

DOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

SNOXELL, David Raymond (b. 18 November 1944)

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DAVID RAYMOND SNOXELL

interviewed by Malcolm McBain

on 19 November 2007

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MM May I start by asking you where you were educated, and how you entered the Diplomatic Service.

Education, entry to the Diplomatic Service in 1969 and first posting

DS I was educated at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School in Sutton Coldfield. I then went to Bristol University to read history, and after that I went on to Aston University to do a postgraduate diploma in personnel management. I became a member of the Institute of Personnel Management. I then went as a volunteer to Senegal where I taught in a *Lycée* out in the bush in a place called Kaolack, and worked in a leprosy village. I came back to work for the Engineering Industry Training Board as a trainee trainer. I couldn't stand that and saw an advert in the press for the Diplomatic Service. They were recruiting graduates who could offer at least one language and some experience after graduation. I entered at what was then Grade 9 in September 1969. My very first job within four days of joining the Service was to go to New York to be a reporting officer at the 24th United Nations General Assembly. That's where my interest in self-determination and such issues begins, and ends.

Reporting officer at 24th United Nations General Assembly, New York

MM Tell me a bit more about the UN.

DS As a reporting officer for three months at the General Assembly one's job was actually to report on debates and resolutions, but also to support the Member of Parliament who was sent out to lead a particular delegation. In this case I was attached to Alan Williams who was the MP leading our delegation to the Committee of 24, which is the Decolonisation Committee of the UN and the Fourth Committee. At that time we had still 26 colonies, so Britain was very much in the forefront of all the discussions in the Committee of 24.

MM You were four days old in the Diplomatic Service at this stage, so what did you have to do as a reporting officer? What was your job?

DS It was to report every evening to London on the day's events; just taking a record basically and summarising it and trying to make sense of it, but it also led into quite a lot of connections and contacts with other delegations. I remember in particular I got quite close to the Maldivian delegation. A young fellow who was number two in that delegation told me one day that the East Europeans wanted to establish a radio transmitter on the Maldives islands and was Britain interested in trying to stop them? So I got involved quite rapidly at quite a high level, which included Denis Healey, in trying to persuade the Maldivians not to allow the East Germans into the Indian Ocean and we finally settled it by offering them a fishing trawler that cost £750,000. Our Overseas Development Department at the time found funds for this, and it fell to me some six months later, when this fellow came over to London, to meet him and take him to our cottage in North Wales, and chat to him about the possibilities. I actually agreed with him that if Britain gave the Maldivian Islands this fishing trawler they would not allow the East Germans to set up a transmitter on their islands, and that's exactly what happened.

MM That's a pretty impressive achievement for somebody who had only been in the Foreign Office for four days. Was there anyone between you and Alan Williams MP?

DS Yes, there was the Counsellor for decolonisation.

MM Somebody from the Foreign Office?

DS Oh yes. He was quite well-known. I think his name was Shaw. And then there was Chancery, of course, and there were quite a number of budding first secretaries who went on to do great things and become ambassadors in big posts. I remember that within two days of arriving in New York I got a minute from Lord Caradon who was the Labour Minister and Permanent Representative at the UN and it simply said, from his Private Secretary, as the newest member of the UK Delegation to the General Assembly, would I draw up a new policy for him on Rhodesia. Now I had

literally been in the Service seven days at that point, and so I took it along to Chancery to say to the fellows very diffidently that I'd just received this minute from Lord Caradon. They looked at it and said not to worry about that, that he always sent the newest person in the delegation a request of this nature. They said that he had done that before and that I should leave it to them. I think it was Stephen Edgerton, who became Ambassador to Rome – who took it upon himself to write a new policy for Rhodesia. After three weeks I was called into Chancery and given the paper that they had written, and they said that I should just sign my name on the bottom and it was duly sent up to Lord Caradon. About three weeks later I got another minute back from his Private Secretary saying that Lord Caradon thanked me very much for the paper and thought it very interesting. It contained some stimulating ideas which he would be studying further, or words to that effect. So I was being thrown in at the deep end. Then Michael Stewart was Foreign Secretary at the time and he came out, as Foreign Secretaries always do, to give the UK speech at the beginning of the General Assembly, usually about the third week of September, and it fell to me to stand at the entrance to Lord Caradon's apartment, where he was giving a reception for Michael Stewart, and to ask each Minister as they came through, what their name was, and introduce the Minister to Michael Stewart. Now, Lord Caradon of course knew who they all were, but they thought it was good training for me. I remember that Golda Meier came through, and I hadn't a clue who she was. I didn't know any of these faces at all. So I naturally leapt over to her and asked what her name was, and she told me in a bit of a huff, but then Lord Caradon intervened, seeing the difficulty I was in, saying: "Oh, Golda. Thank you so much for coming" - and did the introduction to Michael Stewart, who didn't need any introduction anyway. But it was good experience.

MM How long were you there?

DS Three months. For the duration of the General Assembly.

MM And then you came back to London?

Return to United Nations Department of the Foreign Office 1969

DS Then I came back to London and I was there for three years. During that time I was doing human rights, in what was called United Nations Economic and Social Department with Hilary King as Head of Department, and it fell to me to be the Secretary of a Committee that Sir Vincent Evans, our Legal Adviser, had set up in Whitehall. The purpose of the Committee was to bring Britain and its colonies into line with the UN International Covenants on Human Rights, which the UK was going to ratify. We had signed the Covenants but we had yet to ratify them. There were regular fortnightly or monthly meetings of Legal Advisers and so on around Whitehall, and one of the interesting jobs that came my way as a result of that was to round up all our dependent territories and instruct them to bring their legislation into line with some pretty complicated human rights requirements laid down in the Covenants. There was a deadline set for this about six months hence, by which point all the UK dependent territories had to be in line, or had to adopt legislation that would be in line with the requirements of the Covenants. I had to organise derogations on behalf of about half a dozen of them and these are still today at the back of the UK's ratification of the Covenants. We had to do some very amusing derogations. I had to do one on behalf of the Pitcairn Islands which had a sort of enforced labour, because the only way that provisions could get into Pitcairn was if the people manned the longboats, so we had to derogate under the provision of enforced labour and allow the Pitcairn Islanders to continue their practice of rowing out to the ships to bring in the provisions, known as manning the longboats. Of course, that was their only means of survival, so it was in their interests. Likewise in Hong Kong I remember derogating because the Hong Kong Police used what was called a tamarind rod as a form of chastisement – corporal punishment was not allowed under the Covenant by any law enforcement authority. In Montserrat we derogated because they had capital punishment, which could be applied from the age of sixteen. We didn't have time to amend the law in order to ratify the Covenant.

MM That was the statute book of Montserrat?

DS And so on – there were several others. Oh yes, there was a very interesting one – in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands - apparently they didn't have provision for witnessing marriages, and what the natives used to do was to go up on to the beach, or wherever, and simply get married without any official witnesses. That is a requirement of the UN Marriage Convention, and so we had to derogate on behalf of the Gilbert and Ellice in respect of the marriage provision. And so on. There were several others.

MM Very interesting.

DS Yes, it was a great job. I got a huge familiarity with our human rights covenants, with all the UN conventions and then later in my career, dealt with them on a full time basis.

Transfer to Information Administration Department

I did another job for two years in London in what was called Information Administration Department, and there I was initially responsible for official visits from Southern Africa, with the COI, so I was heavily involved in, for example, the visits of the three Bantustan chiefs, as they were called – chiefs Mangopé, Butalezi and Mantanzima. I got to know Chief Butalezi quite well, and continued knowing him and meeting him over the next thirty years. And later I was responsible for the official visits at the time in 1972 that Britain was joining the European Union – so for all European Union visits, which brought me into contact once again with a wide range of politicians – I've completely forgotten their names – but it was a good experience. Then I was posted to Islamabad.

Posting to Islamabad 1973-76

MM What did you do in Islamabad?

