human rights strategy for the Commonwealth, and of course the Harare Declaration didn't go into that detail at all; but I think we could claim that we played a role in achieving the result. In a way it's what happened afterwards that's interesting because we kept on bashing away. By that stage the whole Nigerian issue and the Nigerian dictatorship was absolutely up in lights. I mentioned there was an African member of our group: he was Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Fela Kuti's brother and a human rights campaigner in Nigeria. Beko was always being arrested and having to walk across the bush to get out via Francophone capitals and all of that. And he was pretty fed up with Emeka, as he felt that he was not doing very much. In fact, we now know that Emeka's relationships with the dictatorship by the end of the 1990s had completely collapsed. There were two years in which he couldn't even communicate with Sani Abacha. I expect Stuart [Mole] has told you.

But in the earlier period, there looked as though there might be an opening in Nigeria. Abiola got elected. But then he was arrested and you know the country reverted, as Abacha took over. Because of the involvement with Beko and Beko's knowledge of what was going on in Nigeria, the Nigerian situation was up in lights and we were campaigning all the way up to the New Zealand summit in 1995 which introduced CMAG. This was against the background of the execution of the Ogoni. We all the time were pushing to get the Commonwealth to take seriously its statements from Harare. Work had actually been done by the Secretariat and I think by the British Government in preparation for the New Zealand CHOGM, but actually it was the foolishness of Abacha and his people in executing the Ogoni leaders that made possible the acceptance of CMAG.

SO: Were you providing material support to Ken Saro Wiwa and the other Ogoni detainees?

RB: No, we didn't have any direct contact. We were in touch with his son who was in New Zealand and we supported, as I recall, at least one protest meeting in New Zealand, but no, it was indirect. And there were other players. The Body Shop lady was doing quite a lot for their cause.

SO: Anita Roddick?

RB: Yes. She and her Body Shop Foundation: they were providing quite a lot of support for Ken Saro Wiwa, partly on environmental grounds because he'd been an environmental campaigner as well as a writer and activist for the Ogoni. So our involvement was more to do with Nigeria really than it was specifically to do with the Ogoni, although I met the MOSOP people. I knew them.

SO: So the CHRI wasn't able to provide travel funds for Ken Saro Wiwa's son to go to Auckland?

RB: No, we were always short of money, very short of money.

SO: Who did financially support you?

RB: We'd obviously had a period of support from the Canadians, that was in the early 90s. Then the Ford Foundation were funders. After the office moved to Delhi the Ford Foundation support continued, although there was a slight interim period where there was an unpaid lady called Malti Singh, who had run the Indian chapter of Amnesty in the 1980s; she moved in to keep the show on the road, while Soli Sorabjee persuaded Maja Daruwala to come in. Maja had been running the South Asian human rights programme for Ford, and she brought Ford money with her effectively. After that we've had multiple sources of funding.

SO: Was there continued tension with the Secretariat in London because after moving to New Delhi, the CHRI stepped out of the 'cosy London elite' network on the Commonwealth?

RB: There was, absolutely. Obviously I was beginning to drift out of the CHRI; I was chairing it in the late 1990s in London and there was some friction between the committee of the organisations that had set up the CHRI with the Indian Committee which was chaired by Soli Sorabjee or George Verghese, a prominent Indian journalist, as to what the duties of the CHRI should be. But then essentially the Indian Committee took over and they've been effectively running it ever since. There is now a rather small operation in London, but which is pretty voluntarily.

But going back to the tension with the Commonwealth Secretariat from the CHRI: yes, there had always been tension with the Secretariat because CHRI was concerned for human rights and the Secretariat was concerned to keep its governments sweet and they were often extremely uninterested and downright hostile to human rights. That situation did not change with the move of the office to Delhi. Indeed, in some ways Maja Daruwala, her staff and her committee were even more cynical about the Commonwealth Secretariat. And of course the Delhi perspective on the Commonwealth anyhow is pretty unenthusiastic. For them the UN had always seemed much more important and so they got accreditation in Geneva; they go not every year but quite often to the human rights meetings in Geneva in March. At various times they've said 'Are we wasting our time with this Commonwealth? It's just too weak a political institution to be worth bothering with.'

To be fair, they've hung on in and they've got an international advisory body currently chaired by a Ghanaian lawyer and they've had some very good people before that. I worked with Kamal Hossain, the former Law and Foreign Minister of Bangladesh who helped to write their constitution, when he

chaired it; and again with Margaret Reynolds, a Labour Senator and former Women's Minister for Bob Hawke in Australia. I can't remember whether there was somebody else between them and this Ghanaian chap, and the Ghanaian chap has just recently retired and Yash Ghai has taken over as Chair.

SO: In what other pro-democracy campaigns was CHRI involved in the 90s, because it wasn't solely about Nigeria - although as you said this was very much 'up in lights'?

RB: Yes, I think the other one that was very much in my memory was Zambia, and of course that more or less coincided with the Harare conference in 1991 because it was at the conference that Kenneth Kaunda had to go home and was defeated. What was interesting about that was that the alliances in Zambia were very similar to the alliances in coalitions in Nigeria: that is to say, it included journalists, students, lawyers, trade unionists, some women's movements; and they were all really wanting an opening up of what had been in the case of Nigeria a military, and in the case of Zambia, a one party state. Certainly in Africa this bubbling up of a desire for change was quite widespread and of course it also reflected international changes in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

SO: What of Kenya?

