

REX ALAN BROWNING b.22.7.30

CAREER OUTLINE

Education: Bristol Grammar School; Merton College, Oxford.

Inspector of taxes 1952.

Entered Colonial Office as Assistant Principal 1957.

Private secretary to Parliamentary Under-Secretary 1960.

(Married Paula Mc Cain in 1961)

Founder–member of the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) 1964.

First Secretary (Aid), Singapore, on secondment to Diplomatic Service 1969.

Assistant Secretary (ODM) 1971.

Counsellor (Overseas Development), Washington and alternate British Executive Director of the World Bank 1973.

Under-secretary (ODM) 1976.

Department of Trade, 1978.

Deputy Secretary (ODM) 1981.

Retired 1986.

BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Rex Browning at his home in Devon.

Recorded by Jane Barder.

J.B. Rex Browning was born in 1930 and retired in 1986 as Deputy Secretary at the Overseas Development Administration. He was educated at Bristol Grammar School and Merton College, Oxford. He was appointed C.B. in 1984. After leaving Oxford he became an Inspector of Taxes in 1952 and stayed there until 1957 when he transferred to the Colonial Office. How did that come about?

R.B. The reason that I got into the Civil Service at all was a difference of opinion with the examiners at Oxford over the quality of my historical knowledge. I had to leave Oxford, as it were, unexpectedly and the Inland Revenue, at that time, provided a quick berth for people with first or second class degrees, without too much inquiry into any other aspect of their life. After I took the exams for the Inspector of Taxes it was put to me that I ought really to try for, what was then called the Administrative Civil Service. The Inland Revenue was just below the Administrative - so anyway I took the exam for the Administrative Civil Service in 1956/7. As it happened in the CSSB (Civil Service Selection Board) discussions Cyprus was a considerable issue at the time and I did express some strong views against the Government's colonial policy, in the same way as a friend of mine who was also on the same exam expressed some strong views of an anti-military kind. I was immediately assigned to the Colonial Office and he to the Ministry of Defence. I think at the time, as far as I was concerned, the Civil Service Commission took the view that the Empire was coming to an end and they really needed to recruit not the gung-ho imperialists who had been recruited to the Colonial Office for so many years but, as it were, a new breed, who were not at all enthusiastic about our colonial record and who would co-operate willingly in the running down of the Empire. In fact, of course, this process was very much more quick than anybody had anticipated at the time. I was only in the Colonial Office for about four years and two of those were spent in the International Relations Department which meant that I spent a lot time in New York assisting at the discussion of colonial affairs in the United Nations; so that my actual time dealing with colonies was very short.

I will deal with the international aspect later on as a lot of my career has been spent in international affairs. I will say a few words about my final time in the Colonial Office which was as Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, successively Julian Amery and

Hugh Fraser, that is the Hon. Hugh Fraser, brother of Lord Lovat, not the chap who owned Harrods for a time.

I went on a number of foreign trips with them and I saw, of course, the Empire, the remaining colonies in their final stages. I remember asking the desk officer for Tanganyika, when I was dealing with colonial affairs in New York, when he expected Tanganyika would become independent and he said - well, perhaps 1965/66 if we are very lucky, and then the other African colonies will follow on in a procession going to the end of the century. But, of course, what happened was the empire packed up in the very early '60's and mainly because Iain Macleod simply felt it was hopeless to continue to run that sort of Empire, to have that sort of relations with these countries.

I think, perhaps, an anecdote here is of some interest. While I was in the International Relations Department of the Colonial Office we had a visit from the French High Commissioner of their Cameroons who came over to ask if we would be good enough to postpone the independence of Nigeria and therefore the Southern Cameroons because of the effect of this terrible development on the French Cameroons; of course we said - my dear fellow, we can't possibly do that; we have undertaken to lead these people to self government and independence; this is the date fixed for Nigerian independence and I'm afraid that it must go on - 1960 was the date. Well, was it weeks or perhaps it was a few months later, suddenly the French Empire disappeared with de Gaulle coming in; perhaps I should say the nominal French Empire disappeared. It was replaced with the relations between Paris and the ex French Colonies which we all know about, whereby the French actually run them but they are nominally independent. That, I think, was a tremendous shock to the Colonial Office and perhaps was a significant factor in persuading Iain Macleod that something of the same sort was inevitable. And if it was to be done at all, it was just as well if it was done quickly. Now, I did go in the later days of Empire therefore to visit, with Julian Amery, first a long tour of the Pacific, a couple of months, in which we went not only to our colonies but also to the Australian colonies of Papua/New Guinea. Now that was the only colony of any significance which the Australians had and they were therefore working quite hard, putting quite a lot of money into it. Perhaps I need not go into the relations between the Australian officials and the local people but they were probably what you would expect relations to be between Australian officials and coloured people in the 1960s; but I will say that there was a very strong contrast between what the Australians were doing in Papua/New Guinea and spending and what we weren't doing and weren't spending in the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, Gilbert and Ellice and Fiji, which were the British colonies we visited. They really were the back end of the Empire; such resources that Britain had to spend on its colonies were

by this time largely concentrated on Africa. (India and Pakistan had by that time long since gone). It was a very small operation in the Pacific and much of our touring around, once we got to a colony, had to be by ship because there were no airlines, certainly between the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides. Fiji was the most interesting colony because there was trouble, need I say, between the native Fijians and the Indians whom we had brought over to cut cane years before. This trouble has, of course, persisted until this day and the point I think I would make about that is that the local British official clan there had absolutely no idea how to deal this situation and hoped that Julian Amery coming out would be a sort of 'deus ex machina' who would solve it by waving his magic wand. In fact, what actually happened was that Amery, having seen both parties while we were there, was offered the post of Secretary of State for Air by Macmillan who was then Prime Minister, much to the annoyance and despair of, I think his name was Ken Maddocks, the Governor. Having sampled the problem at first hand the minister was promptly about to be whisked off to a totally different area of government. This, of course, is one of the problems of the continual shifting of Ministers which is a feature of life in any British government.