DS I was given the grand title of Economic Attaché, which meant that I did the economic reporting for the Embassy, as it was then, and I had some responsibility for our technical assistance and aid programme and again that was a fascinating experience, particularly because my university dissertation had been on the partition

of India, so actually going to Pakistan put into practice some of the theory I'd been studying. The Ambassador, Sir Laurence Pumphrey, asked if I would write him a paper on the disjunction of Bangladesh – it was just after the war with Bangladesh – so I did. Presumably he found it interesting and it's somewhere in the archives. But what actually really got me very enthusiastic was writing the history of the Anglican Church in the Punjab. I discovered that our local garrison church - Christ Church Rawalpindi – had never had its history written up. The vicar was casting around for somebody to do this and I offered. When I revisited Christ Church in 1993, that history was still at the back of the church, and it's a church that was established on the 10 February 1849 when British troops, were moving through the Punjab, having defeated the Sikhs in the Second Sikh War. At every stopping place they laid the foundation stone of a garrison church. So I wrote that down and that led me on to writing about all garrison churches in the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. The India Office Library has a copy of that.

MM Were you still a Third Secretary?

DS I was still Third Secretary. But it was at a period I would describe as a sort of golden age for Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was Prime Minister and you could travel a great deal. We travelled several times to Afghanistan and across Afghanistan to Iran, and we visited the tribal areas on the west side of Pakistan – Tank and Bannu, Peshawar, of course, Swat and Dir and Chitral and Hunza. There was a very interesting incident that took place in Hunza – this would have been in 1975. Anne and I went to Hunza. Very difficult to get to. You had to wait every morning at 7am to see whether the plane would take off from Rawalpindi, because it had to fly down valleys, and only when the valleys were free of mist could it take off from Rawalpindi; and you'd go back to the airport every day until it came. About the fourth day it went, so we landed in Gilgit. Gilgit was an agency of the British Empire. The Empire before 1947 was split into a vast range of Princely states with rajahs, maharajahs; an agency was usually an outpost of the British Empire where a local chief had been appointed. Gilgit was dependent on Hunza . The Mir of Hunza was still quasi-independent. Hunza in 1947 had not exercised its responsibility of either attaching itself to India or Pakistan. This was the case also of Sikkim and Kashmir.

MM Oh come on! Kashmir acceded to India in 1947.

DS The people didn't.

MM They weren't consulted.

DS Exactly. But Hunza – well we could discuss that further but let's just stick on Hunza for the moment – Hunza was a principality that had not signed the instruments of accession to India or Pakistan in 1947. We eventually got to Hunza having taken the jeep along a bumpy track from Gilgit. Five hours later we arrived in Hunza, and that's where Baltit Fort is where the Mir lived. We arrived very late in the afternoon and went to the official rest house and found a message waiting for us that the Mir had invited us to tea. So a message was sent back to say that we had arrived and we duly turned up at five o'clock and went past quite a number of retainers; were ushered in to a waiting room and the Mir entered. During the course of tea, the Mir snapped his fingers and a treaty was brought in by one of the retainers and laid out on a table. The Mir took us over to the table and said to me that this was a treaty which had been signed by his great-grandfather, with Younghusband, who was the explorer and the Indian Army officer who had more or less annexed Hunza in the name of Queen Victoria. That treaty provided for both countries to go to each other's assistance should either be threatened. Hardly likely in the case of the British Empire. The Mir said that he had intelligence to the effect that the Pakistani authorities were planning to invade his country and sequester it, and what was Britain going to do about it. I naturally undertook to take that message back to the Embassy in Islamabad and convey it to the Foreign Office. We got back a few days later. A telegram was duly sent from Chancery explaining what the Mir had said to me, and we waited for a reply. We never did get a reply, because three weeks later the Pakistan Army invaded Hunza, sequestered the country, took the Mir back to Islamabad and put him under house arrest, and that telegram must still be somewhere in the archives. I know that Legal Advisers were considering a reply, but events overtook the consideration. But it's quite an interesting thought that actually I was the last British national, as far as I know, at least the last British official, to go to the independent state of Hunza before it was taken over by the Pakistanis.

MM Did you ever meet the Wali of Swat?

DS No never. I have heard of him.

MM So that brought your period in Islamabad to an end?

DS Yes, the following year we came back. One nice little travel thing was that we were able to drive from Kabul to Bamian to see the great Buddha statues, and sleep a couple of nights in a yurt, a kind of local tent. The Bamian Buddha statues of course were destroyed by the Taliban about fifteen years ago.

Posting to UKMIS Geneva, 1976-81

I was told I was being posted to Sudan, but as I had a rather severe allergy reaction to dust, which had been bad in Islamabad, I asked if I might be excused going to another hot and dusty country for a further three years. The Office accepted that – were very cross about it – and I came back to the UK, not knowing whether I was going to be in the Office or posted somewhere else, or indeed whether my services would be terminated. They were annoyed that a young Third Secretary would dare to refuse a posting. I got back to London and telephoned that very afternoon. Somebody in Personnel Department took the call and said: “Ah Snoxell. You were the fellow that refused Khartoum”. After much sifting through papers he said: “Well, I think we’ve found a post for you. Will Geneva do?” So naturally I said that that sounded very interesting and what would the job be? It was to look after GATT and UNCTAD, so I went to Geneva, which suited my family circumstances very well at the time. I did GATT and UNCTAD for about nine months, got promoted, and the job of Human Rights Desk Officer became available, and so for the next three and a half years I did human rights – that is responsibility for the Human Rights Commission and Sub-Commission, also refugee law – that’s UNHCR – and humanitarian law in armed conflict, the Geneva Conventions and the ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross, which is the custodian of the Geneva Conventions. So I was involved in these three major areas – human rights, refugees and ICRC work.

MM And what does that mean?

DS Well as a Desk Officer you attended all the meetings of the UN Human Rights Commission which lasted six weeks and the Sub-Commission which was another four weeks, and various other preparatory meetings in between times. You attended the Executive Committee of the UNHCR and all its myriads of committees, and so on. I monitored that and reported back to London. The Human Rights Commission spawned, if I remember, four working groups, and I was a member of each, and these were working groups which had been set up to draft international conventions – one on torture; one on the rights of migrant workers; one on the rights of the child and a Declaration on religious toleration. I was hugely involved in each of those for more than three years. Torture was the area in which I suppose I gained the most expertise and Audrey Glover, who was our Legal Adviser, used to come out for regular meetings of the Torture Sub-Committee, as it was called. There was very little briefing from London, because in those days you used to get a general brief for the Human Rights Commission and that would be perhaps 40/50 pages long, and then the rest was left to your own devices as to what you thought the UK's position might be in the light of that general brief.

MM Did you then report that back to London?

DS You did. But you probably wouldn't get a reply for three or four weeks, if at all, and since very often committees were trying to agree on drafting, within a day or two, you had to make your own mind up. The drafting of the Torture Convention, which is an extremely important piece of international legislation that has certainly come up over the current hoo-hah over extraordinary rendition - that was being drafted by all the delegations who were members of the Commission. There were, of course, an equal representation among the Communist bloc and the West, the Group of 77, i.e. the developing countries, and the Arab countries. Now since I took a fairly radical view about human rights, I said one day to Audrey Glover: "Why don't we propose that Islamic punishments, i.e. the chopping off of hands and the like; the stoning of women; and also capital punishment, be brought within the purview of the draft Convention, torture being defined as cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment". And she said: "Well you probably do need to get UND's agreement to that". And I said: "We only have this week to decide, but I'll certainly try to get agreement." And as

we got no reply at all, I went ahead within probably three or four days, and proposed to the Committee that Islamic punishments, and capital punishment should be deemed a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. That led to quite a considerable debate which will become available - that was 1978-81 – under the thirty year rule. Of course, as you might expect, it was opposed by the United States – capital punishment; the Arab countries – Islamic punishment, and the Soviet Bloc – so there was absolutely no chance of getting this through, but I like to think that at least, when the records are open to the public, it will be shown that the British delegate on behalf of the UK, proposed that these things should be outlawed in international law.

MM What about the position taken up by other members of the European Community?

DS That's an interesting point. It was in its early days – European Union Community coordination, so you did have quite regular meetings, and particularly with the French and the Germans, but they all got together in Geneva, and you discussed these things. But very little on the working groups, because the coordination was primarily at the level of the Human Rights Commission, so that the coordination that you did with European colleagues, would be sorted in the back of the room during the drafting sessions and by telephone at the end of the day, or at receptions, rather than a sort of formal sit-down – what is going to be the European position. I don't ever recall trying to work out a European position on torture for example. Each country spoke for itself, but we would have found a vast measure of agreement. Whether or not they would have agreed on capital punishment, they would certainly all have agreed on Islamic punishments. But then they would have needed the agreement of their capitals to that, whereas we had a great deal more flexibility, it seemed to me in those days, in British delegations, than our European colleagues did, and certainly far more flexibility than you would have today.