RB: I can't remember the CHRI working a lot in Kenya, although subsequently in more recent times they've done work on police accountability and training.

SO: It's interesting that your particularly acute recollections are of Nigeria, but also Zambia. Obviously they absorbed the greater part of your energies at that time.

RB: Yes, two things. We sent a delegation to Nigeria in the run-up to the 1995 CHOGM which produced an excellent report called *Nigeria Stolen by Generals*. That was in every delegation's pocket when they went to the CHOGM in New Zealand, and along with obviously the executions, it helped to bring in the CMAG thing. That was a very good delegation: it was led by Flora; it included the former Attorney General of Zimbabwe, a very nice man who is now dead; and Nevil Linton actually who had just stopped working for the Commonwealth Secretariat. It was those three, and we also sent a group to look at Zambia a little bit later. That group included a Canadian woman MP or Senator, and again I think Nevil Linton orchestrated it and a couple of others. That had much less impact; it was designed to strengthen the democratisation of Zambia and looking particularly at rights issues, but it was nothing like the Nigerian publication. The cover picture for *Nigeria Stolen by Generals* had a whole lot of children behind barbed wire. They are the kids in Lagos who've been locked up.

SO: A very striking image, as you say. You emphasise very much African dimensions to human rights abuses. Do you also remember giving particular focus to what was going on in the Pacific? I'm thinking of Fiji in the 1990s which proved to be a recurrent problem for the Commonwealth.

RB: We made protests. I think an Australian made a visit on behalf of the CHRI but I can't remember a lot about it, I'm afraid. There was certainly an

awareness. There was a Pacific woman from one of the smaller island groups who was on the International Advisory Group for the CHRI at one stage but she was not very reliable - partly I think due to distance and cost. I think she only attended one of the meetings. As far as South Asia was concerned, there was obviously a continuing interest, particularly after the office had moved to Delhi. The CHRI has been very active particularly after the pogroms of Muslims in Gujarat; they had observers down there for quite a long time and they've done a lot of work. Their two priorities have been right to information and policing; and they pursue that very energetically.

SO: Going back to Auckland in 1995: how did you view the decision for CMAG at the time? Did you feel this represented a particular triumph?

RB: We did. Obviously it was not uniquely down to the CHRI but we did think that the Commonwealth had made a really important step forward, that there was no other international association which had got a rules committee capable of suspending governments. I think we would have probably preferred at the time to see them actually expelled, but for a variety of reasons, including Emeka's own personal situation, they went for suspension. We noted that the European Union had real difficult in dealing with the fascists in the Austrian government and didn't actually go as far as the Commonwealth in dealing with this. Instantly three West African senates were suspended - Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana - and we thought that was very remarkable.

The other thing I intellectually thought was interesting was that what had been so often criticised about the Commonwealth as simply a club had woken up to the fact that as a voluntary association of members, you can have your own rules. Therefore the arrival of a rules committee setting up minimum standards was really a major breakthrough. Obviously I'm very disappointed at what's happened to CMAG since, but at the time I thought it was quite impressive and a positive use of the 'club' metaphor.

SO: So 'a club of clubs' was evolving?

RB: I know I mentioned that in the chapter in James' edited book. Yes, and that was also an element, a line, in the Foreign Affairs Committee report in 1996. I think they talked of 'a network of networks'. But yes, I did think that was important and that was something about the Commonwealth that was significant.

SO: Going back to your own work: in 1998 you moved to set up the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit. What impelled you to do that?

RB: I had a very strong view. By that stage, you see I'd been working in Commonwealth things since 1982, and although the old Commonwealth Institute in Kensington was largely British Government supported, we actually had a rather non-British approach. We were very conscious of working with Commonwealth governments, obviously high commissions, and these three Commonwealth Institute focuses that I've been involved in, first of all with the African countries: I'd travelled to Nigeria and setting the African Focus up; the Caribbean: I've been to CARICOM and helped set up a Caribbean Focus; and the Pacific: ditto. So I was very conscious of the wider Commonwealth and in a way perhaps this was one of the failures of the Commonwealth Institute that it seemed to lack UK ownership in the modern way and

completely failed really in educating the British. It was supposed to be educating school children; it was a cultural and educational institution.

And we had brilliant things, like the Leakey Exhibition on the Origins of Man, and some of these very splashy things that I described earlier in our focuses. But actually we didn't do a very good job in terms of persuading the British of their membership of the Commonwealth.

SO: So that was your remit, to educate the British out of their narrow, insular focus?

RB: It was, but actually what happened instead was that, within the limitations of money and everything else, we were not at all bad about presenting art, etc., from other Commonwealth countries and regions to a British, specially London, audience. We were getting quite big numbers: 400,000-500,000 visitors a year. The other thing that was a bit of a tension within the Commonwealth Institute's staff: the director who was a very nice man whom I'd known before when he ran an education college called Bulmershe outside Reading, James Porter who died last year. He was in love with the arts really and he'd established an arts department which had put on visual and theatre events, but this was not terribly Commonwealth in orientation. The guy who was running it, a very gifted man called Robert Atkins, he was interested in the Third World, in developing countries but not so much in the Commonwealth. In a way, there'd been a slight loss of drive or commitment to the Commonwealth in the Commonwealth Institute. That again I think was a bit of a problem really. But nonetheless, I had got into the Commonwealth as a result of my work with the Commonwealth Institute and with the governments and other NGOs, then I had set up this Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. We'd had some success, as well as obviously some frustrations.