I went to the West Indies with Hugh Fraser. That was the time of the break up of the federation there. One point here; I think it is fair to say, Iain Macleod always subsequently felt he had not been right in permitting the break up of the West Indian Federation, that he should have tried harder to keep it all together. When he went there the main purpose of our business was the handing over of the American bases, which the Americans had received in 1940 in return for the fifty ships, second-hand destroyers, which we got to help in our war effort. They were handing them back and the negotiations about that was what we went to the West Indies for.

After that I left Private Office and became a Principal in what was called Communications Department of the Colonial Office which dealt with air and surface communications between the colonies. Now at that time Andrew Cohen came back to London. Andrew Cohen was the Governor of Uganda who had been removed by the Conservative government in 1954 or thereabouts when he exiled the Kabaka of Buganda. He was sent off to New York to run the colonial operation in our Mission in the U.N. which kept him out of the way for quite some time; but all good things have to come to an end! He came back and had to be found some sort of a job. Now I am speculating here but those who know the way of British or indeed any government can see that it is not inconceivable that one way of keeping him out of the colonial nest where he had ruffled such feathers earlier on and had been a very strong supporter of the Labour government in its term 1945-51 was to create a new and fairly harmless office for him to run. That office was called the Department of Technical Co-operation which took over from

the Colonial Office all those departments which dealt with giving technical advice, education and in my case communications, agriculture, all that sort of thing. It didn't have a lot of money. Technical co-operation doesn't require a lot of money. It requires a lot of effort but not a lot of money. Andrew was put in charge of that. It lasted until the end of the Conservative government, when they lost the election of 1964. The Labour party in opposition had come out very strongly in favour of a very greatly increased aid programme and with the setting up of the new Labour Government in 1964 one of their first achievements was the establishment of, I think it was, three departments: the Ministry of Overseas Development, the Department of Economic Affairs and something, I think, called Natural Resources or something like that; anyway that one disappeared almost at once. The Department of Economic Affairs lasted several years until the Treasury strangled it. So we were left with the Ministry of Overseas Development. I remember that Andrew was very anxious that our acronym should be MOD but the Ministry of Defence said that they had got there first! So we eventually settled for ODM. It so happened that this coincided with other interests in the Civil Service at the time; the Treasury had gradually got dragged more and more into the capital aid business in relation to those countries which had been colonies but were no longer colonies, that is basically South Asia, India and Pakistan; and they didn't really relish the job of themselves being directly involved in providing capital finance to these countries. But they couldn't give it the Colonial Office because they were no longer colonies and nobody would dream of trusting the Commonwealth Relations Office with as much as a sixpence! So the Treasury was relieved when the prospect of being able to hand the detailed administration of capital aid while preserving their usual common Treasury control over public expenditure as a whole and over public expenditure in particular areas of activity. Every aspect of British government relations with the developing countries was brought into the ODM at that time. The department in the Ministry of Education dealing with UNESCO came over, the department in the Ministry of Agriculture dealing with FAO came over. We dealt with all capital aid; we already had technical assistance because the DTC had just expanded into a Ministry and fairly soon after that, when the Colonial Office folded a couple of years later, most of those people came over into the ODM, except those people who opted to join the Foreign Service.

We all had that option and I, after discussion with my wife, decided against joining the Diplomatic Service which we could have done, because we just couldn't think how it might work out in practice to be subjected to the strains and stresses of a diplomatic life. I think frankly I greatly exaggerated the strains and stresses and greatly under-estimated the rather agreeable life which many members of the Diplomatic Service have enjoyed for so long. Now the problem with the Ministry of Overseas Development - and perhaps I can just interject here

that under a Labour government it has always been a separate Ministry with, to begin with, that is under the Labour government of 1964-70, its Minister in the Cabinet, first of all Barbara Castle, who of course was one of the major figures in the Labour Party when they won the election in 1964. Subsequently, when Labour came back in 1974-79, the Minister was not in the Cabinet but it still was a separate Ministry. Under the Conservative governments it was renamed the Overseas Development Administration and was part of the Foreign Office. Unfortunately Barbara Castle discovered almost immediately on taking office that the exigencies of the National Plan put forward by George Brown in 1965 which disappeared into the mists of antiquity in about 1967 when the Treasury regained control of everything, meant that there was no place for increased aid in that Plan. Indeed from 1964-70, under that Labour administration, the increases in aid were comparatively small. Oddly enough, they were much larger in the Conservative government of 1970-74 because, I think Edward Heath was really quite sympathetic to aid, up to a point quite sympathetic; so there was a fair increase in the programme which can be ascertained by looking at the public expenditure figures. Big increases came after 1976 under Judith Hart, the ODM Minister in that Labour Government.

Perhaps before I move on to the question of aid and trade which is to do with the increase in aid from 1976 onwards I can talk a bit about the staffing of the Ministry of Overseas Development when it was set up in 1964. I said that functions from several other departments came over and in common with the other two departments which were set up at that time existing departments were urged to release staff in order to staff up these new Ministries. Andrew Cohen, whatever his capabilities and they were considerable as an intellectual force, was a very bad administrator and he was very anxious, I think, that the Ministry should be enormously significant from the beginning. I think he came to the totally wrong conclusion that the way to do this was to have a very large, or comparatively large, number of people in it. Departments were created with Heads of Departments and staff and large numbers were hauled in from the Foreign Office, then still just Foreign not yet the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, from the Commonwealth Relations Office, from the Treasury and those two departments Education and Agriculture which, as I said, moved their departments en bloc. Unfortunately those other departments which just sent over individuals used the opportunity to get rid of those people they were very anxious to get rid of; both on us and on the DEA and on this Natural Resources department or whatever it was called. I am afraid that that was a very serious drawback for a very long period. It took us, I suppose, the best part of twenty years to get rid of quite inadequate staff. I am only talking here about Principals and upwards. I am not talking about clerical and executive staff; the same thing applied there but I don't know much about that. I am talking about policy makers, the members of the administrative class. There were two groups who were very much