MM Interesting lack of progress. Have we dealt with UKMIS Geneva?

DS Yes, I think from the political point of view we probably covered the main areas where I was involved.

**Return to Republic of Ireland Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth
Office 1981**

MM So your next appointment followed.

DS Yes, it was back in London in the Republic of Ireland Department and a theme was by now beginning to emerge. I had done the human rights covenants, and all that law back in 1970. For nearly four years, I had done human rights in Geneva, and then I was appointed the Desk Officer for Northern Ireland, where there were major human rights considerations. So my first job was actually to try to co-ordinate across Whitehall how we were to counteract the IRA campaign primarily in the United States but also in Commonwealth countries such as Australia. It was an information job. It was in a sense almost a propaganda job, but it brought me into touch with the very issues we were dealing with. At that time, the hunger strike was taking place in the Maze Prison and Britain was getting a vast amount of flak throughout the world for the stance that the Thatcher government was taking on the hunger strike. If you remember, the Prime Minister would not, and never did, give in to the threat of a hunger strike, and that was it. Hunger strikers would die. So it was deemed sensible for me to go to the prisons in Northern Ireland and see for myself what the conditions were like and talk to prisoners, and prison staff, so that I would be in a better position in putting forward the briefing that our posts in the United States needed, and also in responding to the media pressure. We did get our posts to reply to the reporting in the press. I went to the Maze Prison. I saw the hunger strikers. I didn't talk to them. You were not allowed to do that, but you could see them through a window in their cell doors. They were in the medical wing of the prison. The Maze Prison in those days was a modern prison. It had high standards, and good facilities; very good library and technical facilities; gymnasium and so on. So that made quite an impression on me, particularly as you walked down the corridors and you'd see on each cell door the name of the prisoner, his age and the sentence he was serving, and very often the age of the prisoner would be anything between 18 and 25, and there would be 15 years, 18 years, whatever it was. His offence, of course, was not put up. It was just his age and length of sentence. However, there was a 50% remission in Northern Ireland at that time. And later on the ICRC came to inspect the prisons in Northern Ireland. Since I had been the Desk Officer for ICRC in Geneva, it was

obvious that I would be the person who would accompany them round the prisons, and I do remember going back to the Maze with the ICRC delegation who talked to the prisoners, and there were three main complaints from the prisoners. One was the chips were too fatty. Another one was the soap was too slippery and soft so that when they were in the showers they could accidentally slip on the soap and hurt themselves. And the third one was that they did not have individual televisions in their cells; they had to go to a communal recreational area to watch television. Now these days of course, and I've been in several prisons in the last two or three years, that is common practice – to have a television in each cell - but it wasn't in those days. The ICRC were used to going round prisons with horrific conditions in the developing world; in Latin America and so on. They found those three complaints so off the wall really – beyond belief – that if that was all the IRA and UDR prisoners could complain of, well the conditions must be pretty good. And the report the ICRC did, confidentially to the British Government of course, said that the conditions were of a high standard, and that these were the only complaints that they had received during their visit. So that kind of cleared Britain, which was a good thing. It helped me in putting across just what it was like to be in prison. I also visited the Crumlin Road prison.

MM Very interesting. You slipped in the fact that you had done a lot of prison visiting recently – now how does that come about? I know this is a little bit out of order.

DS Well this is going completely out of order, because this goes right to the end of my career as High Commissioner in Mauritius.

MM Well if it's like that, let's leave it until Mauritius. So that was your period in the FCO in London?

Transfer to Economic Relations Department of the FCO 1983

DS Not entirely because after two and a half-years on the Northern Ireland Desk, I did another two and a half years in Economic Relations Department. And there I was put in charge of a new developing subject. A new job was created to deal with extra-territoriality. This was about the extra-territorial reach of US law, primarily over our

Dependent Territories in the Caribbean. What the US were trying to do was to stop the drug trafficking in the Caribbean, which was being funded by narco dollars from secret bank accounts in our Dependent Territories like the Cayman Islands and to a lesser extent Turks and Caicos, and the US authorities were prosecuting banks in Miami that had branches or headquarters in the Cayman Islands. Their fines would be absolutely enormous and they would double every week until the fines were paid, so I remember one bank – it may have been the Hannover Bank – whose fine had already reached £3.5 million. At the same time our Dependent Territories, particularly the Caymans, were protected by banking secrecy legislation which we ourselves had initiated to try to help these Dependent Territories to develop economically. There was no possibility of agricultural development and tourism had hardly begun then. But it was thought that to help them to become offshore financial centres, if it worked, would be a tremendous support to the economy of those countries, which were entirely dependent upon the UK for taxpayer handouts. So we had encouraged the Territories to introduce banking secrecy laws. The Americans wanted the information held by Cayman banks and accountants and lawyers, in order to prosecute offenders in the United States, so they needed access to the bank accounts. This was prevented under local law. So what we had to do was to try to come to an arrangement between the Caymans and the United States which would allow the US access to the information that they required and to reduce to some extent the level of banking secrecy. So I quickly became involved with the negotiation of a narcotics agreement, and this was an agreement that was extremely difficult to negotiate because Britain found itself in the middle between the Cayman Islands refusing to give up its banking secrecy, and the United States doubling the fines on Cayman banks. And the situation got very difficult between the two countries. We did eventually negotiate a treaty which allowed the Americans access when they provided *prima facie* evidence, that a criminal offence – it was usually money laundering – had been committed. And this was the first time that Britain had ceded that degree of sovereignty and so it led on to many more things. The treaty was signed in London by Malcolm Rifkind - the then Minister of State – in Lancaster House in 1984. I was already in Lancaster House at 12 o'clock ready for the 12.30 signing – when the leader of the American delegation came to me and said that it would not be possible for the US to sign the agreement that day. We had a Minister, our Legal Adviser and the US Ambassador coming in thirty minutes time, and it was to be followed by a lunch at Lancaster House. So I

asked them what could we do to help them and ourselves to make it possible to solve the dilemma. I explained that we had an inspired question to be asked in Parliament at 2.30 that afternoon about this agreement. They had clearly prepared their position and said we must agree to sign an addendum to the treaty, which they had already prepared. I looked at the addendum and said that I could not agree to that, but the Legal Adviser would be along at any minute and I would put it to him. David Bickford, our Legal Adviser, looked at the addendum and talked to the Cayman Islands Legal Adviser, and between them they agreed that it was possible. However, it didn't form part of the treaty and you couldn't with ten minutes to go, redraft the treaty. So what we did was something extremely unconventional, and that was to put a copy of the American annex underneath the treaty, which Malcolm Rifkind, the Minister of State, and the US Ambassador, Mr Price, would sign. Rifkind had already arrived – I alerted him to the fact that there would be a delay because there was a final last minute hitch, but the Legal Adviser was sorting it out. Indeed it was delayed by about 15 minutes and it fell to me to slip under the treaty a copy of this addendum, which was one page, and I really can't remember – it can't have been a terribly important issue – and so eventually the two sides signed the agreement, and Mr Rifkind cracked a joke that he would make his speech after the signing of the agreement rather than before since he was afraid this might lead to further delays, and everything went off quite smoothly. I sat next to the Legal Adviser – Sir John Freeland – and explained to him over lunch what had happened. He was pretty horrified because he said in the annals of British legal diplomatic history it had never happened before that a Minister had signed over a document which he did not know the existence of or the content of. So it looked rather sticky, but he said the Minister would have to be informed. So naturally after the lunch he informed the Minister, and David Bickford was sent for, at which point I was told that I would be better out of the office than in. So I went home to dig up my potatoes and didn't return until the end of the next day, by which time the storm had blown over. All that will be revealed when the papers are made available under the thirty year rule.

