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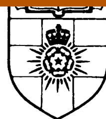

University of London

INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

VOICE FILE NAME: COHP The Most Hon Edward Seaga

Key:
SO: **Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)**
ES: The Most Hon Edward Seaga (Respondent)

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to the Most Honourable Edward Seaga in Kingston, Jamaica, on Tuesday, 20th January 2015. Sir, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to give this interview for the Commonwealth Oral Histories Project. You have remarked that you were not that engaged nor attentive to the Commonwealth as a politician or while you were Prime Minister.

ES: The Commonwealth had very little contact. I once went to the Commonwealth office in London during a visit to the UK because I had an idea that there was a role to be played that could be done at the parliamentary level. I wanted to find out if the Commonwealth had any precedent of the Judiciary playing a role which would be regulatory, insofar as conduct of members was concerned: a type of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to oversee codes of conduct for MPs and ministers of government. I raised the matter here in the Jamaican Parliament. This was in or around 1994. Having done so, we came to the conclusion that, where it was something that the Parliament had to take a decision on the conduct of an individual, it had to be a parliamentary committee. But the problem would be, "Who's going to be the odd man in an even number of parliamentarians? Who can credibly make the judgment? Who would have the casting vote, given the political affiliation of the members?"

SO: Yes, because of the political asymmetry of the deciding, casting vote.

ES: That's right. I wanted to know if there was some way to get around it, but I was advised that it wasn't possible. So, we still haven't done anything about it, because we still haven't found a way of providing an impartial leader.

SO: Do you recall whether the Commonwealth Secretariat or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was of any use to you when you went to London?

ES: The secretariat of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [based in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster].

SO: It's interesting that questions of parliamentary procedure came to the top of your mind in thinking about your interaction with the Commonwealth.

ES: No, the most important was the situation in which I found myself in 1987, when the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was held in Vancouver, Canada. This brought to a head the question [of] whether there should be continued sanctions against South Africa. Mrs Thatcher fought very strongly for not continuing, because sanctions were in trade and they hadn't worked. I had prepared myself for the discussion. I found in the United Nations that there was an organisation that was particularly concerned with trading with South Africa – the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations – and what had been done in sanctions. I used the data to expose the fact that the imposition of sanctions was in the wrong area. Instead of trying to create trade barriers which largely did not work, we should turn to attacking the South African rand. Once the rand started to fall in value, all that had been built up over the decades by the elite of South Africa would start to fall with it. Trade would be dislocated because South African goods would be cheaper for exports, but far more expensive for imports, and a dislocation of trade and investment would result in adverse movement of the exchange rate. This, they couldn't deal with.

That's exactly what happened [cf. Edward Seaga, 'Impact of Economic Sanctions on the South African Economy', *The Round Table* 306 (1988), pp.136-41.] The Conference accepted my position and the Africans, especially, were overjoyed. They had come to an end themselves on how we could continue sanctions, and they accepted this. Acceptance brought a strain between myself and Mrs Thatcher, because she was flying quite high before that. She walked by me when the break came right after that: she walked right by me and didn't say a word.

SO: She cut you dead?

ES: That's right! So, that was my second confrontation with her. Notwithstanding that, she and I got along very well. But I had to speak the truth.

SO: If I could ask you about your relationship with Mrs Thatcher. I know that you had come to a very sharp exchange of views over Grenada in 1983. [cf. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive PREM19/1048 f131 and THCR 3/1/33 Part 3 f37 (T166B/83)].

ES: Yes.

SO: I looked at your book, *The Grenada Intervention: The Inside Story,* and I've also read your two volume autobiography, *My Life and Leadership…*

ES: Yes, you found it there? Yes, and her letter she wrote to me afterwards?

SO: Yes, I have. I've also found her letter written to you afterwards in the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive [THCR 3/1/34 f36 (T180/83)]. I'm

curious how the Grenada crisis gathered momentum beforehand. The British government had been approached in March/April of 1983, when the Grenadian leadership had passed a message via the Commonwealth Secretary General appealing to Britain for help and support. Then, there were the developments in October with the shooting of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and seven others, followed by the decision by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States to act under their foundational treaty arrangements. Had you been in touch at all with Mrs Thatcher in the run up to your decision to act?