By the time in the late 90s, I'd just done this human rights thing, I'd just done this linked project supported by about 20 NGOs and I got some funding to do our links with South Africa and Mozambique. I thought about it and said 'What's really lacking in the Commonwealth, are ideas.' And I'd always been interested in think tanks. Back in the 1970s when I was Assistant Editor of New Society; I'd written an article about London think tanks. At the time there were far fewer than there are today but it was clear that they were having an impact: for example, the Institute of Economic Affairs was influencing in the Conservative Party. I had a Latin American interest at one stage: I'd been involved in a really crazy idea to set up an Amazon think tank and I'd also been involved in the Caribbean Council for Europe/West Indian Committee, in trying to set up a Caribbean think tank. So think tanks were very much in my mind and I said what today's, contemporary Commonwealth needs is policy ideas that can be adopted and which can be promoted. There were various places one might have tried to do this: possibly the Royal Commonwealth Society; the Commonwealth Institute was still just alive in the late 90s but it was really struggling. I'd been a tenant at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, first of all the CHRI had been paying them rent, and secondly running the CONGOSAM, the Commonwealth Non-Governmental Office for South Africa and Mozambique. So it was fairly natural for me to turn to the ICS which was in one of its many interregnums at that point. Rob Holland was Acting Director and he said 'Yes, fine. Have a go.' I got this money and I got the person.

SO: When you say 'this money', what do you mean?

RB: It was a small grant from the FCO, I think perhaps £4,000-£5,000. And the Canadians produced a young bloke under one of their schemes which send young Canadians abroad. (When last heard of, he was with DFAIT). And we did this feasibility study. I interviewed lots of people, about 60 people including many people still quite active. That winter, another director had arrived. This was Pat Kaplan, a Marxist anthropologist from another London college, a totally unworldly figure who said we've got to raise £1m in two months - or something completely impossible! I panicked and basically got going on the basis of some grants – from the British Council, I can't remember, maybe the Canadians. Anyhow, I got going and made a start. After that, I set it up on a self-financing basis until I retired at 65 in 2005.

SO: Was there any resistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat?

RB: To having a think tank? No, I don't think so. I remember interviewing Sonny; he was obviously retired. I must have talked to Emeka, I think. No, far from it, I think they all thought it was a good idea. I think they were all very much aware of several things: one was the diminished interest in anything to do with the Commonwealth, especially in London; and secondly, that good ideas were rather welcome, any ideas really. We then did work on election observing. I did this big indigenous peoples thing for three years with the DFID and the European Commission, and several other things. Peter Lyon had got some money left over from a Ford grant which we used to do research on the accountability of the security sector in six Commonwealth of States. So a range of things: we did a human rights thing for the Foreign Office, Jack Straw got us some money for that. We did some work on setting up Commonwealth clubs in schools. Charles Clarke, the minister, got us some money for that. So a variety of things, really.

SO: On election monitoring and observers: by the end of the 90s, there's been approximately 22 election observer missions. Were you writing a summary report on these missions?

RB: It was a critique really. It was also designed to provide tools for local elections. There was a woman called Amanda Sives who's now a lecturer at Liverpool University. She did the work, and we brought some people here for a meeting. I think she went to one or two countries. I'm glad to say it was a very good example of the policy work at the CPSU having an impact, because she'd recommended first of all that there should be some young people on these Commonwealth observer missions, because she said half the population is under 27, and you've just got old fogies on these things. That was adopted.

The second thing that was adopted was the Commonwealth can't afford to do a huge amount; and therefore it needs to work with other *bona fide* election observer groups and particularly with European Union election observer groups. I think she may have mentioned the Carter Foundation, I can't remember. But again, that happened because I was actually on a Commonwealth election observer mission in Pakistan in 2002, and we did collaborate with the European Commission people. We were in a town called Faisalabad, known as the Manchester of Pakistan because it was a textile town. That was the second thing. There was a third thing: she recommended that it was no good just arriving at the last moment and spending a fortnight

and then going home again. She wanted some long term observers put in, and the Secretariat at that time adopted that too. So three quite important recommendations were adopted. That was definitely a success for the CPSU.

SO: But that was still on the basis that national governments or all political parties agreed to a Commonwealth presence?

RB: Of course.

SO: So if elections were particularly controversial, the Commonwealth didn't have an interventionist role that it could...?

RB: It doesn't, and hasn't, and probably never could. But I think that's true of other election observer groups. Even if you're a member of SADC, you probably have to invite your SADC observers. I think that's to do with national sovereignty; I don't criticise the Commonwealth for that because the Commonwealth is not like the European Union. It's not a treaty-based organisation; it can't crack the whip in that sort of way.

SO: You mentioned that you were a special advisor to the Commonwealth Secretariat for the Iwokrama Rainforest programme in Guyana: was that associated with work on climate change, on sustainability or did it have particular human rights aspects to it?