dragging back the chariot wheels of aid. One was these export rejects from other departments and the other was, frankly, people from the Colonial Office or the DTC who were promoted in vast numbers to be Assistant Secretaries, who simply were not up to that grade and never got beyond it but nonetheless stuck around for the best part of twenty years. It wasn't therefore until the early '80's or thereabouts that we got rid of these people on retirement, and the young people who had come in as Assistant Principals after the Ministry was set up, many of whom were of very high quality because it appealed to the idealists, could come through and take over the jobs of real responsibility. Unfortunately this coincided with the savage cuts in the aid programme introduced by the Tory government of 1979. So the situation now is, in my view, there is a very high quality policy making body of officials in the ODA who are struggling to administer an ever decreasing quantity of aid, particularly now that an increasing proportion of the aid programme that remains is going into the European Development Fund and is thus not under the control of the ODA officials at all, except indirectly. So you have an ever increasing quality of staff with an ever diminishing programme for them to administer. I am not sure quite how that is going to work out in the future but that seems to me to be the present situation. That is, as it were, a very short overview of the staffing situation of the ODM/ODA between 1964 and when I retired in 1986.

I had got to 1976 with Judith Hart as Minister and there had always been - and I will talk more about this in a moment - there had always been a lot of pressure to use the aid programme as an export promotion device, from the Department of Trade and Industry mostly. The Foreign Office interests we will come to later. In 1976 Judith Hart did a sort of deal whereby she allowed the creation of what was called the aid/trade provision (ATP) which was fairly specifically devoted to subsidising British exports in a way in which the ODM and then later the ODA tried to ensure was still a value to the recipient country which, of course, British exporters were not in the slightest degree interested in, nor indeed were the Department of Trade and Industry; why should they be? That wasn't their job. This was the price of having a greatly increased aid programme and I think it is true to say that from 1976 to the end of the Labour government the aid programme did increase at about 6% a year in real terms which was a very significant increase, very difficult, if I may say, to administer and I have on one or two occasions since then, when the Labour party have asked my view on various aspect of aid, when they have thought they were going to win an election, I have said that if they were ever thinking of getting to the 0.7 % international target of aid within a life time of a Parliament, that is in five years, they were talking about massive increases per year in expenditure, not in commitments, but in expenditure and that the chances of achieving that were virtually nil; and that they really ought, seriously, to consider a rather more practical approach to the problem of increasing the

aid programme, if that is what they wanted to do. Whether, if a Labour government comes in in the next year they will still want to do that is, of course, another matter, but in 1987 and 1992 they had ambitions of that sort, the people who dealt with aid in the Labour Party. From 1979 onwards, for a time anyway, the programme was decreasing at about 6% a year in real terms under the Conservative government which was almost as difficult a task to achieve administratively as increasing it by 6% had been for the three or four years before! That was quite a difficult period. No doubt there were other parts of Whitehall who had their own similar public expenditure difficulties, but that was quite a serious problem for us. I should mention, I think, that a very important part of the ODM/ODA administrative structure was the establishment of what we call Development Divisions in various parts of the world where our programmes, as it were, were thickest on the ground. We had three in Africa: one in Nairobi, one in Blantyre, and one in Harare and one in the West Indies, in Barbados, one in Bangkok, and eventually one in Suva, Fiji which were responsible at the more local level for administrating the aid programme.

J.B. Regionally?

R.B. Regionally, yes. This was a very significant, important and valuable step in the administration of aid - when I say where they still exist, of course. These Development Divisions mostly consisted of technical experts, an engineer, an agriculturist or two, an educationalist and whatever the local aid programme needs were and were presided over by an administrator sent out from the ODM/ODA. The Americans had an AID Mission in every country in which they gave aid. I think, that it would be true to say that virtually every other country had its aid administered by the local Embassy. I think that we are the only ones to have this kind of regional set up which has been, unquestionably, a tremendous success technically as it were. It enabled us to do things which simply would not otherwise have been possible, many of which were - I was about to say 'bitterly' but perhaps 'strongly' would be better - opposed by a good number of heads of mission in the areas with which these Development Divisions dealt.

Now let us come on to relations between the aid programme and the FCO. Unquestionably, as I have already said, the greatest pressure for a non-aid aid programme, that is an aid programme which was devoted to aims quite other than doing good to the countries concerned, came from the DTI which was just interested in exports. On the whole the FCO as such went along with that, without any great enthusiasm; it didn't need to in fact, the DTI did all the enthusing necessary for that. The FCO would have liked the aid programme to serve foreign policies, but it wasn't terribly easy to see how this might be done and in these interdepartmental discussions

in Whitehall about who should get what, attempts to get the Foreign Office to specify precisely what they meant by using aid to forward foreign policy aims and exactly what would then be done were not terribly successful. They were not able really to be all that specific about it. I am not talking about the heads of mission here, I am talking about the Foreign Office as such. So that the pressure on the aid programme from the Foreign Office to do things which the ODA did not want to do was not terribly great except in one area which was that they liked some aid to go to almost every developing nation with which we had diplomatic relations. They didn't really like any to be left out and did their best to prevent the ODA from cutting out an aid programme, at a time when the programme overall was decreasing. You know, obviously one of the options was to cease giving aid to some of the less significant countries or ones with whom Britain was less concerned, but that never really was an option because of the Foreign Office, chiefly inspired by the heads of mission in those countries. In many of those countries - shall we say the ones on the periphery of the British interest? - in many of those countries aid was virtually the only way in which the head of mission could get anywhere near the local government. It didn't always work, but without that he had very little hope of ever seeing the Prime Minister or the President or whoever. So they were desperate to keep some aid going so they had some reason for their presence in the country.