ES: We didn't know the participation level of the UK government in relation to the problem in Grenada. We heard after that there had been some communication. It was obvious that the British government wasn't going to take any effective role.

SO: The Foreign Office told the New Jewel Party leadership in April 1983 that their ideas of a possible US or British invasion were 'fanciful'.

ES: Yes, that's right. So, on that basis, we didn't bother to approach the British government again after that, when the matter exploded. When General Hudson Austin took over after the assassination of Prime Minister Bishop and some of his ministers, there was a cry for something to be done, especially since that was followed by an immediate total curfew. You can see where he was heading. I have the papers, the notes, of the Secretariat from the meetings that were held in the lead up to this happening. The fact is that it shows that Austin issued very, very radical threats: "If you don't like it, take one of the flights out of Grenada." Have you seen my book on Grenada? [Edward Seaga, *The Grenada Intervention: The Inside Story* (Kingston, 2009)].

SO: Yes, sir, I have. It gives a very good summary of the events from your perspective. There is one thing that puzzled me: your relationships and contact with the Governor General of Grenada, Sir Paul Scoon. You state that, first of all, there was the particular issue – because he was the Queen's representative – of issuing a letter formally inviting external assistance to help in the restoration of democracy, and…

ES: That letter is here, on my office wall outside. We had to find a way for the Governor-General to seek assistance from external powers for the reasons that he set out, concerning what was taking place in Grenada. Everything was very tightly under control. So, Tom Adams, the Prime Minster of Barbados, took care of getting the formal letter. I'm not sure how he managed to get a letter from Governor General Scoon, but my copy of the letter is here because I didn't know whether I would have allowed Jamaican forces to participate unless I had that invitation. As it turned out, that invitation did not play such an important role in determining whether the intervention was right or not – in other words, whether there was an invasion of a foreign, sovereign territory because of some quirk in the law. I have that in the book because it's an excellent exercise for law students as to whether it was right or wrong.

SO: Addressing it from the point of view of international law?

ES: Oh, yes. The UN, etc., etc. Everybody had condemned it, and then Professor Phillips – who was from the University of the West Indies – did an analysis which indicated that the Cubans were being paid by Havana.

SO: It was a mercenary arrangement?

ES: Yes. That was not acceptable in the various treaties of the OAS, the OECS and otherwise, if you could establish that. He established it by finding out that the workers that were there were taking their orders from Havana. So, they were not employed by the Grenadian government. As a result of that, they really were mercenaries. That was the way that it was positioned in terms of whether it was against a sovereign country or not. I've seen another paper since then which challenges that, too.

SO: Mrs Thatcher, I know, felt that after the assassinations of the Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, and the seven others, "political and economic" measures were appropriate. I know you sent a short message to her saying this was not the case.

ES: We had papers showing the lists of armaments, weaponry, and ammunition, etc. There were five million rounds of ammunition – that's one for every man, woman and child in the entire English-speaking Caribbean. There were a large number of assault rifles, field camps, a field kitchen, a field hospital, etc. It's all in the book. They were preparing to provoke attacks in other Caribbean Commonwealth countries.

SO: Yes, you list it in great detail in your memoir. You give the statistical break down.

ES: The question that you ask yourself is, "What is a little country of this size doing with that amount of material, unless it had a larger role to play?" Now, at that time in the Caribbean, the Soviet Union was sponsoring – apart from Cuba – Nicaragua and Grenada. Nicaragua is in the Central American area and Grenada is in the island group. The way in which Grenada was taken over by the assassination of the Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, and ministers indicated that it would be quite easy to replicate that on the smaller islands, because they had no way of protecting themselves. So, it is obvious that this was the armoury that was needed to carry out attacks.

SO: You make the point in your book that, in terms of weaponry and ammunition, Grenada certainly surpassed the Jamaica Defence Force. Barbados had a total of 270 people in its army, and none of the other small island states except Trinidad had anything more than very small police forces.