RB: No, really none of those things. It was very specific. I had been asked by Vishnu Persaud, the head of the Economic Affairs Division in 1991, to do short briefing notes on about six environmental issues, including climate change. I'm not quite sure now in retrospect what the purpose of those was - whether it was for him to brief finance ministers or just for the purpose of the Secretariat alone - but anyhow he'd enlist me and I did it. Following that, I was asked by him and the then Deputy Secretary-General, a British guy, to come in and work for just under a year to get the Iwokrama Project moving, so it was quite a practical assignment I had. What had happened was that in 1989 at the summit in Kuala Lumpur, the Commonwealth had accepted an offer of a million acres of rainforest in Guyana to run an experimental programme in rainforest development and conservation. They were trying to find a way of utilising this without destroying it. An excellent Indian scientist, Dr Swaminathan led a team which investigated the terrain, recommended how this issue could be handled but by the time the Harare summit had taken place in 1991 the project had got a bit stuck. One of the issues was that the Commonwealth donor countries were not really prepared to put up money for it. The Guyanese government was teetering on the brink of democratisation which meant that really the Forbes Burnham/Hoyte government was about to go out and be replaced by Cheddi Jagan's PPP. There was quite a lot of hostility within Guyana to the whole idea of this thing, questioning why were they "internationalising" a chunk of their territory. There was an issue still with the Amerindians as well who felt they were being pushed around and not really being involved in the project.

And so for all of those reasons I was asked to come in and see what I could do to unstick it. I got some funding from what was then the ODA, I think it was before the DFID, to put some experts in to carry out an audit of the trees that were in the terrain. I flew to Tokyo to the International Tropical Timber Organisation which at that time was being run by a Malaysian to see if we could get some money from there; and they said for a start Guyana's got to

join and pay up. Of course, the Guyanese were broke so basically this involved getting the British Government to pay the sub for the Guyanese. They got some money, after I'd stopped doing this consultancy.

I was also active in promoting this, so I went out to Rio with Chief Anyaoku and his delegation to the Earth Summit. I had organised a special event in the non-governmental forum promoting this with President Hoyte and the Chief. It was a rather fun occasion actually because the Chief lost his luggage so he arrived in Rio with no suits, and so he had to rush out and buy himself a suit. Apparently this happened again: somebody told me the same thing happened when he was going to Barbados one time. He was obviously a bit of a genius for losing his luggage! Anyhow, we had got some publicity and interestingly too, Mugabe, of course had just chaired the summit in Harare, and at the Earth Summit all of these leaders were given sort of five-minute slots to speak, and one of the most fun ones was Fidel Castro. Nobody believed he could keep himself down to five minutes, but he did and was extremely effective and everybody raised a cheer.

But Mugabe said, he was speaking as President of Zimbabwe and that's what he said for half his five minutes. And then he said, "And I'm asking you as Chairperson of the Commonwealth, as the Chair of the recent Commonwealth summit in my country." And he included some stuff about the Iwokrama Project. So that was interesting.

SO: How attuned were you to the diplomacy behind the Rio Summit or did it just seem a great panjandrum and not a lot was going to come out of it? That there wasn't indeed an identifiable Commonwealth voice?

RB: Ah, there's an article of mine actually in the Round Table about the Commonwealth at Rio which is worth looking up because it was complicated and it was rather personal. Sonny wrote the special book for the conference and key Commonwealth players played quite an important role. But it was a very interesting example of the secret or discreet way in which the Commonwealth interacts with, or can interact with international events. So the Canadian guy who did most of the work, he was somebody who the Commonwealth Secretariat had worked with a lot. I'm not sure how much you could honestly say that Commonwealth Secretariat or Emeka were pulling lots of strings. I don't think that was the case, but you can say, and I did in this article, that were was quite a significant Commonwealth input due to the personalities involved, including Tommy Koh the Singaporean who chaired that main event. So it was an interesting example of the under-the-counter kind of Commonwealth diplomacy.

SO: So personal networking diplomacy within the Commonwealth?

RB: Exactly, yes.

SO: Moving forward to your era in the CPSU: you made mention of contributing to the Expert Group on Policing?

RB: Yeah, we completely failed to get that off the ground actually. It was quite interesting. There were two people's forums at which this was endorsed: the CHRI had put it forward, I think the CPSU was also involved, and others as well. It was a complete failure in the sense that it never happened. But what was fairly obvious is that after the era of Sonny Raphael where to some

degree he'd configured the Commonwealth Secretariat as a kind of think tank for the Commonwealth linked to international processes... There was a real backtracking for both I think financial, political and possibly personal reasons. I mean Emeka and Sonny didn't get on, as you know. I think Emeka wasn't at all interested in doing anything that Sonny had done really. By the 2000s under McKinnon... I think the figures are something like 15 expert groups under Sonny in his 15 years, it was almost one a year. Since then there've only been about 4. It's been very, very few, and therefore in our proposal for a policing expert group, we were up against that. The Commonwealth wasn't doing expert groups on anything really, and we just failed.

SO: Yes. So you think that was because of institutional resistance rather than a personal disinclination?

RB: Yes, I think that's probably the case really. I think the Commonwealth Secretariat wasn't terribly keen on it. It's not as though there were lots of governments clamouring for it. There are two ways in which you can get things done in the Commonwealth, one is if you've got a range of governments clamouring for something to be done and not too many trying to naysay; and the other is if the Commonwealth Secretariat is tremendously keen on something. But actually the amount of leadership that's been coming out of the Commonwealth Secretariat since the 2000s has been not that great in my view. Two Secretaries-General who've not really been leaders in the sense that Sonny and Emeka were, has meant that the Commonwealth Secretariat hasn't been doing any kind of mission...

SO: So you would contradict those who say that in fact Don McKinnon took the whole Latimer House guidelines, the aspirations, and ran with it? That his contribution at Valetta in 2005 was significant?

