

British Diplomatic Oral History Programme: Roy Dean

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From "*Mainly in Fun*" (The Book Guild, 2002)

As a young diplomat in Ceylon, one of my delights was to satirise the Soviet system. A friendly local editor with a great sense of humour was very cooperative in printing my japes with a distinctive byline. This one was published in the Times of Ceylon in October 1961.

TAX RELIEF FOR THE 'LITTLE MAN'

MOSCOW, October 7th (Royter)

Following the announcement that Soviet dwarfs are to be made free of income tax, the Chairman of the State Planning Commission, Mr. A.N. Kosygin, has published details of the Russian "Lilliputi", broken down by age and sex.

It is decreed by the Supreme Soviet that a dwarf is a person over 21 who has not reached a height of 1.25 metres (about 4 ft. 2 ins.). The latest census shows that there are 15,663 registered male dwarfs and 1,371 females in the Soviet Union. Eighty per cent are in the age group 21-30, fifteen per cent between 31 and 40, and five per cent over 40. The maximum age of 56 was attained by a dwarf who returned from Nome, Alaska, in 1923.

A survey carried out at the time of the census reveals that 38.6 per cent of male dwarfs attributed their lack of height to smoking Caucasian tobacco, 28.9 percent to nuclear fall-out, 13.2 percent to living in a low-roofed house, 5.7 per cent to looking at Sputniks, and 1.8 per cent to "the Government". The remainder said "Don't know".

The Secretary of the All-Union Committee of Working Dwarfs, Mr. V. Manikin, has welcomed the news that male dwarfs will be able to draw their old age pensions at 45 and females at 40. He added that his organisation would continue their campaign for equal pension rights. At present Soviet dwarfs receive only two-thirds of the national rates.

Unpublished article:

THE POWER OF A PRESS RELEASE

It was early on 11 November 1965, and I was listening to the BBC World Service over breakfast at my house in Lagos, the Nigerian capital, where I was serving as First Secretary (Information) in the British High Commission. The news bulletin began with a bombshell - Ian Smith, Prime Minister of Rhodesia, had issued the country's Unilateral Declaration of Independence - UDI - the very event we had all been dreading.

Taking office in 1964, Smith had rejected British terms for independence which required moves towards black majority rule, and African politicians had been locked up. Negotiations with Smith led by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, on the basis of a biracial political compromise had broken down. But because Britain was not in a position to use force against the government of Rhodesia, a land-locked country, most African leaders were convinced that the two Prime Ministers were colluding in preserving white minority rule in that country. In their eyes UDI would be the final proof of British duplicity; we could expect the anger of their people to turn to anti-British violence as Africa felt betrayed.

Driving immediately to the office, I asked the political officers in Chancery if there had been any guidance from the Commonwealth Relations Office on handling UDI, and what official statement we could put out to the people of Africa showing the British Government's opposition to Smith. There was none - other than that UDI was illegal.

Immediate action was essential as my daily press releases had to reach newspapers and other media offices by 10.30 a.m. The only solution was to concoct a statement based on what I thought the British Government might be considering. Using the heading "Britain Vows to Bring Down Smith", I drafted a list of measures including economic sanctions such as import and export bans, an embargo on the supply of arms, foreign exchange and travel restrictions, and other actions that we would undertake, with the support of Commonwealth countries, to isolate the Smith regime and bring about its downfall. Naturally the measures were not specific and had no time frame.

By 10 a.m. the release was on its way to all the national media in Lagos. The next morning I was relieved to see that the leading government newspaper had reproduced the press release on

its front page with my title as a huge banner headline. Other media had also given it favourable coverage, though not as forcibly.

Meanwhile reports were starting to come in about demonstrations against British Embassies and High Commissions all over Africa, often culminating in hostile crowds putting our offices under siege, with the tacit compliance of their governments. Some British Council centres were attacked and destroyed. But mercifully, no British diplomatic missions or cultural premises in Nigeria were harmed.