ES: We couldn't have handled it: not with that amount of weaponry. So, that was a very important factor in deciding to invade and to take charge. Mrs Thatcher was not advised by President Reagan until the night of the event. She felt very offended because this was a former British colony.

SO: Grenada was a member of the Commonwealth, and the Queen was Head of State.

ES: That's right. Reagan had not advised her before. Reagan was very concerned about any word slipping out because there were a thousand American students in the American college that was set up in Grenada. This was how the Americans saw it: the sort of mad approach that was taking place could have led to holding the students as hostages, and then Reagan would have come in for a lot of criticism.

SO: Particularly in 1983. President Reagan had only relatively recently resolved the Iranian hostage situation, in January '81, after he was inaugurated as President. That would be a recent and painful memory in Washington. There would be no desire to see Americans as hostages again.

ES: The US would have been a laughing-stock, the ships standing in the waters outside the harbour and not making a move. So, on that basis, it was kept very quiet. We were briefed on the Sunday night and the invasion took place on the Tuesday morning.

SO: Sunday was the 23rd October, Operation Urgent Fury was launched on the morning of Tuesday, 25th October. So, after your sharp exchange of views with Mrs Thatcher, I know that her staff were encouraging her to telephone you to resolve the tension between you both. However, she resisted this and there was a delay before she wrote back to you. How soon thereafter did you manage to smooth this short-lived friction?

ES: I must say this about Mrs Thatcher: she never held that view for any length of time. It wasn't too long after [that] I received a fairly lengthy letter from her, saying that we're always on the same side. But she wanted to do it by way of improving the lot of the people and projects and so on. If she was going to do that, she would have had to do so for a lot of other smaller islands. Then it would never happen. The Soviets and North Korea were the ones who were supplying the arms and the Cubans were doing the training. So, they were well organised.

SO: There was a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting very soon after these events in the Caribbean, which was held in Delhi. I know that you had gone to Delhi for the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in March of 1983, but you didn't go to the Delhi CHOGM.

ES: I didn't go to the Commonwealth meeting that took place at that time because of what was happening.

SO: Because of the crisis in the Caribbean and the political situation here in Jamaica, as well? I am aware you had an election in the December of that year.

ES: Yes, but this happened as a result of the fact that I knew what was going to take place. I knew there was going to be an intervention. Only my deputy Prime Minister Hugh Shearer knew it. I had to send him to the meeting in Delhi to take my place, because I would be needed to make decisions here.

SO: So, it was a question of national security: obviously, you had to be here?

ES: That's right. After that, Sonny Ramphal came to see me. I was a little curt with him because I just felt that everybody was ganging up on the people that took the decision to do something about the problem. The people in Grenada were overjoyed. All that was done after that showed that they were fully in acceptance of the military action and so on. In Ramphal's position, he ought to have seen that and not be part of the criticism that was then in vogue among socialist leadership in the Caribbean.

SO: At the Commonwealth heads meeting, the President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe was intensely critical of the American action in Grenada.

ES: You see, the Caribbean leadership at that time were largely a legacy of the original leaders which all came from a Labour Party background in England and a socialist background in general. They couldn't practise it here because they were blocked at every turn. Then they saw the building up that was taking place in Grenada, and expected the radical left in Grenada to be able to get its way. Then, it would have happened in Antigua, and in Saint Vincent – where the present Prime Minister [Ralph Gonsalves] was the front man – and Jamaica. So, three others were set to go. They even had a radio station, Radio Free Grenada, which was so powerful it could reach Jamaica. They took over all the radical staff at one radio station – the government-owned Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, who were active socialists – they took them on after I got rid of them from Jamaica. So, they were gearing confrontation to happen, and Ramphal should have seen that. He was in a political position. He wasn't there as an advocate for those who believed ideologically that what was happening was good or bad.

SO: How did Ramphal respond to your 'curt' treatment of him?

ES: I said to him, "You know, that's not your business. You know what was happening and did nothing."

SO: Do you feel he listened?