RB: That's a very interesting case: the attachment of the Latimer House statement to the Harare principles at Abuja in the end at 2003 was quite significant. Don McKinnon himself was always quite interested in human rights, but I think having stubbed his toe on the Zimbabwe issue, and he really didn't get on with Africans, his room for manoeuvre was quite narrow. There was another case I was going to mention which was about the same period which was quite interesting, and that was the fact that the Commonwealth adopted a commitment to freedom of information in, again, 2003 at Abuja. There the CHRI and other lobbies had been working pretty hard to get an adoption of this and we had some sympathy for this within the Secretariat. And also a tremendous scamp, the Minister of Justice of Trinidad, Ramesh Maharaj. He had run his own sort of private human rights NGO – it's always said that there were only three members: his wife, him and their child! He was persuaded that this was a good idea. There was a small meeting in London organised with him by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Because he was chairing a meeting of law ministers in Trinidad, he got it through the law ministers and they then recommended it to the heads, and in 2003 the heads adopted it, a commitment to freedom of information acts and access to information. That was actually quite an interesting example really of the chair of the particular ministerial group - law ministers in this case - plus sympathetic work from inside the Commonwealth Secretariat, plus these outsiders like me and others, and we got a result.

SO: So it was a case of the periphery working on the centre?

RB: Exactly, yes, yes, yes. Sometimes these things shouldn't be divided too sharply. The connection between periphery and centre can be very close really, partly because the Secretariat's very overworked, or some parts of it are overworked, and they've become very dependent on outsiders to do things for them.

SO: So it's classic out-sourcing?

RB: You could say, yes, that's right.

SO: Going back to Abuja: you mentioned that Don McKinnon stubbed his toe on Zimbabwe. How much were you aware of the tensions and issues on Zimbabwe leading up to 2003?

RB: A lot, yes.

SO: In what way?

RB: Well, it was fairly well reported, all the stuff to do with the Prime Minister of Australia starting out and then having to turn back; the frictions between the troika, that was quite public. His book I'm sure has got quite a lot stuff about it now. I haven't read it so I'm not in a position to say, but there was quite a lot, although I only learnt relatively recently it's why Mbeki backed out of the agreed statement that had been made at Abuja on Zimbabwe. According to the former Jamaican Prime Minister who told me, P J Patterson, it was the sight of Blair flying back after the conference in Abuja and somebody said to him in spite of that anodyne statement that the leaders have made or that group of leaders, which Patterson had shared, Mugabe has decided to withdraw from the Commonwealth. At which point, Blair did a thumbs-up indicating, 'Isn't this tremendous?' When they saw that on television, Mbeki then broke ranks although he'd signed up to it, and said 'This is what's wrong.' etc. But I'm not an expert on the departure of Zimbabwe; they obviously had been watching the whole issue and the involvement of the way in which the CMAG sanctioning had been maintained. I think McKinnon was quite brave really. They were pushing the Harare boundaries beyond those that Emeka had had which was really just the un- constitutional overthrow to a civilian regime. McKinnon pushed it even though I think it was probably pretty clear at that point that a number of the African governments didn't want this suspension to continue.

SO: So would you say that was the principal reason that McKinnon didn't get on, as you said, with Africans?

RB: No... the Zimbabwe issue was part of it, so I'm told. He just didn't have an affinity with the African high commissioners in London. He just wasn't very good at getting on with Africans, and of course when you remember that he was succeeding Emeka who was brilliant at all of that. Emeka was a personal friend of African leaders over many years standing; they'd helped get him elected and all the rest of it. I think there was a huge concern over it and therefore for McKinnon, partly due to his own attitudes and partly because he wasn't Emeka, it all went badly wrong.

SO: After you retired from the CPSU in 2005, where did you focus your principal Commonwealth energies?

RB: I'd always done a bit of writing. My initial reaction was to say 'Hey ho, I'm now free. I don't have to do this Commonwealth stuff!' I'd had this non-Commonwealth interest in Brazil so I wrote my biography of Lula. But I got called back into the Commonwealth thing because of the rather unhappy succession of events involving the CPSU and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. The man who succeeded me, called Alan Perry, got involved in a huge row. First of all, he wanted to take the CPSU out of London University. His father had been Walter Perry, the first Vice-Chancellor of the Open University and before that head of the medical school at Edinburgh. I think Alan just didn't really get on with his father, and his father had married again; I think there was a whole lot of personal things. Alan had married a Jewish woman, had converted to Judaism, was a very brilliant international lawyer, and spoke five languages. When I went with him to Malta CHOGM I saw him making notes in Mandarin. I mean he was teaching himself Mandarin.

SO: That doesn't actually describe somebody who's got a philosophical understanding of the Commonwealth then?

RB: Well, he'd been involved a bit with the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, and it's really Jim Manor who was at that stage chairing the advisory group for the CPSU who captured him and promoted him. I think what Jim Manor was impressed by was plainly his intellectual qualities which were very impressive, but he never totally committed himself to the CPSU. He was doing it part time whilst he was still working in a law firm as a partner. Anyhow, he then got involved in a huge row with Richard Crook who was the director of the Institute, but by that stage, getting permissions all over the place he'd established this Ramphal operation because he wanted to call it the Ramphal Commonwealth Policies Studies Centre, or something like that. He'd got Companies House registration, he'd got a string of 20 rather impressive patrons all around the world, Lee Kwan Yew, etc., and he'd also started the wheels turning for a celebration of Sonny's 80th birthday in October 2008.