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From “*Mainly in Fun*” (The Book Guild, 2002)

The editor of the Guinness Book of Records invited the champions to contribute any unusual incidents arising from their entries in the book. The first episode in this account appeared in the 1995 edition; the second has not previously been published.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

During my career in the Diplomatic Service I always found that cultural diplomacy played an important role in getting to know people of influence and opening the way to promoting HMG's policies, as well as British goods and services. In various countries I was invited by press, radio and TV to give my views on matters of current interest, and made many public speeches. I opened art exhibitions and a Shakespeare festival, and judged a beauty competition. In this context it was enormously helpful that, by a great stroke of good fortune, I happened to hold the world record for the fastest solution of the *Times* crossword.

A curious episode stemming from this came about in 1976. At that time I was on the FCO desk handling our economic relations with the Indian subcontinent, and had done some research into the figures of our exports to those countries. Analysis showed that our trade with India was not flourishing as well as it should, given the close historic and commercial links between the two countries and the size of our bilateral aid programme.

Following talks with Indian officials it was agreed that trade relations would benefit from the formal framework of a bilateral economic cooperation agreement. The terms were drawn up, and I travelled to New Delhi with Peter Shore, the Secretary of State for Trade, for the official signing of the agreement (which incidentally has proved very beneficial to both sides).

We were cordially received and entertained by our Indian counterparts. The Indian Government and people had never forgotten that it was a Labour Government in Britain in 1947 that had granted India independence with a parliamentary system of government - the largest democracy in the world. There was an instinctive bond between the Congress Party of India and the British Labour Party.

But it was some time since a British Cabinet Minister had paid an official visit to New Delhi, and naturally Mr. Shore wished to call on Mrs Indira Gandhi and discuss India's progress. However, there was a problem of protocol. It became clear that whereas the Indian Prime Minister would have been glad to meet her British opposite number officially, in accordance with strict protocol she would not be able to see a mere trade minister.

I discussed the problem with her private secretary, an old friend from his days at the Indian High Commission in London, when we found we shared a common interest in E. M. Forster. He knew that Mrs Gandhi liked to relax from the cares of office with a puzzle at the end of the day. He mentioned to her that I was a crossword champion, and she agreed to see me.

Thus it came about that I was ushered into her sanctum for a chat about our shared enthusiasm, with the Minister waiting in the wings. I was privileged to enjoy an informal conversation with Mrs Gandhi for ten minutes. As I thanked her for her kindness, I asked if she would like to meet Mr Shore, who was in the room next door. The ice having been broken, the Minister was invited to pay a courtesy call on her. He was able to conduct his official business in a very successful meeting which helped to reinforce UK/India relations at the highest level.

This article was published in *Password* in May 2002

In the early 1980s there was fierce public controversy about nuclear weapons throughout Western Europe. An important part of my job as Director of the FCO's Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit - responsible for formulating British proposals in the various international disarmament negotiations - was to improve public understanding of the efforts being made to achieve multilateral arms control agreements. In this context, it became necessary to refute KGB propaganda.

WINNING THE WAR OF WORDS

In a speech on 6 October 1979 President Brezhnev claimed that the proposed deployment by NATO of ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing II missiles would upset an existing parity in Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF), increase the likelihood of a nuclear war limited to Europe, give the United States the ability to Launch a 'first strike' attack against the Soviet Union, and make the territory of European states accepting them a target for Soviet nuclear weapons.

These arguments - though palpably false - were calculated to alarm the populations of Western Europe, to fuel the movement for unilateral disarmament by the West, and to disguise the fact that the Soviet Union had been installing its multiple-headed SS-20 missiles targeted on Western Europe since 1977. In this they were immediately successful. Widely disseminated by the KGB and other Soviet organs such as the World Peace Council, they produced a climate of opinion that completely dominated the public debate. The spate of disinformation was accompanied by a cynical Soviet 'peace offensive'. Recently published East German secret police records reveal that Stasi 'agents of influence' were also involved; while they were not in a position to hand over classified documents that would have endangered the national security of Western countries, they were well able to peddle Cold War propaganda on behalf of the Soviet Union.