We in Economic Relations Department then drafted and eventually signed a mutual legal assistance treaty with the United States in respect of the Cayman Islands in 1986. It was of course an agreement between the UK and the US because the Caymans were a dependent territory. Perhaps I should just add that this treaty lead on

to the negotiation of a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) between the UK and the US that was extended to all the dependent territories in the Caribbean. I was only involved in the early stages of that because I then moved on. But one interesting incident occurred early in 1986 when the Attorney General, Sir Nicholas Havers, called me over, the legal adviser was not available so I went on my own, to explain to him what extra-territoriality meant. Although an eminent lawyer he was not fully up to speed with the developments in extra-territoriality. This had all started with the Soviet Pipeline dispute and he wanted to know what we were doing about it and what the Foreign Office's view was. This was such an arcane subject that we kept it between three of us in the FCO: me, David Bickford, the legal adviser and Humphrey Maud the Under Secretary and it did not involve anyone else. It was always Humphrey who went out to Cayman and I went with him. I explained the situation to Sir Nicholas Havers and what we meant by mutual legal assistance treaties and he gave his support to it. But Whitehall at that time in 1986 knew very little about extra-territoriality and the Home Office, whose subject it would have to be, since we had been negotiating on behalf of the UK, were very ignorant about the whole process. So there was a big educational job to be done in Whitehall as well.

Then I was appointed as Executive Director of BIS, New York

MM That was rather an important job. Were you promoted to it?

Campaign to open membership of the DSA to all members of staff of the Diplomatic Service

DS Yes, I was. I was promoted to Grade 5. There were at that time Administrative stream and Executive stream jobs in the Foreign Office. I was in the executive stream but I had always been appointed to administrative grade jobs or jobs that had been previously held by members of the A stream. This led to an interesting dilemma for the trade unions. Members of the executive grades were not eligible to be members of the DSA (the Diplomatic Service Association), membership of which association was restricted to members of the A stream only. My application to join was refused instantly on the grounds that I was really a Grade 5E. I said I would consult the Legal Adviser as I thought I had a case that I could win before an industrial tribunal. I

would base the case on the grounds that they were discriminating against a fully fledged member of a grade to which they offered membership. Within a day a minute arrived on my desk from the Chairman of the DSA inviting me to become a member. I carried on the campaign and eventually became a member of the Committee of the DSA. Back in London I became Treasurer of the DSA for a number of years. I continued the campaign against great odds, I have to say, in the form of certain senior members of the DSA including legal advisers who were strongly opposed to admitting members of the executive stream to membership. It was accepted in the end and from about the year 2000 that any member of the Diplomatic Service, whatever the circumstances under which they joined, became eligible to join the DSA. I claim the credit for that campaign from start to finish.

Appointment as Executive Director of British Information Services New York 1986-91

MM Well let's get back to your appointment to BIS New York. How did that come about?

DS This job had a great deal to do with the situation in Northern Ireland and that was presumably why I was appointed to it. It was at a time when we were under great pressure from the Provisional IRA. Our offices in New York were on the ground floor of the same building that housed the UK Mission to the United Nations and every day there was a demonstration by American sympathisers with the IRA who saw BIS as the propaganda arm of the British Government trying to convince the United States to support British policies in Northern Ireland. Under New York regulations the demonstrators were not allowed to stand still. They had to keep moving so they formed a continuous moving oval circle in front of the office, chanting slogans. It happened every day of the year public holidays such as Christmas notwithstanding. You did get quite friendly with some of the demonstrators. It was led by someone we had dubbed Megaphone Meg. She always shouted slogans like 'down with the British', 'Out with the Brits' etc, through a megaphone. I remember one day when it was absolutely bucketing down with rain I came out of the office and the demonstration was there. Meg was there with an

umbrella and she said ‘Don’t you worry Mr Snoxell. There, I’ll get a taxi for you.’ So I stood under the cover of the building while she summoned a taxi.

I had to go to a number of universities and think tanks to explain Britain’s policy sometimes against a barrage of heckling and other interruptions during talks that I gave. I often went to editorial boards and met journalists. The job also included looking after any official visitors to New York and Royal visits including the Princess of Wales, Prince Andrew and Fergie, Prince Philip and so on. I accompanied them and organised their programmes and I organised the official visits. The Foreign Secretary was usually taken care of by the UK Permanent Representative to the UN. But there were New York events that I would have to get involved with. And then I organised Mrs Thatcher’s visit. When she came out to New York it wasn’t so much to see the UN as to see the New York media and to convince the New York media of the rightness of her policy in relation to Northern Ireland, Hong Kong, etc. I accompanied Mrs Thatcher and took her to the New York Times, the Journal of Commerce and the Wall Street Journal. I remember us going in to the WSJ. While sitting in the car on the way, she asked me to explain the attitude of the WSJ to Hong Kong. I replied, “Well, Prime Minister, it hasn’t been helpful to our policies.” And I explained the line the WSJ had been taking. She said she wasn’t going to have that! She had a very severe cold on that day and was really suffering. We got into the lift and went up to meet the Board of the WSJ. Our ambassador, Sir Antony Acland, from Washington was there. The WSJ Chairman welcomed the Prime Minister. Mrs Thatcher was in full flight and then the Chairman asked a question that related to Hong Kong and that gave her an opportunity. She leaped at the entire board with enormous fury, bashing them and hand-bagging them. Antony Acland and I sat there wishing the floor would open up. The meeting ended very abruptly. Mr Berkeley, the Chairman, after this outburst said “Thank you, Prime Minister, for all you have shared with us today. We do not wish to detain you any longer” and immediately got up, as we all had to do. And that was the end of the meeting. Mrs Thatcher got into the lift with me and Antony Acland and crumpled up. She was absolutely exhausted having this severe cold. I was amazed to see this woman with all the power and dynamism that she possessed in such abundance attacking fifteen members of the WSJ board, all hard nosed, hard bitten journalists and the chairman and then just return to being like everyone else when we are under the weather in the way that she was. And she sat in

the car with me on the way back and she asked me what her performance had been like? How had it come over? I replied with some diffidence, “Well Prime Minister you were extremely powerful with them and you saw that the meeting ended rather abruptly as a result.” It was an interesting experience.

Another interesting experience was with John Major when he came out as Foreign Secretary, having been appointed to succeed Geoffrey Howe, six weeks earlier. He came in 1989 to deliver the speech which Howe was to have given to the Foreign Policy Association, a big New York dinner event for about six hundred guests. I was sitting in the back of the car, Stephen Wall, his Private Secretary in the front, from the airport to the hotel. Major had never been to NY before and was impressed with the height of the buildings. He asked about the event and on what topic he was most likely to be questioned after the speech. I replied that the UK’s policy to the Baltic States was the subject which was currently of interest since Americans couldn’t quite understand it. He said “well you had better first tell me where they are.” Stephen Wall, like any good PS, had a map of the world in his inside pocket and handed it to me. I pointed out Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and then tried to explain our de jure and our de facto policy over recognition. Major commented that that was quite hard to explain and was there any way in which such a question could be avoided. I said I would talk to the Chairman of the event, General Scowcroft which I did when I got back to the office. Scowcroft said to leave it with him and he would see. Came the evening, Major read out the Howe speech in a rather wooden style (he was not too familiar with foreign policy issues) and sat down to answer questions. Unfortunately my prediction came true. The first question was on Britain’s policy to the Baltic States. It almost looked as if I had planted it. Scowcroft leapt in and said that if the Foreign Secretary didn’t mind he would take that question since he had been an officer in WWII and somehow had been involved with the Baltics. He went on to explain the UK’s approach quite correctly, apologising to Major for stealing his thunder. Naturally John Major commented that he couldn’t have put it better himself. After the dinner the Foreign Secretary asked how I had managed it and congratulated me.

During my time in NY I organised programmes for a number of Ministers, eg the Northern Ireland Secretary. I remember an amusing incident when I introduced Lord

Young at a breakfast for journalists as Secretary of State for Unemployment. He quickly corrected this Freudian slip (the British press that morning had been full of Britain's soaring unemployment), but the faux pas was reported in the FT next morning. Lord Young was nice about it, said he didn't think it would affect my career! I also accompanied Gordon Brown, Opposition spokesman on Trade, to a speech on the economy he gave to the Economic Club of NY. He came over as very sure of himself.