So anyhow, when he resigned in a huff at the end of February 2007, I can't really remember, and there was a hiatus, it's possible that Daisy Cooper moved in for a couple of months then, I can't quite remember the sequence before Victoria te Velde was arriving, but I remember, I think it was the beginning of 2008, Victoria who was then Director of the CPSU saying there's no way the London University's going to allow the CPSU to escape, especially as they've just had this Bulmer-Thomas report saying that the CPSU should be brought more under the aegis of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

So we were left, I felt, and Patsy Robertson felt too, with a very embarrassing situation, both vis-à-vis Sonny Ramphal and also vis-à-vis the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. All this stuff had been established; these prominent people such as McKinnon had written letters of support and all kinds of things, and here we were and yet the rug was being pulled from under our feet. So basically, with no money but with a certain amount of goodwill from various people, we decided to rescue the concept of a Ramphal Centre as it was initially called, it's now the Ramphal Institute. We duly have a huge bash in October 2008 at Marlborough House for Sonny's birthday. Various people made speeches; we'd got in the former president from Mozambique and Sharma did a speech. The whole thing was a big hooley. And it got sponsorship I think.

After a major struggle, we set up this Migration and Development Commission under P J Patterson, former PM of Jamaica, but it didn't start straightway; it was largely funded by a contract that we had with the FAO. We've now just been invited by the Commonwealth Secretariat to be a substitute for an expert group, by appointing Ramphal Commissioners to examine easing the visa requirements between Commonwealth states. So it's pootling along.

SO: This makes it sound as if the Ramphal Institute is a cross between an expert group and a think tank?

RB: Well, that's right, yes... That was one expert group, the Migration and Development Commission. The piece of work that we've just been commissioned to do will involve having three part-time Ramphal commissioners who'll zoom around a few capitals, but be backed up by desk research. We're commissioning a researcher, which is why I sent you that message. So that's where we are. But I think it is different from what the CPSU was in various ways. First of all, it's very much focused on development issues, not precisely Sonny's legacy, if you like. Secondly, our USP is much more to do with advocacy at government levels; so that's how we managed to get a whole lot of stuff to do with migration and development through the Perth communiqué, and also its Food Security Principles, that declaration. So we're operating really in a quite different way from the way that when I was running the CPSU, or Daisy was running the CA/B; it's a different kind of animal really. It's a struggle and I would like to frankly stop doing it. I've effectively been involved in this for six years now and I got into it by accident, but we've made a success of it. We've already done some quite useful things.

SO: Richard, I know that you've written in your chapter in James Mayall's book that you think that the idea of the Commonwealth and Commonwealth institutions have shown remarkable stamina, but I think you've shown remarkable stamina!

Going back to the Commonwealth's remarkable stamina: how do you think it survived, and why do you think it survived?

RB: I think there are both negative and positive ways of looking at this. The negative way is it doesn't cost very much. It's not terribly demanding, not too much is expected of it, it pootles along. It's got certain things that bring people together like the Commonwealth Games. That's a brand title. It's useful for various things, so that's a low level way of looking at it. A more ambitious way of looking at it would be to say that, from time to time, and usually thanks to a crisis, the Commonwealth seems to matter for its member states and indeed for non-member states too. That was the case, for instance, over South Africa; with the execution of the Ogoni; with the departure of Zimbabwe; maybe with Sri Lanka this year. It's usually out of crisis that the Commonwealth seems suddenly to have some significance.

I actually think that it is very dysfunctional. A situation where nearly three quarters of the money is provided by just three states and everybody else is there for the ride and a post-colonial party, I think is really pretty unsound. The British may be the key funders, but they don't have the fun of being able to pull the strings because they get balked and they don't know what to do with it anyway. The British, in my view, have very little serious idea. One of

the interesting things now is the way in which Commonwealth governments reacted to, particularly, the Commissioner proposal at Perth, but then any kind of attempt to criticise Sri Lanka suggests that actually all this stuff about Commonwealth values is for the birds.

SO: It is purely 'aspirational'?

RB: Yes, it's hot air. There was a time, I think, under Sonny with South Africa and under Emeka on the democratisation agenda, a bit under McKinnon too, when that seemed meaningful. But I think recent events suggest that for most countries, this is not the case. In spite of all their talk about democracy and rights - you only have to look at Brunei, or Cameroon or Swaziland – there are a whole string of states which absolutely don't fit the theoretical model of Commonwealth values and principles.

SO: One question Leo suggested I should put to you is, 'Why is there a small left-leaning generation of people who see the organisation as an instrument of progressive change?'

RB: I noticed that question, and I thought Leo probably lay behind it! [*Laughter*]

SO: Well spotted!