Consequently the NATO decision, taken in December 1979, became the main focus of nuclear disarmament campaigns in Europe. Opponents of this modernisation overlooked the fact that

the programme was requested by the European members of NATO, that it committed the United States more firmly to Europe's defence, and that it would restore the INF balance that had been upset by the installation of the Soviet SS-20 missiles. But most crucial of all, they largely ignored NATO's simultaneous commitment to engage in talks on limiting INF, and the importance of the proposed deployments in persuading the Soviet Union to negotiate on mutual reductions.

The resurgence of public opposition to nuclear weapons in Western Europe in the early 1980s occurred during a period that also saw a marked deterioration in East-West relations. The key developments following the signature of the SALT II agreement in June 1979 included the growing threat to Western Europe from the Soviet multiple-warhead SS-20s, NATO's decision to counter this threat by modernising its own defences, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the consequent break in the momentum of the East/West arms control negotiations, and the Soviet-backed imposition of martial law in Poland. New administrations coming to power in Britain and the United States were more open in their criticism of the Soviet abuse of detente.

But the greatest change in public attitudes after 1979 was that uneasiness about the possession of nuclear weapons was replaced by sharper concern about the use of nuclear weapons. It was this fear of nuclear war that inspired the huge public protests forming a political and social phenomenon of the 1980s. Fanned by the KGB, fear became the mainspring of the movement for unilateral nuclear disarmament by the West. In Britain, for example, *The Mitrokhin Archive* published in 1999, recorded the KGB Residency in London boasting in June 1982 that it had brought a quarter of a million people out on the streets in a protest demonstration.

It is possible to trace, from the beginning of 1980, increasing emphasis on 'the growing danger of nuclear war', sometimes coupled with the assertion that 'deterrence has failed'. A steady stream of books, articles, radio talks and television programmes on the horrors of nuclear war gave the public - including teenage students wondering whether it was even worth while taking their 'O' and 'A' level examinations - the impression that a nuclear holocaust was imminent.

No evidence was ever produced for these apocalyptic assertions; it would have been difficult to do so because all the available evidence was to the contrary. In December 1980 the non-governmental Pugwash group meeting in London concluded that, whereas the destructive power of nuclear weapons had increased enormously, the likelihood of their use had not. (The two factors are clearly related). The annual review of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in May 1982 stated that nuclear war was "as unlikely as it has ever been".

But the principles of nuclear deterrence, carefully formulated and mutually accepted by politicians, military leaders and defence strategists, were not understood by the general public. Here Western governments had been at fault; no effective action had been taken over the years - possibly through a fear that this might somehow reveal aspects of NATO's nuclear strategy - to inform their peoples how deterrence worked and how successful it had been in keeping the peace in Europe. Hence the doctrine that nuclear weapons were not for fighting wars but for preventing them had never been accepted by the anti-nuclear campaigners.

In assuming the title of the 'peace movement' the protesters seized the high ground in the nuclear debate. By calling themselves 'disarmers' they gave the impression that others supported unbridled rearmament. Widely publicised rallies in European cities against nuclear weapons were portrayed in Soviet propaganda as popular manifestations of opposition to the defence policies of Western governments. With so much disinformation being circulated, the real issues of peace and disarmament became obscured. To a large extent the nuclear debate was treated as a domestic matter in Western countries - by the well-meaning women at Greenham Common, for instance - and the international dimension was somehow forgotten.

The KGB and other Soviet organs could call on an elaborate machine for disseminating Cold War propaganda; NATO countries were slow to respond. When they eventually did so, the most urgent task was to inform their publics of the real facts. In Britain the FCO's Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit (ACDRU) began to issue information on the international negotiations, while the Ministry of Defence produced material explaining the role of deterrence in preventing war.

The ACDRU publications, mainly designed for non-governmental organisations and academics,

included a quarterly newsletter, leaflets, and a booklet and wallsheet forming an information pack on the Second UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1982. A presentation at NATO Headquarters in Brussels for information officers from member governments resulted in the adoption of a common policy, with some of the British material being translated into other languages. A discussion with US officials in Washington helped to produce a much more balanced response from President Reagan to Brezhnev's "peace offensive".