ES: It was around breakfast. I was in Washington at the time, when he came to see me. That was not on an invitation, but I just heard he wanted to see me and he turned up for breakfast. He told me a little bit about it, but he was trying to make me feel that we had pre-empted Mrs Thatcher on what she was going to do. I sat there. I did not accept that as a response. I thought that was a very poor response.

SO: You mentioned earlier your relations with Mrs Thatcher, particularly over apartheid and the issue of sanctions. In your development and presentation of the idea of the need to focus on the financial sector in South Africa – to attack the Rand, to encourage disinvestment following the Anti-Apartheid Act – and also [during] developments in the United States and at the United Nations, were you also working in concert with Brian Mulroney's government in Canada and his particularly supportive Foreign Minister, Joe Clark, and also the Australians? I know Bob Hawke at the Vancouver meeting privately sent a representative to see Jim Wolfensohn at the World Bank in Washington, DC, to find out

whether it would be indeed feasible to impose financial sanctions on South Africa.

ES: It's a simple strategy. Pressure the rand to depreciate.

SO: This was obviously a passionately and long-held view by yourself. I just wondered whether you made this decision at the Vancouver CHOGM, working with a core group of other leaders, to ensure that this actually went through as a policy.

ES: No, I directed my attention to the heads of government and received a very warm response – from the Africans, especially. I went to the UN just before, because it was the UN's 40th anniversary. Pressuring the rand was the centrepiece of my speech there. This would be the way to weaken South Africa and bring it to a point where it would have had to come to the table to discuss the end of apartheid.

SO: You mention, particularly, in your autobiography, Kenneth Kaunda with his white handkerchief coming across to congratulate you.

ES: He was in tears**.**

SO: He was a very emotional man and leader.

ES: That's right.

SO: Shortly after this, you joined an international group of experts to look at the question of transnational corporations and trade with South Africa. Did that group's work have, in any way, a Commonwealth dimension to it? Or was it really international action?

ES: Yes, on the trading of oil. But that's an area that I said wouldn't really work, because it was being circumvented. Hence, we had that meeting in Switzerland using a selected group of 'wise men'.

SO: Yes, you did; in Geneva.

ES: I'm not quite sure whether it was before the position in 1987 in Canada or after.

SO: I have it as after the Vancouver meeting.

ES: Anyway, I went because I was asked to be a member, but I didn't go there with any stars in my eyes. I knew what I had seen: we had suffered so much from the devaluation of the Jamaican currency. I knew what it could do.

SO: So, in your pursuit of policies to end apartheid and your use of this as a key foreign policy platform for Jamaica, how much were you also thinking this had an enormous domestic resonance and importance? Were you thinking that, in working to end apartheid, it also mattered back here in Jamaica?

ES: Oh, yes. The anti-apartheid position in Jamaica was very strong. I remember Jamaica was the second country to have taken the position to bar trade with South Africa.

SO: Your biographer Patrick Bryan has made the point that you felt that Jamaica, too, had suffered in the past from racial preferences in terms of access to jobs – that there had been a racial dimension affecting economic opportunity, that there was a hangover of this into the independence era in Jamaica.

ES: You mean racial problems…where?

SO: Here, because of Jamaica's experience and its own history. Coming to independence, there had been a back history of white, elite, privileged access, and that needed to be addressed. So, Jamaica had a particular understanding of the issues of apartheid in South Africa.

ES: Yes, that's also in my autobiography – not in the same chapter. That's in that long chapter on foreign affairs. I dealt with Grenada in that chapter, too.

SO: So, please, could I ask you particularly about your working relationship with Canada as the large Commonwealth power in the region?

ES: Very smooth under Mulroney; not as smooth under Trudeau, although we were friends. He used to come here on holiday every year, and we would meet. I have a picture of himself and myself in bathing suits! I think that's in the autobiography among the pictures. We were friendly, but he was very much committed to the watered-down socialism that was practised. You know, the "do good things" that socialism advocates, which are the practices that made it popular. But you can't separate those things from the fact that it has a cost factor. When that cost factor erupts at the surface, then it's going to bring problems that often results in military action being taken.