RB: I'm not sure that there are very many people like that at all, but it is interesting. There's a line through Fenner Brockway's Movement of Colonial Freedom, and then Gordon Brown as Rector of Edinburgh University in the 1970s, writing to all Commonwealth Ministers of Education and telling them to boycott a meeting in Edinburgh because Rhodesia had been invited, or the Vice-Chancellor of the Rhodesian university college had been invited. But there is a line there and that also links with the people who are active in anti-apartheid. I have to say I was never really a part of that; I was a very active and campaigning journalist on a lot of things. Particularly as an education journalist, I was fighting for comprehensive schools. I was very active in covering the student protests in 1968 when I was Education Correspondent on the Guardian, but I wasn't at all involved in the Commonwealth. In fact, we used to laugh because Pat Keatley was at that time a Commonwealth and Diplomatic correspondent. I can still remember him: he was doing three jobs - he was doing the CBC, BBC and *The Guardian*, and at a six o'clock conference in the Editor's office I can remember Hetherington cursing the television and saying, "Stop telling us on television, Patrick! Come back and write it!" [*Laughter*]

I can still remember Brian Lapping who, of course, went on to have a brilliant career in television and was responsible for the *End of Empire* series. He was Patrick's Number 2 and writing Bumley One and Two on pages on his typewriter for Arthur Bottomley who was the No 2 Colonial Minister under Wilson. We just laughed at all this stuff; I wasn't involved at all, and it's the irony of one's life that you find yourself involved in things that much later on that you have no expectation of at all!

But going back to the question: I think that, for me, a more interesting question is I worked with people around the Commonwealth who are not of that conservative McKinnon Party background; or the Chief, with his pretty conservative Nigerian outlook. Emeka was in love with royalty, he helped to boost the Royal Family in 1997 after the Diana affair by giving the Queen a

role on the Edinburgh CHOGM which she'd never had before. That was very much down to the Chief.

SO: As a deliberate policy to soften that surge of criticism?

RB: Well, I think he knew what he was doing. He was a tremendous royalist and I think he wanted to prop up the Queen.

SO: As an affirmation of the institution of monarchy?

RB: Yes, that kind of thing. I worked with some very interesting people. For instance, I mentioned the former Women's Minister, Margaret Reynolds in Australia. She was a Labour Minister. I have mentioned Flora MacDonald: now she was interesting, she was a 'Red Tory'.

SO: I hope I'm going to interview her when I go to Canada.

RB: Oh, she's a lovely lady and she's always angry. She's angry with the British, she's angry with the Commonwealth, but she's very good. She's good value, and when last heard of, she was still speed skating on the Rideau Canal in her late 70s or early 80s! So she was a 'Red Tory' and that's a very particular brand of Conservatism in Canada which is a world away from Thatcherism, or this chap, Harper. Joe Clark was a Red Tory, and actually this man they put in charge of the Commonwealth, Hugh Segal, he says he's part of that tradition too. In Flora MacDonald's case, she came from Nova Scotia and until her parents' generation, they can still speak Gaelic. She was explaining to me once that the Co-op, whereas in Britain it is very close with the trade unions, in Canada it was all to do with Scots' extended families system of sharing, and in a Gaelic tradition. The Red Tories were very much more 'Left Tories' in British terms, and in a rather older way which we don't really have under Cameron.

SO: As latter day Social Imperialists?

RB: I don't know how 'imperialist' they were. They would certainly hate to be described as imperialists.

SO: Social Imperialists were robust in foreign policy issues, but progressive on social welfare issues.

RB: Very progressive on home issues, but also internationally robust on issues such as human rights and development. But when you talk to Flora, as I hope you will, do question her about the Red Tory outlook, because that really coloured her approach.

Then Beko, you see, from Nigeria: I worked very closely with Beko, sadly dead now, but he came out of a firmly anti-colonialist nationalist family. His mother was the first woman to drive a car in Sub-Saharan Africa. She used to get up the nose of the British, because she went to Communist Front meetings in Prague. His dad had been on the Willink Commission which recommended that Ibadan should have a university, and his brother, Fela. Of course we know all about Fela, and his other brother Koye was Minister of Health. And he was a radical; he worked with the unions, with the students and was running human rights organisations in Nigeria, so he was very much a leftist person.

So is Sorabjee: he's still alive. He had broken with Congress over the Emergency and he never went back to them. He was completely fed up with Gandhi's family and all of that. He never forgave them, so he found himself in rather bad company subsequently sometimes. I think he was Attorney-General for a government which was BJP, although he'd also been Attorney-General for a leftist government in the early 90s. So again, quite a radical person in a way.

And these were characters. Yash Ghai, of course, was highly critical of the British and anti-imperialist and helped write all these constitutions and legal cases, etc.

SO: From the way you're talking then, this does tick the box of 'a small left wing generation of people'.

RB: Yes, it does, but it's more international. I think Leo's probably right. I think there are some people within the UK, but funnily enough, the only person I can really think of who fits that bill perfectly is the man who was my MP, Guy Barnett. Now he was a Labour MP, a Tribune type, who won a by-election in Dorset in about 1963 on an anti-Common Market ticket for Labour. Obviously he lost it, it was supposed to be a Tory seat, and then he turned up in Greenwich which is where I live. He was elected, and it was at his death that Rosie Barnes won for the SDP sometime in the 80s. But Guy did represent that sort of leftist which did come out of the Movement for Colonial Freedom.

SO: Yes, with others such as Polly Toynbee and Fenner Brockway. In conclusion, Richard, what's your view of the impact of the Commonwealth on the UK? From the way you've been talking, it suggests it's been negligible.

RB: I did actually have to write a booklet, of which copies must still exist, in 1997 called 'Britain and the Commonwealth' which was jointly funded by the Secretariat and the Royal Commonwealth Society. It was designed to be distributed at a time when the British were hosting the Commonwealth Conference in Edinburgh. I went through various parameters; I think I produced this famous estimate, which other people have picked up on which I'm sure can't really be justified, but two thirds of children in British primary schools - this was 1997 - have a second cousin in at least one other Commonwealth state!