I don't know whether I shall have a further opportunity to mention this, but perhaps I should say en passant, I really think a rather more serious study is needed of the extent to which Britain needs to have a diplomatic post in so many countries of very little interest to Britain. The fact that heads of mission in those peripheral countries are so anxious to use aid as a way of getting into corridors of power in that country, I think indicates that some of them are really not up to it.

J.B. Are you talking about Commonwealth countries?

R.B. No, mostly foreign countries. For example French West Africa - which used to be French but now nominally free but is still French. I am thinking of a particular country and a particular head of mission - no names - who was quite open that he needed aid in order to have any kind of entrée into the local government machine at all. Now there has always been tension and I don't think I can call it creative tension between posts overseas and the ODM/ODA and the Development Divisions in particular as being much nearer. With certain honourable exceptions, and you yourself Jane are not so far from one, perhaps most honourable exception of all, heads of mission wished to support the DTI in using aid to further British exports with some fairly horrific results of which the Pergau Dam is probably the most well known one. It is by no means the only one, not the only one of that size, but I have mentioned the problem of

helicopters to India which was another similar one.

J.B. You haven't mentioned it yet.

R.B. No, I mentioned it to you. Well, do you want me to go into that? Perhaps a brief summary. Westland Helicopters, Westlands being then, as usual, in some enormous difficulty with keeping going, the DTI were very keen that we should provide some helicopters to somewhere to keep Westlands going and about the only place that was capable of using helicopters was India. So the idea was to sell helicopters to India. Now our economists had no difficulty whatever in showing that the effects of this on the Indian economy were at best neutral and on the most reasonable assumptions would diminish the India gross national product, if only marginally, but I mean it still was a most appalling use of aid money which was supposed to provide a return for the recipient not less than the current rate of borrowing. They got the aid for nothing and it was getting that kind of return, so that is how aid is supposed to work. Well, that was not the case with these helicopters. Eventually after a tremendous amount of opposition from the ODA, ministers eventually firmly said these had to be provided and they were provided and they proved to be almost entirely useless for the purpose for which they were allegedly wanted, which I believe, as I recall, was dealing with off-shore oil installations.

Well, that and the Pergau Dam are the two big ones and there are many other instances of a smaller nature where the ODA was more or less obliged to finance aid which was really only supporting British exports and did the recipient country no good at all or only marginal good. I also remember the railways in East Africa: railways in Kenya was another one urged on us by the DTI. This was over and above the aid/trade provision which was more specifically directed to promoting exports. So you had two elements in a particular post and, let's face it, if one goes back to the Duncan report on the Diplomatic Service, which had this idea of countries of concentration or whatever it was called, and then the peripheral ones, virtually all our aid recipients came in the peripheral category. Naturally enough, the FCO did not feel under any particular obligation to send its best people to these peripheral posts, so I am afraid all too often one was dealing with heads of mission who were not among the leading intellectuals of our time nor in some cases possessed of even normal reserves of common sense. So there could be two sorts of tension in a post between the post and ODA headquarters back in London. One was the head of mission who was only interested in aid that promoted British exports - that was the capital aid side of it. Now you come to the technical assistance side of things, which is enormously important for a developing country trying to develop their technical skills; difficult, long, taxing in the sense of unrewarding, because there are such long periods before anything

seems to happen. This technical assistance would be dealt with at the grass roots level by the junior staff in the post. Some of them were very keen on this job and worked hard at it, but they were a comparatively small number; most of the junior staff who were given the job of looking after these technical assistance experts who were resident in the country in which they were, really resented having to do it.

J.B. You are talking about Second Secretaries?

R.B. Yes, that sort of level - Second or First Secretaries, did it used to be called 'B' class? A lot of them did not really relish this task. I have some sympathy for them, because some technical experts, although they may have been pretty expert in their knowledge, were not particularly helpful individuals and many of them did not react well to living in tropical climates or outside the sort of structures of society that they had been used to back in England. Those who had done a lot of service overseas, they were fine; and people who came from the Colonial Service, agriculturists, engineers and so on, who came from the Colonial Service, no problems with them; but a lot of people who were brought out of jobs in the U.K. for technical training really did not behave themselves at all well outside their professional hours; sometimes not in their professional hours! I had particular experience of this myself because when I went to Singapore, which I will come to later, I had myself recruited a lot of technical experts or helped to recruit them when I was in London on the Singapore desk. I was unexpectedly sent to Singapore when I had to deal with the consequences of my own mistakes in recruitment. I was there as First Secretary and I was fortunate in that I had a Second Secretary who came from the Colonial Office and who was also keen on aid business and together we managed, fairly successfully, to sort these people out. There was a lot of time and effort involved and many diplomatic service staff who didn't have any overseas or colonial service background, really didn't relish this task. Whereas the Development Division were very anxious that the technical assistance staff in these countries should have a fair crack of the whip and do their job because basically in the longer term that is where development is going to occur, rather than in capital aid. It is no good building dams, airfields and all these other things if there is nobody locally who is capable of operating them successfully - in itself a whole subject which I won't go into. That is a tremendous problem in developing countries. In many countries, particularly Africa these days, it seems to be getting worse, rather than better!

So there were these areas of tension and when I became Deputy Secretary on several occasions I was either sent, or decided to go myself, to try to defuse very bad relations between a head of post and the Development Division. Not even the head of post, it could have been the second in

command - in Sri Lanka he did all the aid and had appalling relations with our Development Division - and I tried to sort that one out, not with a great deal of success. On another occasion I was actually sent to Barbados where there was enormous tension between the then High Commissioner for the Leeward and Windward Islands and the Development Division which was also situated in Bridgetown. Because when the chief ministers from these various islands came to Barbados they made no attempt whatever to contact the High Commissioner but went straight to the Development Division where their interests were concerned since the Development Division was giving them aid; and the High Commissioner just sat twiddling his thumbs in his High Commission without any of the people to whom he was supposed to be accredited paying him any attention. So it had to be sorted out so that he was seen to be the kingpin on aid, even though he didn't do much about it. This has meant over the years that relations between the ODA and the development divisions and many posts overseas has been considerably less than satisfactory.