Perhaps I will relate one experience only concerning the Princess of Wales because it shows something about her that was not always obvious to the public at the time. The Princess came out to visit AIDS babies among other social events arranged for her. I accompanied her to the hospice in Harlem run by nuns. The Princess was very moved by the occasion and I remember her picking up the babies quite regardless of their suffering from AIDS and cradling them in her arms. Tears began to roll down her cheeks. She was immensely affected by this experience. Then we had to go on to a big reception organised at the Consul General's residence for the glitterati of New York. To go from one extreme to the other was quite an emotional journey in more ways than one. She was not psyched up for the social scene by the time we got to the party. The Consul General's wife took her off to a bedroom. They must have chatted, had a cup of tea perhaps. We kept everybody waiting for a good twenty minutes and then she came out looking glorious, very beautiful, glacial, and she came into the room and did her duty, going round talking to everybody as if nothing had happened. And I remember her being able to make the emotional switch, as politicians and Royals must do, but carrying it off with enormous dignity.

Deputy Head of Drugs and International Crime Department FCO, 1991-94

MM You returned to London next and were appointed to DICD in the FCO.

DS This linked up to some extent with the job that I had been doing earlier in the FCO when I had been involved with money laundering and money derived from narcotics trafficking. Now I was to be involved with the production and trafficking of drugs. When I first went there the Department also had responsibility for AIDS. I think it was then called Narcotics Control and AIDS Department (NCAD). But I managed to

get AIDS transferred from the Foreign Office to the Department of Overseas Development and the Department of Health where it seemed to more properly belong. I really could not see that the Foreign Office needed a Department dealing with AIDS. We began to see the need for a Department dealing with international crime, and drugs were an important element of international criminal activity. International crime was clearly going to be linked to the internet and financial crime which was taking place right across the world and spreading with enormous speed. So we were developing a system for dealing with this. My job initially was to get countries which had not yet signed up to the 1988 Vienna Convention on Drugs to bring their law into line with the Convention. I remember a visit to Morocco to try to persuade the Moroccan authorities and also to look at the growing of cannabis in Morocco, which was on a vast scale. I also went to most islands in the Caribbean, the French, the Dutch as well as the British territories to try to initiate co-operation among these islands where we had law enforcement agencies. I called on the Préfets in Guadeloupe and Martinique and the Dutch Governor in the Dutch Antilles and tried to take these things forward. And then, it was taken up in an EU Drugs Co-ordination group that met in Brussels every few months where we discussed international co-operation amongst the EU dependent territories in the Caribbean. One good example of what you could do to counter drugs trafficking. Similarly we discussed co-operation in the Lebanon and I was the first British official to go into the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon after the war for a purpose other than military.

MM Was that the war with Israel?

DS No. It was the civil war which had been going on for fifteen years. I went there in 1994 and the idea was that I would go into the Bekaa Valley and investigate heroin production and discuss with the Lebanese authorities what more they could do to counter this production and deal with money laundering. I was put into the Bristol Hotel, the first British official allowed to stay in a hotel -- we had always had to stay at the residence. It was quite scary. The SAS left me there and said they would be back in a couple of hours. Then there was a power cut and I found myself in a darkened hotel room with the telephone not working. Not knowing what to do, and with a lot of noise coming from the street outside, I barricaded myself in the room by pulling the wardrobe across the door. Eventually, the SAS came back for me. It was

an interesting experience. The next day we went up the Bekaa Valley with a huge retinue of Lebanese troops and went as far as Baalbek where the famous Greek archaeological remains are and I was the first British official/tourist to go back there after the war. They opened it up especially for me. Our Embassy had an ulterior motive in doing this - the Defence Attaché came with me. I was a cover if you like to enable him to see what the situation was and what positions were occupied by the Hisbollah in Baalbek. And indeed while I was inspecting the archaeological remains he was inspecting Hisbollah positions through his binoculars.

MM You say the SAS came back to the hotel to get you out. Do you mean our Special Air Services?

DS Yes. I mean the people who were protecting the Embassy. I think they were SAS. We had about twenty of them there at that time. They met me at the airport on arrival and took me through in a Jeep. When I got home my son telephoned from school; he had been worried because it had been announced that the Israelis had bombed the Bekaa Valley while I was there. Was I all right? I knew nothing about the raid. The Israelis had been bombing the Southern part of the Valley while I was in the North. So that was the drugs job. I would just make one further comment. In Britain's zeal to get as many countries as possible to sign up to the Vienna Convention on drugs, we persuaded them, perhaps not intentionally, to introduce draconian penalties for drug trafficking and I was to come up against that in a very real sense in Mauritius some years later.

MM So that was really your main job in that Department?

DS Yes it was, and to take forward generally international co-operation on international crime and it led to various other legal instruments in the fight against crime.

MM Did you have dealings with the Home Office?

DS Yes. A lot. I was involved with the setting up of the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS). It led to the planting of DLOs (Drug Liaison Officers) in

a number of our overseas posts. These DLOs came from the Metropolitan Police and Customs and Excise. They could create tensions in a number of our posts. I will give one example: Thailand. As in all our posts there was a Consular section in the Embassy one of whose tasks was to visit British nationals in prison and to deal with all their problems. In Thailand, we had a great number of British nationals in prison. We also had a Drug Liaison Officer who saw his job as to shop British nationals engaged in drug trafficking to the Thai authorities. So what the DLO was doing was creating a vast amount of work for the Consular section, which would have gone on for decades to come. For drug trafficking the death penalty might be imposed. This created highly politically sensitive problems for the Consular staff. I was trying to come to an agreement with NCIS that DLOs would not shop British nationals direct to the local authorities where there was a risk of dire penalties but would instead take action to pick up our nationals when they returned to the UK. I was hugely involved in the death penalty cases. We had to appeal to the Thai authorities and to the King of Thailand and to explain that we were opposed to the death penalty and that even life sentences, which might mean forty five years, was not an acceptable alternative when the punishment in the UK might only be five or six years in prison. And it got very difficult to deal with the families in the UK when someone in the family faced the death penalty or a life sentence in some foreign prison. We had of course been instrumental in the first place in persuading some of these countries to adopt draconian penalties for trafficking while we ourselves favoured much lighter sentences. There was something wrong with all this.

MM I find it breathtaking that our own DLOs were shopping British nationals to foreign authorities.

DS They were. And it led to some difficult situations within the embassy but even more so in Whitehall and it led to some real stand-offs between the FCO and the Customs and the Police. So I tried to bring some common sense to bear on all this.

Deputy Head of Southern Africa Department 1994-96

After the job in Drugs and International Crime, I was appointed Deputy Head of Southern Africa Department at a time when South Africa was emerging from

Apartheid and Mandela was to be elected President. As South Africa became a democratic state, Britain became more and more involved. We wanted to organise a visit to South Africa by Prime Minister John Major. There had been no visit to South Africa by a British Prime Minister since Harold Macmillan went there in 1960 to make his 'Wind of Change' speech. So it fell to me to organise John Major's visit in 1994 and to write his speeches. He was going to deliver a keynote speech in the South African Parliament. John Major did not have a deep historical background, as I discovered when he came to New York, and he didn't have a lot of experience of the world although he had worked in Nigeria. But he was keen to do a mea culpa in front of the South African Parliament. He believed that Britain was largely responsible for the slave trade and that we should apologise for it. I claim to be something of a historian, and I went on to write about slavery in Senegal. I knew full well that Britain was not the only country involved in the slave trade, and that the Arabs before us, then the Portuguese and French had traded, and so on. I did not see why Britain should take full responsibility for this or should be apologising for it today. But the draft speech which I served up to No 10 was heavily amended to incorporate John Major's views. I then fought a rearguard action for several days right up to and during his flight to South Africa and on arrival, suggesting amendments that we could live with in the Foreign Office. It was only as he walked into the Parliament that he accepted the last of the amendments put to him by his Private Secretary from me. He did accept these changes but it was a sort of compromise in that he accepted that we had played an important part in slavery but he didn't actually go down on his hands and knees and beg for forgiveness which was something that we were trying to avoid.

MM But we did more than any other state to stop slave trading.