SO: It sounds like 'six degrees of separation'!

RB: Exactly. Basically that sort of ethnic kind of thing which was both, white people have cousins in Australia and Canada, and black people have cousins in the Caribbean, etc. So I was looking at that interplay. I can't remember the different issues, but obviously it was a public education thing really. (The ICS probably still has some copies.)

What has been the Commonwealth's impact on the UK therefore: obviously at a certain profound level - you only have to walk around London, particularly in certain parts of London. But in a political way I actually think it's been more significant than people realise. Because it's invisible - everything to do with the Commonwealth in the UK is pretty invisible - it's not picked up on. I would argue that it was the Latimer House Principles that helped to introduce and

take the Law Lords out of the House of Lords and establish a Supreme Court. For example, separation of powers is getting a stronger recognition.

I would argue that all those MPs going on election monitoring expeditions, which were certainly jollies, helped to establish the need for an elections commission in the UK, so taking it out of the hands of the Home Office and the government therefore, providing an independent, funded agency overseeing British elections. Those are two specifics. And I think way back, going back to the 1970s really, there was a linkage between the Commonwealth drive on anti-racism and anti-racism at home within the UK - both by legislation and things like the Commission for Racial Equality - I think that's obviously difficult to pin it down, but I do think that there was a linkage there.

And maybe some other things that are a little harder to establish. I think what's happened since the Macmillan Government and Alec Douglas Home is the fact that as far as the British government and policy makers are concerned, the Commonwealth has floated away. They are not involved; they don't feel an ownership; they don't know what it's going on. Hence it's quite difficult to run the conferences: I have been involved in such Round Table conferences, with really quite knowledgeable people. I can remember a conference at Cumberland Lodge a few years ago with Meghnad Desai talking about economics in the Commonwealth and development. It was quite clear he didn't have the faintest idea what the Commonwealth had been doing. He spoke very well and he was a knowledgeable man, a man of Indian origin, and yet the Commonwealth was so remote, it was completely off the radar. And I think that's what's happened, and in a way that disconnect…. Obviously I've tried various ways to reconnect, but I just happened to read yesterday the DFID review. This was a multi-lateral aid review of the Commonwealth done in 2011. Obviously they were looking at it from British eyes in terms of British Government policy, but basically they didn't rate it. They simply didn't rate it. I mean, they wrapped it up a bit, and yet, from the point of view of the Commonwealth and this public pronouncement, it has two main legs: one is democracy from a governance rights stance, and the other is development.

Whatever you say about DFID, they're a fairly competent development agency, and actually I know that their view is shared by the Australian AUSAID people and Canadian CIDA. And that's not because the Commonwealth Secretariat has very small funds at its disposal, that's not an issue really. It's more to do with the convening policy drive, its capacity to generate and push issues over time is not now recognised. Now that wasn't always the case. In the 1990s, you see, the famous Trinidad terms which John Major backed in 1993 did lead to the great HIPC write-offs in the late 90s. That was a major development case and success; and the Commonwealth can honestly have been said to have contributed a lot to that. Obviously it was not just Commonwealth countries, but they really pushed it.

And under Sonny, he'd had some success too, but in recent years they've really not. And one of the things that really annoyed me in 2009 prior to the Copenhagen Environment Conference was that there was quite a good statement from the Commonwealth, but zilch follow up. It's not just that Sharma didn't fly to Copenhagen, he'd have the Prime Minister of Denmark present, he'd have Ban Ki Moon, but he didn't do any bloody thing himself. He didn't send a team, and he should have gone with the Prime Minister of

Trinidad because he'd been chairing the conference, and together they should have done something, but they didn't. A complete failure in that respect, yes.

So that's why I think that DFID basically got it right in their critique. Despite all the EPG staff and the ministerial taskforce, I don't see any improvement.

SO: So you just think that that's a lot of sound and fury, signifying nothing?

RB: It could signify something but currently I don't think it adds up in that particular field of development. I am a well known sceptic on the famous Charter. I don't think that adds up to an awful lot either.

SO: Why? Because you think it's excessively elaborate?

RB: I just don't think it's going to have the promotion which will make it meaningful for Commonwealth citizens. I don't think it says anything that was not in the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of 2009...

SO: So it doesn't add substance...

RB: It adds no substance, no, not in my view.

SO: You said that the Commonwealth represents a constructive tension between an association of peoples and an association of government. Or does it need a good old fashioned crisis to bring the two together?

RB: I certainly think crises are good for the Commonwealth, there's no doubt about that. In fact the Commonwealth tends to come alive at a crisis. So that's a good thing, crises are good. In terms of the on-going tension: the problem really is that this association of peoples is pretty nugatory. I really don't think many individuals or many organisations in the Commonwealth countries have much sense of the Commonwealth or see it as useful. Going back to our discussion earlier about the CHRI and scepticism there as to whether it's worth belonging to this thing: I think it is, but one has to argue the case and at intervals clearly they have done interesting and important things. We talked about 1995 as an example, and actually, I don't say I rejoiced at the departure of Mugabe, but I do think that that was a valuable thing because to some degree the Commonwealth is defined by those who don't want to belong to it, like white South Africa in the 60s and Robert Mugabe in the early 2000s. And if there's some convulsion between now and November and it leads to Sri Lanka walking out in a huff, I would not regret that! [*Laughter*]

SO: Richard, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]