Another element of this which I will mention is as follows: towards the middle of the 80's, I forget the exact date, the World Bank began to get much more concerned about the problem of aid co-ordination between all the donors in order to bring pressure on developing countries to behave themselves sensibly in economic policy. I am not talking about human rights here; that is another aspect. The World Bank was more concerned with developing countries behaving sensibly in the economic field. This could not be done if particular donors kept on shoving in equipment and capital goods which they wanted to get rid of on export promotion without any regard as to whether they were of any benefit to the country concerned or whether or not they were a negative benefit to the country concerned. I was caught up in this attempt, both in Washington and in OECD in Paris, where the Development Assistance Committee of OECD met to discuss these sorts of problems. Although we devoted a great deal of time at these international gatherings to discussing these problems, there didn't seem to be a hell of a lot going on in the field; so I thought I would take it on myself as one of my tasks as Deputy Secretary in the ODA to go around and try to stimulate donor co-operation in the field; and this normally met with intense opposition from the heads of mission in the countries to which I went and tried to organise this, because they felt that it would seriously damage their relations with the government to be seen to be taking the lead in dissuading the government from doing what it wanted to, which was basically to fill the pockets of its senior members' Swiss bank accounts rather than act in the way which was in the best interests of the country as a whole. I am afraid that in Africa, (I suppose it is an example of my usual hyperbole) one of Browning's laws of development is that there is always enough money in whatever country, however poor, to fill the Swiss bank accounts of the ruling group; that has been shown over and over again to be the

case. Not only in rich countries like Zaire, where this happens, but also in very poor countries or countries, like for example Ghana, which were made poor by their rulers. It was obviously important to get this co-ordinated approach by the donors whereby they would all insist on the same policies being followed by the government concerned as the price of getting any aid at all; and then each of the donors would provide the goods where they had the comparative advantage. I need to state that proposition in that way to see the appalling difficulties, but we never even got to that stage - we never even got to the stage of serious attempts to co-ordinate aid between the donors. Of course, now I am ten years out of date on pretty well every aspect of aid policy, not just this particular one. But just as I retired, the EDF, the European development fund came on the scene wielding enormous sums of money. Wielding it at the time badly, to a degree which many of us in the field could scarcely comprehend. So there was a new factor and we, that is what I would call the thinking donors plus the World Bank, were desperately trying to get the EDF to behave in a sensible fashion. But some European countries were particularly anxious to shackle to themselves their former colonies who were the chief recipients of the aid from Europe, that is the ACP countries (Asia, Caribbean and Africa). The French, strongly supported by the Italians, were anxious to see a lot of money spent in the North African countries without being too particular about what it was spent on. They hoped thereby to establish close relations between these countries and the European Union. When I retired the attempt to co-ordinate all this aid and put everybody's aid to a useful purpose in relation to the developing countries was still only in its infancy, having been going for only two or three years, which in this whole business is infancy; and the World Bank and IMF went in for structural adjustment which is basically the same thing. How that has gone since, I really don't know because I have lost all contact with the whole aid business but my impression is that most African countries have gone steadily downhill in the ten years since I left so perhaps it hasn't been all that successful. Ghana may be an exception but Africa generally does seem to be in an appalling state and as far as Asia is concerned I think that the problem there is probably that the amount of aid available isn't sufficiently great in relation to the countries' overall economic capacity to enable the donors to have all that much influence on what governments actually do; that is certainly the case in India for example.

Now that is all that I can usefully say on the question of aid co-ordination and indeed relations on the ground between the ODA and the FO representatives overseas.

Ministers, yes. I had two overseas assignments, one in Singapore from 1969-71 and one in Washington from 1973-76 and in between that I was doing an international job in London so that I wasn't around the Office much. So that from being a Principal who didn't see Ministers

all that much anyway, up to being an Under-Secretary who saw Ministers all too much! there was quite a long gap. When I came back in 1976 as Under-Secretary for Asia the Minister was Judith Hart, a first rate Minister from all points of view. She wrote a very good book on aid; she knew a lot about it; she was a very energetic lady, anxious to tour and anxious to make sure our aid was properly used, an excellent Minister, not least because if there was a meeting any time after 4pm in her office the gin and tonic was certainly served! As I think I have mentioned, she negotiated the ATP arrangement in return for the increased aid programme. She lasted until the end of the Labour administration in 1979 and then I am afraid things took a very substantial turn for the worse.

Our first Tory Minister was Neil Martin, now deceased, who had been a great war hero in the Balkans during the War and had been one of Mrs. Thatcher's very early supporters which is, I assume, why he got a Ministerial post which frankly he was utterly unable to cope with and had no interest in coping with. I remember until to the day of his departure he could not remember what HEO stood for (that being Higher Executive Officer) of whom he was in charge of untold hundreds but every time HEO was mentioned in a meeting with him he had to say, now what does that stand for? and I am afraid he had absolutely no interest in aid at all and made no attempt whatever to find out what he was supposed to be doing. Which was a pretty nightmare situation, when one accompanied him abroad, particularly because at that time the European aid business was getting under way and we were getting more and more sucked into it. The negotiations for the European Development Fund were showing likely results which, as I said earlier, was going to absorb a higher and higher proportion of the total British aid programme; but we had no valuable Ministerial input into the negotiations about keeping the volume of EDF down or improving its use - I wonder if I am allowed to say in this context what an enormous admirer I was of Charles Powell who was then in Brussels, the Counsellor dealing inter alia with the aid aspect of Europe in Brussels. As our local representative he was an immensely hard-working man, very able and, unlike some members of the diplomatic service, always kept very closely in touch with what the ODA wanted to do and tried to achieve and did not try and run his own aid policy. I think he was a sad loss to the ODA when he left for No.10. He did do a considerable amount to keep the British aid policy effort in Brussels on track, in spite of having virtually no assistance from the British Minister who was nominally responsible for dealing with this. Neil Martin was probably with us to something like 1983-84. I think that after the 1983 election he stayed on for a bit and then Tim Raison came over from the Home Office, having absolutely no knowledge or experience of aid matters and taking some considerable time to work himself into the international game, particularly the European game that was the major thing at the time. I took it on myself to accompany him on all these