DS Exactly. We were the first country after Denmark in 1797, the first major country to ban the slave trade, which we did in 1807 and then of course slavery in 1833. I do claim to have played a part in getting the record reasonably straight in front of the South African Parliament. After John Major's very successful visit to South Africa, a State Visit by the Queen followed in 1995. I was heavily involved in the Queen's State visit having to draft the Queen's speeches. That visit went off well and was highly successful from all points of view. And then it was only natural that we should have a State Visit to Britain by President Mandela. South Africa went straight to the

head of the queue. State visits can take up to twenty years to arrange but President Mandela came in 1996. I remember standing behind President Mandela on the balcony of South Africa House in Trafalgar Square when he addressed some ten thousand people in the Square below. That was quite a moving experience. I went to a Guildhall dinner and those sorts of functions which are all part of a State Visit and it was a very enriching experience all round. I got to know the people in South Africa House, who were nearly all white at that time. I worked very closely with them. By then, one only found very sympathetic people in South Africa House. Later on, the white High Commissioner, Kent Durr, was replaced by Missimangu and he became the first black South African High Commissioner to London.

So that was all very interesting. Of course I was also involved with the ending of the war in Angola, the peace process in Mozambique and what was happening in Zimbabwe as we attempted to persuade President Mugabe not to target the white farmers, to democratise, etc.

MM Did you have anything to do with the accession of Mozambique to Membership of the Commonwealth?

DS Indeed. We played an important part. I had responsibility for co-ordinating the Prime Minister's briefs for his visit to South Africa and personally wrote into one brief that Mozambique should not be invited to join the Commonwealth on the grounds that it was a Lusophone country. Britain's relations with Mozambique were very loose and only derived from the fact that we had had some commercial links and had sent a few missionaries in the 19th century. The links were tenuous indeed. John Major, after his speech to the South African Parliament, met President Mandela and Mandela asked him if he could see Mr Major on his own. The officials then left the room leaving the two principals alone together. After fifteen minutes or so, Major and Mandela came out and announced that Mozambique could apply for membership of the Commonwealth. It seems that what had happened was that Major had asked Mandela to intervene with Zimbabwe, as we ourselves had briefed him to do in order to get Mandela to use his by now enormous international influence with Robert Mugabe. But in return Mandela wanted Mozambique to be able to apply for Commonwealth membership. So that was the deal that was done. It was a deal done

between a Head of State and a Head of Government in private, no officials present. And Mandela helped us over Zimbabwe and we helped him over Mozambique.

MM What about other members of the Commonwealth?

DS Once South Africa and Britain had decided on this course, the others fell into line. And that is not surprising. After all South Africa had rejoined the Commonwealth the year before and Mandela's prestige and influence were so preponderant at the time that no one wanted to oppose him in a matter of that sort.

Appointment as Ambassador to Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, 1997-2000

MM So in April 1997 you were given your first post as a Head of Mission. Would you tell us about it?

DS Yes, and it was the post I had most wanted in life because thirty years before I had been a volunteer in Senegal: a UNA volunteer, and had taught in a *lycée* out in the bush and worked in a leprosy village. So I was extremely gratified and very surprised to be appointed Ambassador to Senegal, as well as Ambassador to Mali, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, so I was accredited to five countries. Perhaps I can describe our arrival because it was quite dramatic in some ways. As the 'plane came in towards Dakar airport, I looked down and noticed there was a large crowd of people on the tarmac, and I remember saying to Anne, my wife: "Oh. There must be a visiting Head of State coming through". Well we went down the steps of the aeroplane and the crowd surged forward, and it was led by the Chief Justice, or so he told us. And he said to me: "On behalf of your former students in Senegal who are here" – there must have been about fifty of them I suppose – "I welcome you to Senegal." Now amongst that group of people was the future Prime Minister, Lamine Loume, two Governors of Provinces, three heads of nationalised industries and the Chief Justice, and they had all, apparently, been my students when I taught English in the Lycée Gaston Berger, in Kaolack thirty years earlier. So that gave me an *entrée* into Senegalese government and society of enormous importance. Indeed the French

Ambassador just simply couldn't understand how the British Ambassador had such access at any time to the Prime Minister and his government. Now, it is true to say that the Foreign Office hadn't realised that when posting me to Dakar that I had worked in Senegal and that I spoke some Wolof. I didn't want to reveal that because I thought if they knew that, they might think I had already gone native. So I got the job notwithstanding. But having been a volunteer gave me much credibility. I remember one occasion when Mrs Short came – she was Secretary of State for International Development, and I took her to call on the Prime Minister, and after a while she said: "Prime Minister, how come you speak such excellent English?" and the Prime Minister replied; "Your Ambassador taught me". And she looked at me and said: "David, are you teaching the Prime Minister English?" I said "Oh no Minister. Not at all. I taught him English over thirty years ago when he was a schoolboy". This helped me in my campaign when I was in the back of the car trying to get Clare Short and her office to support the funding of English language teaching in Francophone Africa. I said: "Look. That Prime Minister would not have spoken English to you, but for the fact that I was a volunteer thirty years earlier, and shouldn't we be supporting the promotion of the English language". She was adamant that we shouldn't. I said well in that case I would have had to do all the interpretation for you, or you would have to have spoken French. There it is.

MM Short sighted. Now what about the other countries? Did you visit them?

DS Oh yes. It was a fairly intensive visiting programme, because you had to go and present credentials in the other four countries. You had to make annual visits and then you had to make a farewell visit to each country. So that was a lot of time out of Dakar. It was very intense and what I felt as a non-resident Ambassador was that you had five times the amount of work that a resident Ambassador would have had, simply because you had to get to know five legislatures, five media, five civil services – and they were all very different, and five lots of parliamentarians. So, it was tough, I felt, but I had some extremely interesting times there. I was very involved with the promotion of Anglo-French co-operation, and because I was accredited to three Francophone countries and two Lusophone countries, and the line I took all the time, which I think the Foreign Office would in theory have agreed to, but in practice did little about, was that if you wanted to reduce conflict in these areas of Africa, the best

way to do it was through regional co-operation, which could be hugely enhanced if the two former colonial powers, Britain and France, got together and were seen to support it, and to be doing things together and funding the same projects

Now Senegal is the only country in West Africa never to have had a *coup d'état* and it's a stable, reasonably democratic country, but Senegal contains within its borders an enclave The Gambia, and Gambia is totally British, down to the shorts the policeman wear, and Senegal is totally French in its mode, indeed its attitudes. Senegal is regarded as the jewel in the French colonial crown. Terribly important to France, and in the past there had been attempts in the 19th century to exchange Gambia for other parts of West Africa, so that Senegal could be properly united. Gambia is just a narrow finger of territory, thirty miles wide. It extends 275 miles into the interior and geographically ought to be part of Senegal. I discovered when I got to Senegal that the reason that I had been a volunteer near the border with Gambia, in Kaolack, was because of a policy that President Senghor had enunciated in trying to enhance co-operation with Gambia by teaching Senegalese people in the areas round about, English, so I had unwittingly been part of that policy. He had persuaded the British government of the day to fund these volunteers through the British Council. I felt when I went back to Senegal that so much more could be done by France and Britain together, rather than in competition, and this chimed very well with what became known as the "Spirit of St Malo" – a declaration that was agreed by John Major at St Malo and President Chirac in about 1998, and that agreement between Britain and France set out areas in which we could co-operate together in Africa. When you look at the map of West Africa you see all these French, British and Portuguese former colonies, all mixed in with one another, with their borders jutting into each other, and you wonder why there isn't greater regional co-operation in the same way there is in Europe. There are two organisations – one Francophone called UEMOA and the other ECOWAS which is Anglophone. Naturally, we support ECOWAS and the French support UEMOA. The French organisation is much more economically integrated than the Anglophone one. They have a common currency, and common duties and so on. And all the time that I was in that part of West Africa, I advocated the idea that we should put a great deal more effort in trying to bring the countries together through a regional organisation which both France and Britain supported and worked with. I especially felt that over Gambia we should not, for example, have a

separate High Commission there. As with all other countries except France, US and UK we should run our relations with Gambia out of Dakar. That would have sent a political signal that – after all Dakar is only 175 miles north of Banjul, Gambia - we believed in regional co-operation, instead of treating each country on the basis of whether it was Francophone or Anglophone. And that's a policy that I pushed very hard with London, I don't think with much success. No idea where it's got to today. It's the same tribal peoples on either side of the borders. They speak the same local languages. They're divided by their colonial heritage, not by their tribal differences or their languages. They have the same customs and traditions. It's just that colonial boundaries have been in a sense imposed on them and they are unable to escape from their colonial heritage. And here too I felt that we should be doing a great deal more as the former colonial powers that had perpetrated these divisions – to try to help them overcome those divisions. I was constantly advocating that theme. I also felt that Britain much neglected the Francophone territories like Senegal. Senegal has a fairly high reputation on the international stage for stability and democracy - even the fight against corruption, though there is plenty of it. We seem to me to give very little support to the Senegalese other than of a purely diplomatic or symbolic nature.