SO: So, overall, if you were to list the importance of international organisations for Jamaica, how would you rate the Commonwealth as a useful platform for your country?

ES: You mean as an association? The Commonwealth didn't come into it because I don't know what role it would have played, except as Sonny Ramphal tried to use it on that particular occasion. I wasn't involved with the Rhodesia problem – that was Michael Manley. I presume that the Commonwealth organisation was also involved at that time. That happened in Rhodesia, and this happened in Grenada. It's a very ineffective organisation in terms of getting involved in things, but when you do have matters that cut across the Commonwealth it does become involved. It's a good organisation, at those times, for having discussions and having a middle-man who will play the role to smooth out things.

SO: Would you say that that was particularly because of the climate of international relations when you were Prime Minister in the 1980s? It was the Cold War, and apartheid needed to be addressed. So, the Commonwealth had a particular role at that time?

ES: It very much had a particular role. Mrs Thatcher seized the opportunity to use [the] CHOGM to settle the problem in Rhodesia, but she was not successful in having her way in Vancouver on South Africa. When Ian Smith declared Rhodesia to be independent, it came to a head. It is much the same thing when General Austin declared that Grenada was now socialist, or communist. So, there are parallels there. Michael Manley played a very useful role in the Rhodesia settlement, and I played the same role in Grenada.

SO: Michael Manley had also suggested in 1979 that Jamaica pull out of the Commonwealth. Did you have a particular view about that?

ES: Manley, at that time, gave an interview to a Soviet journalist – V Veraikov. He said that, when he won, after the election, he would move to leave the Commonwealth and pull Jamaica closer to the Third World movement, and that he admired the model of government of both Cuba and the Soviet Union. I think that was a major point in the final failure of Manley. In addition, people had no food, 14,000 shops were closed, spare parts weren't available, and there were blackouts because the power generators malfunctioned. Who would want to follow that system? I blamed him especially for the destruction of Jamaica.

SO: You did, indeed, during the 1980 election campaign. So, you have indicated that you felt that the Commonwealth was ineffectual as an association on a number of matters.

ES: I think the Commonwealth operates on a basis of, "Call me if you need me". I haven't really given serious thought to what else I think it can do. It's active, for instance, in sports, and it used be active in the arts and cultural exhibitions. I know that Jamaica had one cultural exhibition that I attended in London as Prime Minister. But as far as getting involved in any of the problems that seem to exist politically, it took a lot of waking up before they would take action in the Commonwealth.

SO: Do you think that having a Secretary General from the Caribbean was of any particular use while you were Prime Minister?

ES: As far as I'm concerned, whether he was from the Caribbean or elsewhere, he didn't really serve the interests of the Caribbean. I don't know [if] it would have been right for him to serve such a purpose.

SO: Because he had to become an international servant, rather than a representative of the region?

ES: That's right.

SO: Yes, okay. So, how much value do you think the Queen brought to the Commonwealth that you observed while you were Prime Minster?

ES: I'm one of those who believe that it is essential in the structure of a government to have a figure at the top that is beyond politics – [someone] that is able to be a symbol of what is good and right in the eyes of the people and the laws of the constitution. In other words, to be the constitutional head in terms of being able to offer solutions that would be in keeping with the

constitution. The presidential model ends up with such a person, but has always been a political person. The monarchical model ends up with someone who is not involved in politics, and therefore leaves open a door to go through if you have a problem. It is not a question of whether the Queen has been a useful figure, but whether that role has been a useful role. The Queen must play the role. To me, it is very important. In Jamaica, some people talk about 'the Queen's justice', which they feel is better than the justice of the state.

SO: It's been said that the headship of the Commonwealth is a role that she has created for herself, and that the Queen's position has evolved with the Commonwealth since she became its head in 1952.

ES: Yes. I met her in the 1970s, here, and in the 1980s to sit and talk. She usually had a discussion lunch with some of the influential leaders of the Commonwealth. She was very, very pleasant to talk with and very informed. I really valued her role because I know what it is to have a regime with the right symbols for guidance. If the Queen actually devised such a role as she now occupies, then I believe that she devised a perfect match.