European negotiations, particularly after Charles Powell who must have left at that time and gone to No.10. He didn't last all that long before Mrs. Thatcher decided that he wasn't to be a Minister any longer, but by that time I had retired; he lasted for a short time after I had retired. The next major Minister, Chris Patten, didn't come on the scene until after I had left. So really, looking over a period of twenty two years, we are looking at two major Ministers of Aid: one was Barbara Castle, who didn't last more than a year before she went off to Transport and other things and the second was Judith Hart who was Aid Minister, I think she was at the end of the Labour government 1964-69, and then back fairly early in the Labour government of 1974-79; those were the really good Ministers; I am afraid the others didn't cut a great deal of mustard.

I have, as I mentioned earlier, had service overseas in posts twice, both under rather special conditions. In the late 60's the then Labour government decided that they could no longer afford to maintain Far East Command which was, of course, based in Singapore and they decided that this base had to be run down and abandoned. This, of course, was likely to be a considerable economic blow to Singapore and an economic mission went out from the ODM to assess how big that damage was likely to be - I think their estimate was that it would take away 10% of the gross national product of Singapore and a lesser extent of Malaysia's. Under any economic criteria this would be a fatal blow to a country's economy, to remove 10% of its GNP in one fell swoop; so it was a question of providing some aid to make up for this or to help make up for this. I forget the figure mentioned by the economists as required for this but the aid was eventually settled as £50 million for Singapore which was hopelessly smaller than the amount the economists said was required; and I think it was £10 million for Malaysia. I was going to Malaysia to administer the programme there as I was dealing with those countries in London but at the last moment there was a frightful bust-up in Singapore and the First Secretary who was going to deal with aid to Singapore was sent home overnight. I was hastily switched to Singapore as I was the one with experience in London, which proved to be very nice for me as Singapore in those days was idyllic. Admittedly all those people in Singapore at that time said 'Oh God you should have been here before the War, it was really idyllic' and no doubt the people who are there now say 'Oh gosh, you should have been here in the 70's, it was idyllic' but we really had a very good time. I may say that Singapore shrugged off this loss of 10% of its GNP without any difficulty at all and has gone on from strength to strength with very little help from our aid programme. I should say perhaps the best thing we did was the setting up of various technical education facilities staffed by some of those inadequate people I mentioned earlier! Probably that was very helpful but the rest of the aid programme didn't make all that difference. Singapore has gone on to have a per capita income now higher than that of the U.K. That was an extremely interesting experience; I didn't get a lot of co-operation from the High

Commissioner but on the whole, as long as I didn't upset the Singaporeans too badly, he let me get on with it and there wasn't too much pressure on the export promotion side. It was a very enjoyable couple of years and then I was summoned back, just when I was looking forward to my mid tour leave with full allowances, an aim which I have never succeeded in achieving!

Then in 1973 our alternative executive director to the World Bank; the UK had its own executive director for both the World Bank and the IMF and it was always the same man, a Treasury Deputy Secretary and he was assisted on the Bank side by an Assistant Secretary from the ODA and on the Fund side by an equivalent grade official from the Bank of England. Our man from the ODA side unfortunately had cancer of the stomach and had to be brought home very suddenly so I succeeded in getting myself into that job for two and half years. I was thus alternate executive director UK in the World Bank but also allegedly Counsellor (Aid) in the Embassy, a job which since we were in the capital of the richest country in the world at that time was not all that onerous, although it did involve a certain amount of liaison with USAID on matters of interest to the ODA. I sort of acted as the local leg man for the ODA, one who really knew what he was talking about as he was an aid man, rather than some First Secretary or Counsellor from the Embassy who didn't know what he was talking about but was still told to deliver messages and receive the reply. So that was really what my duties as Counsellor (Aid) in the Embassy were. I was very much on the periphery of the Embassy; our office was down in the IMF building, not in Massachusetts Avenue where the Embassy proper was. Neither of these experiences were all that typical of being in the foreign service nor indeed dealing with aid. They were both rather specialised and I should perhaps have added that in Singapore, because I was dealing with the run down of the forces I was given the task in the Embassy's role in the handing over of the military estate to the Singaporeans which probably occupied some 50% of my working time and enabled me to get on very close terms with the forces for the only time in my life, since my sight was not good enough to do national service.

An interesting experience though perhaps peripheral to this study! Although I served in posts overseas I can't claim to say "well because I was there, I saw what things were really like and I offer the following prescriptions for a vast improvement in the Diplomatic Service".

J.B. But you did an enormous amount of travelling.

R.B. Yes, I did an enormous amount of travelling. Now I think that I have mentioned earlier that a good deal of my experience was in the international field, that is dealing with the aid operations of the UN. To begin with, when I was still in the Colonial Office, it was discussions

of colonial policies in the UN.

I went to the General Assembly of 1958 where those discussions took place in that extraordinary lunatic assembly, the 4th committee; this was just an unbelievable experience for a still comparatively young man, who hadn't a great deal of overseas experience, to be subjected to masses and masses of largely lunatic foreigners, or it seemed lunatic foreigners, discussing how our colonies ought to be run and how badly we had done it. Many of them were political exiles or people just taken off the street and shoved in - very, very extraordinary. Then subsequently discussions with the Trusteeship Council and the committee on information on self-governing territories but, of course, I was only the bag man, the junior taking notes and very seldom able to speak. And of course when Brian (Sir Brian Barder) gives his enormous peroration he will have much more to say on how that actually worked. Subsequently, ten years later, I went back as Head to what was called the Multi-lateral Aid Institutions Department in the ODA dealing with our policy towards the World Bank, particularly the IDA replenishment, that is the soft lending window of the Bank.