In addition, numerous articles were contributed to learned journals, particularly those of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, NATO and the United Nations. These were widely read and sometimes reprinted elsewhere. Their impact was reflected in a personal attack on me in the official Soviet journal, *International Affairs*, and a complimentary profile by Peter Hennessy, then Whitehall correspondent of *The Times*, headed "Wise Owl Watches the Doves and the Hawks"!

Briefings were given to diplomatic correspondents and church leaders, papers were presented at NGO seminars in Britain and to the UNESCO Conference on Disarmament Education in Paris, and lectures given at the international relations departments of several universities. The thrust of the argument was that negotiated measures for mutual weapons reduction were the best recipe for world peace. As unilateralism was challenged, a more informed public debate became possible.

The principal effect of the anti-nuclear campaign in Western Europe had been to encourage the Soviet Union to stall for some two years in the INF negotiations that had been initiated in 1981 on the basis of NATO's twin-track proposals for mutual reductions. It was not until the first deployment of the NATO missiles took place in 1983 that these talks began in earnest.

With the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, Soviet policy changed direction. He quickly realised that his country could not sustain the burden of military expenditure, and that it had much to gain from mutual arms reductions. Negotiations were speeded up and in December 1987 the US and USSR signed an INF agreement in Washington providing for the global elimination of American and Soviet ground-based missiles (ballistic and cruise) with a range

between 500 and 5,000 miles. The removal of cruise missiles from Britain followed shortly afterwards under a phased programme between the two sides. Ironically, the Greenham Common protesters claimed this as a success for their campaign.

It had taken eight years to accomplish our aim - the first international arms control agreement to abolish a whole category of nuclear weapons. But the result fully justified the effort - and it had an even greater significance in bringing East and West into dialogue instead of confrontation, and thus hastening the end of the Cold War.

From “*Mainly in Fun*” (The Book Guild, 2002)

Another piece of crossword diplomacy occurred some years later in a sporting fixture.

PEN VERSUS PUNCH

At the end of my career in the Diplomatic Service, when I was Acting British High Commissioner to Ghana, an enterprising lady journalist on the *Mirror*, the leading local newspaper, spotted that I was in the *Guinness Book of Records* as a world crossword champion, together with Azumah Nelson, the Ghanaian world featherweight boxing champion. She arranged for us to meet in November 1986 at the Accra Stadium, where Azumah was in training for the next defence of his title.

I showed him a sample of the *Times* crossword, and he asked what my record was. When I told him it was 3 minutes 45 seconds he thought the time was pretty good, but went on to say he had done even better because in 1985 he had knocked out a challenger in the first round in 2 minutes 24 seconds. We agreed that Azumah had won on points.

This unusual encounter was reported in the *Mirror* with a splendid photograph showing paper and pen versus boxing gloves. A week later, on a Saturday morning, an official from the Foreign Ministry called at my residence and told me I was summoned to the Castle - the seat of Government. To the head of a diplomatic mission, such a summons often means bad news -for example, that the Government to which he is accredited is to make a protest - and I was prepared for the worst.

Imagine my surprise when I was ushered into the presence of the Head of State, Jerry Rawlings, who had been Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) since 1981. He was accompanied by the Chief Secretary (the equivalent of Prime Minister).

They greeted me warmly, and mentioned that they had seen the newspaper report. They were

impressed by my appearance in the record book, which they took to be a sign of high intelligence. I was completely unprepared by what followed. Rawlings went on to ask whether I could offer any advice on how his Government might improve the lot of the people of Ghana. What on earth could I say in that situation, coming out of the blue?

I racked my brains (much as I would have done with a problem in a crossword) and ventured a few off-the-cuff comments. I pointed out that some foreign publications still mistakenly referred to his regime as a "military government", being ignorant of the real situation in Ghana. Some countries even had difficulties about their relationship with a non-elected government that appeared undemocratic. This had some serious consequences - such as the unwillingness of several prominent donor countries to provide aid to Ghana because their constitutions forbade it. Elections would legitimise his government in the eyes of the international community.