SO: Institutions are crucial.

ES: Exactly. That is why these institutions are so critical. I wrote about this in one of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association magazines [*The Parliamentarian*]. I argued, for instance, what is the purpose of having ministers who take the Oath to the Queen? The words didn't really carry any credibility. They didn't say, "I promise to perform my duties, to keep the economy stable, etc., etc." They just said, "I promise to give advice to the Queen." Which they can't do – that is for the Governor-General.

SO: So, you felt those commitments embodied in the Oath needed to be more prescriptive?

ES: More prescriptive [and] in keeping with the changing times. That Oath has been around since colonial days.

SO: What do you see for the future of the Commonwealth, going forward?

ES: I believe it is an oasis of stability in the world. It is part of a system of belief which involves the democratic system of governance, but also the economic system of the market place, and both have been found to work. They work to the extent that they are regulated, and that's where the problem is. In some countries they're not sufficiently regulated, causing the market place to experience turmoil and the political system to be corrupted.

SO: In terms of the Commonwealth and the economic system of the market place in the 1980s, when you were Prime Minister, it was very much your mandate and agenda to roll back the socialist experiment and the state in Jamaica: to push for deregulation, privatisation, and government-directed development. Did you feel that there was any supportive role from the Commonwealth Secretariat in your political agenda?

ES: No, I didn't involve them. It would have been out of place. They would be taking an ideological position that may have been inappropriate. I set out the agenda to deal with socialism in the 1970s and, after winning the election, I set the agenda as well for the 1980s – introducing liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation within the framework of a stable and prosperous economy. This set the course for economic recovery by the end of the decade, when stabilization and economic growth returned on a settled basis.

SO: That was your particular involvement when you were Minister of Development and Welfare, and then also Minister of Finance, of course: building the financial institutions and the planning infrastructure.

ES: Actually, I set the agenda for the 1970s. Sir Alexander Bustamante made me Minister of Development and Welfare; Hugh Shearer made me Minister of Finance. The agenda was not pro-socialist: it was market-oriented. I set that agenda with a very active campaign. Then, when we went into the 1980s, I set that agenda for liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, stability and prosperity.

SO: So, for you then, in your national strategy in terms of foreign policy, the Commonwealth came very low down your list of priorities? You were focusing on the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) [1982]; you were focusing on CARIBCAN with Canada [1986], and the Caribbean dimension through CARICOM?

ES: None of these carried any real impact. The CBI didn't work. We weren't able to take advantage of duty-free exports provided in the CBI, because the fact is that we weren't producing anything that could be exported. We didn't have that size of population for the domestic market to allow sufficient surplus for export, nor the technology for serious manufacturing. There was little [in terms of] exports. We sold everything that we made in the export market and it didn't help. So, we had to turn to tourism to earn foreign exchange.

SO: Did you feel that CARIBCAN was relatively successful? Canada, at least, granted Jamaica reciprocity.

ES: Canada didn't have any relaxation of the rules for garment manufacturing, which we found was the only thing that worked. The US allowed access to garment manufacturing through the Multi Fibre Arrangement, to compensate for our failure in the CBI. There was a great advantage in the numbers of people employed and in the foreign exchange that we earned, and so on. We couldn't do that with Canada. CARICOM had no export growth strategy until the 1990s. And, so far, the Caribbean Single Market and Economy has been a failure.

SO: Okay. So, then, CARICOM remained a working, functional collaborative arrangement for you?

ES: It then became the syndrome of sleep. It has no economic value whatsoever. It just keeps putting forward new directions to grow, but nothing happens.

SO: Do you feel the same about the ACP Group [African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States]?

ES: The ACP Group? No, but I feel the same thing about the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). We can give up duties to Europe for exports to our countries, but what are we exporting to them? Fruit preserves and spices – mainly small stuff. Until we're producing goods that have higher value suitable for export, we won't benefit. These kinds of strategies don't help us at all.