J.B. What replenishment?

R.B. The IDA - International Development Association - which provided loans at low interest rates to developing countries. The fund was replenished every three years as a result of appallingly difficult negotiations between the donors as to which proportion of the new replenishment they would take. First of all you had to quarrel about what size the replenishment should be and then how the responsibility of funding it should be divided up between the donors; this was a major task in itself. I was mainly concerned with the World Bank and the UN development programme. Now that is a point of some interest. The UN had been providing some technical assistance for a long period; in what would have been the late 50's I suppose, the developing countries who by then must have been in a fairly large majority of the members of the UN although, of course, now the majority is much bigger, pressed very hard for a capital fund for the UN to administer called I believe 'Sunfed' which the donors were desperately anxious to avoid having to fund because it would have operated on the basis of one country one vote and the IDA was set up really to take the sting out of that pressure for a UN capital aid fund, the Bank, of course, having its voting capacity divided up amongst the member countries according to their contributions to the fund. So that it, the Bank, was responsive to the wishes of the major donors whereas the UN has always been responsive to the wishes of the majority of the developing countries, the recipients. So the UN operation remained as a technical assistance one. There was a great report on the UN technical assistance operation

including UNESCO, UNIDO, FAO, WHO and the International Maritime Consultative Organisation by a fellow called Jackson, an Australian and I believe the husband of Barbara Ward, a lady of whom it was said she never used one word when ten would do!

Anyway, he had done this great report, the effect of which was, in principle anyway, to establish the UN Development Programme, a body in New York, which would be the financial basis for all the operations of the UN specialised agencies and would thus control what they would do. This vast report had just been promulgated and the UNDP set up not long before I took over the job as head of that department. I may say that it did not quite work as it was intended, because what actually happened was that all the specialised agencies then set up their own funds to supplement the UNDP which they could use in the way they wanted to do. But nonetheless there was a considerable amount of money and we again, the donors, were expected to provide it; and again it was a question of deciding on the quantity of the next tranche of aid, the replenishment, and then how it was to be used. Whereas there was weighted voting in the World Bank and the IDA there certainly wasn't in the UN. The UNDP Governing Council consisted of somewhere around forty countries including all the donors and a selection of the recipients but the donors only had one vote each and were not really able to impose their will, even if they had had a collective one, and there is always been a great division amongst them, between what you might call reactionary donors which I think you can say are the Americans, ourselves and the Germans and the progressive donors - Scandinavians, Canadians and the Dutch, who have very strong social aims and so on and are not too fussed about what happens to the money. So the donors have never been a very coherent group, whereas the Group of Seventy Seven which was the group of developing countries, I don't know if there were ever seventy seven of them, but anyway they have long since been a larger group than that and are no doubt still called the group of seventy seven, were a much more coherent group and usually whipped into line by one of the more major recipient countries like India or Brazil who managed to impose their will on the others. It was only a question of dragging money out of us. So it wasn't too difficult for them! So I dealt with that for those intervening periods when I was Under-Secretary Asia, then I went to the DTI which I will deal with later and then I came back.

I was Principal Establishment Officer, director of manpower, in the ODA for a couple of years or so and then became Deputy Secretary and a good deal of my time as Deputy Secretary was spent in the international business, mostly the replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA) and the EDF, sitting in on the negotiations. Also I took the opportunity to pay fairly regular visits to Rome to attend the main FAO meetings and see how that worked. And I had also, when I was in charge earlier of the international relations department in the

ODA, been around when UNIDO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, was set up and eventually swam off as an independent specialised agency.

Now my opinion of the UN. I am afraid my opinion of the technical assistance operation is that it is not worth the money. I am not denying that some good work was done and our agriculturalists felt that FAO, for example, did some useful work in the field in a number of areas; but the politicking at headquarters was intense between the various directors general, particularly Saoma, in the FAO and between donor countries and Saoma - Saoma and the staff - between Saoma and the recipient countries. Immense politicking at enormous cost, people's salaries. All UN staff are by definition overpaid, like all Brussels staff are overpaid, and by that I mean that they started off by being paid at American rates, when admittedly there were a good number of Americans. But as time went by the number of Americans was reduced and a lot of developing country people came in. If a developing country official could get a job in New York in the UN - bingo, his fortune was made! - and far too much of that kind of thing went on. People were there simply to make money and stab each other in the back. I think that the UN is an absolutely frightful institution and its recent - I am talking here not about its aid operations but overall - its recent efforts in the peace-keeping business I just have no time for. However, that also applied to the technical assistance operation - enormously expensive, because of the colossal oncost of the headquarters staff and simply not worth the money. It would have been much better if the money had been devoted by the donor countries to their own programmes. We did get out of UNESCO. I had very little to do with that decision but I warmly applauded it. I was always on the look out for a way of getting out of FAO, but FAO never got quite so bad as UNESCO so there was never quite the same incentive. A point I will make here is that, I said that the UN Development Programme, the body in New York, was supposed to control the doings of the specialised agencies by providing them with funds; now one of the problems we came up against - particularly in relation to FAO - was that you had one lot of people from the donor countries operating in New York, mostly I think they had come from their aid agencies in their capitals, deciding whatever they decided. These decisions as it were then passed over to the headquarters of the specialised agencies. Let's take the FAO. When you get to the FAO annual meeting, do you meet the same people as you met in New York? do you, hell! What you met was the people from the Ministries of Agriculture in the donor countries who had no idea what had gone on in New York and appeared to have no briefings from their aid departments and tended to go along with whatever Saoma thought was a good thing. So you got the same country adopting totally contrary policies in New York and Rome.

J.B. Did that apply to us as well?