I said that the British Government had been watching with great pleasure Ghana's economic progress under his leadership - and had indeed contributed materially to that progress. I added that Rawlings was a popular charismatic leader and had a first-rate team of technocrats running his Ministries. If he went to the country he could be certain of being elected President with his capable government more or less intact - but with the added advantage of winning financial support from new quarters abroad. He nodded thoughtfully, as was his wont, thanked me, and we parted on the friendliest of terms. I left Ghana shortly afterwards, on my retirement from the Diplomatic Service, but naturally continued to follow events there.

In 1992 I was intrigued by the announcement that elections would be held in Ghana, and pleased when Jerry Rawlings was elected President. He was re-elected in 1996 and served out another full term under the new constitution. HM the Queen paid a highly successful State Visit to Ghana in November 1999, and President Rawlings was invited to Britain in 2000 before he retired from public office at the beginning of 2001.

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BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS

I arrived in Accra on 17 November 1983 as Counsellor Economic/Commercial in the British High Commission, with no personal responsibility for the political and administrative side, which rested with the Head of Chancery. On 29 March 1984 my High Commissioner went on leave and I took over as Acting High Commissioner in Ghana and Chargé d'Affaires in the neighbouring republic of Togo.

From then on the volume of office work built up, as every member of the staff reported directly to me. A stream of UK visitors and heavy representational duties added to the burden, and as my wife was then Head of Publicity at the ODA I also had to run a household, arrange for official entertainment, and so on.

The first crisis occurred on 3 April when the police moved into the site of the new High Commission building, for which the foundations had already been laid, and stopped work on the grounds that no building permit had been approved for such a large office in a residential area. This action had almost certainly been engineered by anti-Western elements in the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), the ruling government. On making enquiries, I was astounded to learn from my Administrative Officer that our application for a permit had been signed by a junior official in the Ministry of Works, and had never been authorised at the higher level that was obviously necessary for such a project.

My first action was to speak to the senior officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dealing with our bilateral relations. He was sympathetic but unable to intervene on our behalf. The Property Service Agency (PSA) and the West African Department of the FCO had already been informed of the problem.

The situation was then complicated by the fact that I had to be in Lome for the next six days with a group of four British Members of Parliament invited by the Togolese National Assembly, which had recently toured the UK, to pay a reciprocal visit.

On my return to Accra I sent a telegram to the FCO suggesting that our best course would be a personal approach to the PNDC Chairman, J J Rawlings, by the Minister of State, Mr Malcolm Rifkind, who had visited Ghana in February and had a cordial meeting with him. I drafted a

letter to the Head of State outlining the problem and stressing the harmful effects which the building stoppage would have on our bilateral relations. The letter also explained how a new and beautifully designed diplomatic office would not only signify HMG's confidence in the future of Ghana but also be a great architectural asset to the capital. (I had a full colour set of the artist's impressions showing how the building was designed to fit into an attractive landscape).

This proposal was accepted by WAD and the personal letter came immediately by the diplomatic bag (this was, of course, before the age of the internet). I secured an audience with the Head of State on a Friday afternoon and went along to the Castle accompanied by my Defence Adviser (a Falklands veteran), who had already briefed the Head of the Army that morning. Chairman Rawlings read the letter carefully and asked to see the plans, with which he was clearly impressed. He said he would visit the site the next morning and let me know his decision. His approval to the building (with some slight amendments) was brought to my residence that afternoon, and telegraphed to the FCO and PSA.

The West African Department did not acknowledge my telegram or comment on the successful outcome of a high-level political approach to a major problem. On the other hand, the PSA and Taylor Woodrow were very relieved that work could continue. The EC Ambassadors at our weekly meeting voiced their praise for what they thought was a remarkable diplomatic coup, and the US Ambassador also sent his congratulations.

About a week later, at a State ceremony, Chairman Rawlings approached me with a smile and asked if I was pleased with his decision. I replied that I thought it would be of great benefit to both our countries. On 13 August I signed with the Financial Secretary a bilateral agreement setting up the first £3 million of British development aid to Ghana.