There is one area which I feel is really important to talk about and that is Sierra Leone, because Dakar was chosen in 2000 as the forward mounting base for our invasion of Sierra Leone. This was because at the time of the Falklands War, Senegal had agreed that the international airport at Dakar could be used as a staging post for the Falklands, and this agreement remained in being, and the RAF used Dakar whenever they were on their way to the Falklands. This carried on in my time and we had good relations with the authorities over this until one day in May 2000, British military suddenly started turning up at the airport. I was informed that this was an advance force that would go into Sierra Leone – but they needed a forward mounting base. I was told that on a Saturday morning in the middle of a local conference of our Honorary Consuls from the five countries to which I was accredited, and I had to leave that conference and argue with London that we really had to get the permission of the Senegalese authorities before taking over Dakar airport in this way. My protestations were ignored, and by the evening large UK forces were already stationed in Dakar airport with the authorities quite unable to prevent any of us coming in and doing anything about it. The nearby French Base agreed to accommodate them and

erected hundreds of tents that afternoon. Military arrived all day Sunday. I asked for calls on the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief of Defence Staff, for the Monday morning in order to try to explain our position, but the President had already asked me to call at 8 o'clock on Monday morning. President Wade had been elected six weeks beforehand and his first comment to me was: "I have been kept awake all weekend by the heavy drone of Hercules aircraft flying over my Residence. Not only that, but the British seem to have taken over Dakar airport without so much as asking our permission". I had enormous difficulty in trying to explain to President Wade, whom I knew well, and had dealt with in opposition, the background to this. I tried to convince him on the grounds that what we were doing in Sierra Leone, or what we were about to do, was for the good of not just Sierra Leone, but human rights and democracy in West Africa as a whole. He agreed but he felt, and I could only but share his view on it at a personal level, that Britain ought to have asked for permission to use Dakar airport, because it screwed up all the civil aircraft and all that kind of thing. We had about five thousand people already there before we asked the government, and this seemed to me to be behaving in a high-handed colonial manner in a country which had not even been one of our colonies. So I reported all that to London, and little by little things were patched over, The Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Charles Guthrie, and his staff came out in May, took over the Residence for a couple of nights, ran Sierra Leone from Dakar, and called on the President, Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and so on, with me. We tried to placate the Senegalese and to explain our actions. Likewise Robin Cook also came out in June 2000 on his way back from Sierra Leone for a similar round of calls, and with perhaps less success, talked to the President and Prime Minister about these issues. On the other hand, we were by then beginning to make some headway in Sierra Leone, so we had something to show the Senegalese, that but for their help we would not have been able to achieve what we had already achieved in Sierra Leone. So we were able to assuage what was a highly delicate, and what could have become a difficult political issue for Britain. The Senegalese never once said: "You can't use Dakar airport". We did have this agreement for the RAF to stage through Dakar, but they were just extremely upset that a foreign country could invade their country without so much as a by your leave. Senegal thus played a crucial role in the war in Sierra Leone in that it provided the airport where all the British forces were able to congregate for the invasion.

MM What was your impression of Robin Cook?

DS On that occasion he was extremely nice and very cordial with everyone, especially with the staff at the Residence, and all the people that we had invited for a buffet supper on the terrace, and I felt that he made a really good impression. And indeed I felt, because he deliberately chose to sit next to me at the buffet, rather than some senior official from the Foreign Office, that he actually wanted to hear from me about Senegal, and their reaction. So I had a favourable impression of him.

I have a much less favourable impression of Robin Cook over the Sandline affair in Sierra Leone, which preceded, did it not, the invasion of Sierra Leone, and I felt that our High Commissioner, Peter Penfold, had been dumped on, and I still feel that to this day. I don't know all the details, but it seemed to me at the time, that Robin Cook actually made an issue out of something, which could have been dealt with in another way, and as a result it became something that really paralysed the Foreign Office. For months you could get nothing out of the Department, then called AD(E), because they were so consumed by the entire Sandline business. I do not feel that some, perhaps the Legal Advisers, behaved as well as they could have done over that investigation, and that Peter Penfold was made a scapegoat for failures in the system. Unbeknown to Penfold, we were in breach of the Security Council Resolution. Indeed I remember explaining to him on the telephone from Dakar what the implications of this were, and I felt that our Department in the Foreign Office hadn't a proper grasp over what had happened. After all, this Security Council Resolution had been drafted by our own Legal Advisers in a way which appeared to say that no arms could go to the government of Sierra Leone. The Resolution placed an embargo on arms going to all parties to the conflict. But why was the government of Sierra Leone included in that? That is what the issue was about. It was when Robin Cook realised that we were in breach of the Security Council Resolution that he personally created such a hoo-hah, both in the Foreign Office and in Parliament, over it and I think to some extent got hoisted on his own petard, and people had to be sacrificed. So on the way Peter Penfold was one of those people. That's my understanding from where I sat in Dakar reading the telegrams backwards and forwards between Freetown and the Foreign Office.

MM So it was an eventful posting?

Effects of the Sandline Enquiry in West African posts

DS On the whole it was. I had a civil war in Guinea Bissau and I'll just pick up on that. Guinea Bissau itself had periodic conflicts, and one took place in my second year in Senegal. That was at the time of the Sandline enquiry. Some twenty or so British nationals were caught up in it and we had to find the means for them to escape. I found myself – that must have been 1998 – in the Presidency seat of the European Union, so I was chairing the EU Ambassadors locally. We also had the P3 and the Security Council jobs. P3 France, Britain and the US – another grouping and the P5 Security Council. Now I found myself within a year of getting to Dakar in the driving seat on how to rescue the European nationals from Guinea Bissau after the outbreak of this civil war, and it got extremely fraught. Although no European nationals were killed, some were lost in the bush and we had to try and find them and get them out with nobody on the ground except for the Portuguese Ambassador. Some of them actually turned up in Cape Verde which included our Honorary Consul, a Dutchman, who was lost in the bush. He turned up in the Cape Verde Islands some three months later when I happened to be visiting. I was told he was on a boat bringing more refugees from Guinea Bissau, arriving in the port of Praia (capital of Cape Verde) and that's where I greeted him, looking very emaciated.

What I think the Sandline enquiry did in the midst of this was to paralyse the Foreign Office so that they could not respond to emergencies like Guinea Bissau. I remember sending at least thirty telegrams and not getting a reply to any of them until I telephoned Richard Dales, who was the Director, and said "I've sent all these telegrams. You seem to be totally unaware that there is a civil war going on here in which British nationals are caught up, and we're doing very little to help". It was only then that they turned their minds a little bit towards that. But this is what happens. I think Sandline is a very good example of when a Department gets totally obsessed and wracked by a particular political issue – this was a political issue more than anything else, and it wasn't able to function properly and deal with all the other crises that could occur at the same time.

MM Thank you very much for that.

DS I think that's nearly all of political significance really in my time in Senegal.