R.H. No, that is one thing that can be said about the British overseas operation. On a particular issue any British official anywhere in the world will say the same thing. It may not be worth saying but he will say the same thing, because it will all have been worked out in unending committee meetings in the Cabinet Office if it is of that importance. I think it is true and fair to say from that consistency of approach there is almost no real comparison between Britain and any other country. All US government departments are at each other's throats, so every US delegation has to be enormous, because it consists of representatives of every individual department. The UK is perfectly able to operate with say one man, because he has been briefed jointly by every department in Whitehall. As I say, it may end up with a sort of wishy-washy compromise which doesn't help anybody much, but at least it is a consistent approach. I think this happens very seldom. I think probably perhaps only the French are able to do this. I like to think that, whereas their intentions are almost invariably malevolent, ours were on the whole on the side of good, although they may not be very firmly or coherently expressed, because of the difficulty of getting agreement in Whitehall.

So I was not a great believer in the UN system of aid. Douglas Williams, you know who he is, I don't know if you are ever going to get onto him, after his retirement from the ODA some twenty years ago now, was commissioned, in I think the middle '80's, to write a book about the UN system and how it could be improved and he wrote a brilliant book saying what the system was and how it could be improved but I am afraid that my review in the ODA newspaper was that whereas in theory it could be improved in this way, in practice I saw no hope at all of this ever being achieved - as far as I know it hasn't; but there again I am ten years out of date.

I was going to mention my trip with Callaghan to South Asia. I was Under-Secretary for Asia. I came back from a very gruelling trip in Asia at the end of 1977, just before Christmas to be told that immediately after Christmas I had to accompany the Prime Minister, then Jim Callaghan, on a tour of the South Asian countries, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. My attempts to get out of this were totally useless. I had to go along with it. I must confess that I wondered why I was there, I wondered why other Whitehall officials were there, because the Prime Minister made virtually no attempt to discuss the various problems which might arise with the officials he brought with him, he spoke only to his wife, Audrey, who was with him and to the Press who were in the back of the RAF VC 10 which we all went on. He spoke, I suppose, to his personal staff, the Private Secretaries from No 10 - Ken Stowe was then Principal Private Secretary and Brian Cartledge was the Foreign Office Private Secretary - but he certainly did not speak to the rest of us who were there. I think only once in the entire trip did he have a

meeting with his officials and that was in Bangladesh and it was extremely bad tempered on his part and concluded very quickly without anything really useful being said or done. This didn't prevent a rather disagreeable experience I had. We went in Bangladesh on a boat sailing down their great river, the Brahmaputra, on a ferry type boat; in the briefing there was a small mention of a possible project of building a canal between the Bramahputra and the Ganges which would very greatly help, inter alia - well, first of all to draw off floods in Bangladesh and secondly to help with the problem of the Hoogly river in Calcutta and the fact that it was inclined to flood, I forget the details now. Anyway here we were on this ferry boat, somehow the Prime Minister had got hold of this brief which was about no.900 in his pile and I was approached by his press man Tom McCaffrey who said the Prime Minister wants a detailed brief on this subject because he intended to make it the central feature of his next statement but I said we are in the middle of the river with no means of communicating with anyone except by signals to the shore, all the information I have is in that brief ... anyway all I do know is that the cost is so horrific that there is no question of the money being found, however wonderful the result might be. Of course he said "don't bother me with details: kindly go and write a detailed brief on this issue for the Prime Minister". The High Commissioner there was Barry Smallman who had been in the Colonial Office and was well known to me and to Brian Barder; he knew a bit about this so I went down to him and cobbled up some piece of paper and the Prime Minister duly expounded on this at our next stop; I can't remember if it was in Bangladesh or India, fortunately nothing ever came of it but if ever what could have been a major development of absolutely horrific cost was floated on the bases of utterly inadequate backing this was it; and this was rather typical of Callaghan's approach. I think that I am not the only one to have mentioned this - you had this extraordinary spectacle of the Prime Minister within the plane going around looking like thunder, not talking to anyone and looking thoroughly disagreeable and indeed being disagreeable, and then as he stepped through the door of the plane, as he landed at the next capital or major city, being smiling sunny Jim; just as he went through the door of the aircraft, his face changed completely and his entire character changed and changed back again when he came back into the aircraft. I am afraid that I have not a great deal of time for - what is he now, Lord Callaghan, isn't he?

Perhaps I should just finish by saying how I came to retire, what was it, just about four years early. It was really because the difficulty of coping with an ever decreasing aid programme just got to me, although I had just fallen into the aid business by chance, as will have been clear from my earlier reminiscences, I had grown to become involved, if you like idealistically, in trying to make sure that this money was properly used and that Britain was making an adequate contribution. I won't say that I had been a strong believer in the 0.7% international

target; it is just a figure plucked out of the air anyway and I think that I have mentioned earlier the actual difficulties in spending that kind of money; nonetheless, to be continually presiding over a diminishing programme was becoming increasingly irritating, particularly as - since I operated so often in the international field - I was spending a lot of time from preventing the British Government from being attacked in the international field for its deficiencies as an international aid donor - deficiencies which I recognised. I eventually had a terrific stand-up row with Ernie Stern of the World Bank, a friend when I had been in Washington and subsequently, over the Special Fund for Africa which I think was set up in about 1984 where he tried, reasonably enough, in a press release to have the finger pointed at the UK. I had a tremendous job avoiding that; I won't go into the details but it was quite difficult and I came back thoroughly disillusioned that I was becoming the major excuser of what seemed to me a very wrong UK aid policy. At that time the Government of Mrs. Thatcher and Co. were quite anxious to get rid of senior people. They wanted to reduce numbers, particularly reduce the senior ranks and there was a moderately generous scheme, by civil service standards anyway, for retiring with a full pension which you would have received if you had stayed on until you were sixty; so I seized that opportunity in the last year, I believe, in which it applied. I left with considerable regrets but still feeling that I had done my whack and that I wasn't really prepared to stay on and continue on this line of an ever decreasing aid programme and ever more specious, and I hoped convincing, excuses for this which would prevent us being pointed out in international circles. So I retired to bucolic rural Devon.

J B. Thank you Rex.