SO: Sir, please, if I could just ask you my last question then. From the viewpoint of your long political career from 1959, how much is it possible to say that the Commonwealth provided a source of support to Jamaica as it moved to independence because other international associations like the IMF and the World Bank were too remote, and the United Nations too large?

ES: I don't think you can compare the Commonwealth association with any of those. What I was saying, in effect, was that the British government doesn't rule by a constitution because the people over the generations and centuries have come to have an understanding of where that line in the sand was drawn. They know that it was not 'cricket' to cross that line in the sand. We had, in our colonial period, that same sort of level of understanding. When we came to write a constitution, we failed to close all the loopholes, believing that these loopholes would not be taken advantage of because that would not be 'cricket'. This was a huge mistake in the 1970s. Manley's democratic socialism was established on the basis of a strategy that the end justifies the means. They used the resources of the state for attracting electoral support and the state security to terrorise opposition supporters politically, using the powers of the state of emergency to suspend rights and freedoms to take political advantage. Eventually, we had controls and safeguards. These were introduced as a result of the Constitutional Reform Commission, which we called for in 1996 to deal with the violations of human rights and freedoms.

SO: Yes, precisely to prevent abuses of the system which had evolved elsewhere…

ES: That's right.

SO: …and to make sure that there were appropriate checks and balances, and accountability.

ES: The British system is noted for its checks and balances, but they lack the tightness we need to avoid pitfalls and remove the opportunities for using loopholes.

SO: So, now that the Commonwealth itself has got a Charter, do you think that's to the good?

ES: What Charter is that?

SO: Coming out of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Port of Spain in 2009. An Eminent Persons Group was set up to examine how to re-energise the Commonwealth – to make sure that it was a 'Commonwealth of Peoples' and not simply of governments. Integral to

this idea was the proposal for a Charter. This finally emerged at the Perth heads meeting, with its 112 clauses. There are now 'rules' for this club.

ES: It became rule-based.

SO: Well, this is the tension that exists in the modern Commonwealth: between those that feel that it should be rules and sanctions and that governments should be held accountable…

ES: Oh, that's good. I must get a hold of a copy of that.

SO: It's available on the Commonwealth Secretariat website. I can give your personal assistant the link.

ES: Yes, sure.

SO: But there are other Commonwealth governments which feel that they didn't sign up to an association with rules; that it has evolved now in a way that is highly uncomfortable to them. There's also a feeling that civil society is exerting inappropriate pressure on them, the elected leaders with a domestic political mandate.

ES: Correct. Absolutely correct, because what the system of governance needs more is a team of watch dogs from civil society which have had to back up the political opposition in safe-guarding human rights and freedoms. What has happened is the opposition is the constitutional watchdog. I don't know if you know [that], in our Senate, the opposition has eight members and the government has thirteen. The government has to have two-thirds of the vote in certain critical constitutional matters for it to be passed in the Senate. It cannot get it without at least one member crossing the floor or voting with government.

SO: Indeed, so there does need to be, as you say, that oversight and that accountability. Sir, thank you very much indeed.

ES: I thought I wouldn't have anything to say. It's been very interesting.

SO: Sir, please, could I just ask you to repeat that comment about what you feel is the use of the Commonwealth?

ES: If I had to give a response that comes off the top of my head, without any deep thought, the Commonwealth appears to me as a sleeping force that is always there to be reckoned with when necessary. But it is not necessarily something that is pervasive.

SO: So, a force for stability in the form of a force for potential deterrence?

ES: A lazy foundation for stability.

SO: A lazy foundation for stability?

ES: Yes, lazy.

SO: Arguing for the status quo?

ES: The status quo, but without saying that you don't want change, because there's all kinds of change: change that's within that line in the sand, and change that goes beyond that, which has to be justified and has to be given its own importance.

SO: That suggests, then, that the Commonwealth's principal asset can be to act as a safety valve. It can operate as a forum for discussion, but then heads can reach consensus not to do anything?

ES: That's another way of saying it, surely?

SO: Perhaps a more positive way? I don't know. Sir, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]