British High Commissioner to Mauritius 2000-2004

DS I was British High Commissioner to Mauritius for the four years and two months which took me up to my 60th birthday. It was interesting to go to another basically Francophone or “Franglophone” country, as I call Mauritius. French is the language of the media and Creole the language of the people, and is used much more widely than was English. So coming from Senegal to Mauritius wasn't really all that different for me. I don't think I'd been appointed to Mauritius because I was French speaking. I think it was more by chance than anything else, as was the case very often with postings. But I was certainly struck by the enormous preponderance of French influence. The French Embassy was four times the size of the British High Commission. It had fifty times our aid budget. We had a small grant scheme, and the French were involved, it seemed to me, in just about every aspect of Mauritian government and Mauritian life. Certainly the French Embassy was the most important and biggest of all the nine permanent missions based in Mauritius. So I thought we had a bit of an uphill struggle. It intrigued me that none of my predecessors had ever reported that Mauritius was a French speaking country, and this became evident when I read in my preparation for going out, the country brief on Mauritius. It simply said that Mauritius was an English speaking country and had been colonised by the British since 1810. Well that was true, but it didn't say what had happened before 1810, and that fifty eight years of French administration had left an indelible mark on Mauritius with a Franco-Mauritian community numbering some twenty two thousand by the time I got there, probably only two or three hundred British people living there. So what I first tried to do was to get the Foreign Office to see that we were not dealing with a typical ex-British colony. That we were dealing with a typical ex-French colony that had a British veneer over it, albeit they use the British common law and criminal law, but the civil law and land law was the *Code Napoléon* in French, as was the entire media. Although there was a 9 o'clock English news programme for twenty minutes, the English itself was of poor standard. We had the British Council there and I tried to get the Council involved in English language

teaching. To begin with they were very resistant because they were English speakers, and not French speakers. Indeed I was the only French speaker in the High Commission and the British Council put together. They believed that they were living in a typical British ex-colony. So it took a lot of discussions and effort on my part to get them to see that actually what they saw on the surface was not what it was like underneath. The real heart of Mauritius was Franglophone, not Anglophone.

MM English was the language of administration and government?

DS If you looked at the age pattern you would see that those civil servants that were above the age of fifty let us say, were speaking and working in English. That coincided curiously with 1968 when Britain started charging fees to overseas students, and that was a kind of watershed. From then on the number of Mauritian students going to Britain declined very rapidly till we finally had something like, I calculated in my first year, about eighteen Mauritian students in the UK. There were 1,800 Mauritian students in France, however, where they didn't pay fees. So that explained why anyone under fifty, roughly speaking, would speak French, and do all their meetings in French, or Creole which was French based, and anyone over fifty would do it in English. We had totally and completely lost our influence, lost out to the French, commercially and in every way. The French dominated business, commerce, finance. We did have HSBC there. That was one thing. And we had the British Council, but there were very few British companies left.

MM But Tate and Lyle bought all the sugar, the main export.

DS That's right, the sugar was exported to Britain, and it came through the Tate and Lyle sugar refinery at Silvertown on the Thames, that's true. But that was really I suppose the only part of the Mauritian economy that we had a hand in. I wouldn't say we dominated, because the sugar estates were all run by Franco-Mauritians anyway, except one that I can remember, run by Rowntrees. And so the whole commerce of sugar took place under French influence and in French, although it was exported to London for refining by Tate & Lyle. But it didn't really give us much of a stake in the Mauritian economy.

MM Well actually when Britain was negotiating entry into the EU, and we were trying to protect Commonwealth exports to Britain we had to bargain hard, and pay a price, to secure an exemption from EU duties for Mauritian sugar while opposition to the entry of Mauritian sugar was really pushed by the French. I always found that curious. But my impression of Mauritius, gained as a frequent visitor from Madagascar, is exactly the same as yours.

DS It surprised me that nobody in the Foreign Office at the time that I went there had that understanding of Mauritius at all. I did get the briefs changed eventually to say that it was a Franglophone country and a few people spoke English. But we were able to help nonetheless during my time. For example, with police training and education. Now the police preferred the British way of policing, not the French way, and I think I was able to use that. We got the Mauritian police quite a lot of training and equipment, and they sent some of their best recruits later on to the University of Portsmouth where they did degrees in policing. So that was one area where we preserved a good link. The local defence force was another. The local defence force was a sort of paramilitary organisation, actually part of the police. They clung to their British traditions far more than any other aspect of Mauritian society and government. We were to a limited extent able to respond to that, which I was grateful for and during my time I was able to get the first and probably the last, joint Anglo-French naval visit in 2001. I was able to get the French to send a vessel from Réunion, just forty five minutes down the road from Mauritius; part of France, of course.

MM Forty five by air.

DS Yes by air. Well thirty five, and then a frigate from Britain. I think it was HMS Cornwall. It was a very large frigate, and so for four days we did all things Anglo-French, and there I felt I was taking forward *l'Esprit de St Malo* - the Spirit of St Malo – with which I had been much involved in Senegal, into Mauritius, and I think it made a good impact on the Mauritian government and people to see both France and Britain for the first time not in competition, but working closely together with various jointly funded projects. We organised quite a lot of activities like a round the island relay race, in which we all took part with French, British and Mauritian teams and so on. It all seemed to me to be a very useful demonstration of Anglo-French co-

operation and showing the Mauritians they could not play one country off against the other, which was quite typical of West Africa. I also got much involved with marine conservation (I am today a Trustee of the Indian Ocean Marine Education Trust and a Fellow of the RGS with whom I worked). Then we had visits from Princes Michael, Edward and William. Their programmes had strong marine and wild life conservation elements.

MM It's a "keep left" country of course (like India).

DS Yes indeed. Yes, there are all these curious leftovers from the British colonial period but it's partly to do with the fact that when Britain took Mauritius in 1810, and then it was ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Paris in 1814, throughout the 19th century we only ever had a handful of British administrators and British military, and probably never numbering more, at the outside, than a hundred.

MM I'm surprised it was as many as that.

DS Yes, but if you think of all the administrations; customs, fisheries, commerce – no that would not be too surprising. And the military. We had various garrisons around the islands, but we were primarily administrators, so when Mauritius got independence, they left, as did HMS Mauritius in 1976, which was a British naval training centre in the middle of the island. Throughout the 19th century the French were keen to get Mauritius back and there is quite a lot of documentation on this of the French planning, if there should ever be war again between Britain and France, to take Mauritius back if they could, because Mauritius was a very sore loss to France.

This probably brings us on to the Chagos Islands. One of my jobs in Southern Africa Department had been Deputy Commissioner of the Chagos Archipelago, a.k.a the British Indian Ocean Territory, and then nearly four years later I found myself High Commissioner to Mauritius, and dealing with the many issues arising from the Chagos Islands, for a third of my time I was there. Sometimes I seemed to be on it full time. Now there were various reasons why between September 2000 and November 2004, Chagos was by far and away the dominant issue in Anglo-Mauritian relations. I arrived on 18 September, the day the new government of Sir Anerood

Jugnauth PC QC – you can't get much more English than those initials – formed his new government. They had just been elected, and one of Sir Anerood's policy statements was that they would be mounting pressure on Britain to get the sovereignty of the islands transferred to Mauritius. We had always said we would return the islands when they were no longer needed for defence purposes. So almost from the moment they got in to government they started agitating. The Deputy Prime Minister, Paul Bérenger, was the first Franco-Mauritian ever to get to that level in government. On 4 November 2000, six weeks after I arrived, the High Court delivered its judgment on the Chagos case that Britain had behaved unlawfully in depriving the Chagossians of their right to return to the islands. So the High Court restored that right and from then the Chagossians had the right to return to their homeland from which they had been evicted between 1969 and 1972 by Britain to make way for an American base on Diego Garcia, the most southerly island of the archipelago. There are sixty five islands, and all the other islands, other than Diego, are known as the Outer Islands and they are 150 to 200 miles north of Diego. Now the High Court had said, understandably, that they would not restore the right to return to Diego Garcia, from which over five hundred Ilois, as they were called then, had been removed because that is necessary for all military bases, even on Salisbury Plain. People cannot go and live there even if they once lived there, because it is now a military base. So that was something that I think Chagossians by and large accepted, but there was no reason why they should not return to the Outer Islands. Indeed Robin Cook, within two hours of the judgment accepted that and made a statement. It was issued by the Press Office that he accepted the judgment of the High Court and would now work towards helping the Chagossians to return to the islands. The FCO had already started a feasibility study on the question of how we could settle people on islands which had been uninhabited for thirty five years, and Cook said that we would now press ahead with those feasibility studies and help the Chagossians to return. That judgment overjoyed the Chagossian community who'd been fighting for it since they first took a case for compensation to the High Court in 1982. It fell to me to summon the leaders of the Chagossian community and to inform them that they could now start returning to the islands, and I used, perhaps a rather unfortunate expression, that "you can now start paddling your canoes, chaps – you can go back. The High Court has cleared your right to return and the British Government has accepted it." Of course I knew full well that it was easy enough to say in theory, that the people could return, but in

practice, without any assistance and without transport to go to the islands, which were 1200 miles north of Mauritius, across rough and heavy seas, would be extremely difficult indeed. Now that right remained in place right up until June 2004 when the Foreign Office overturned the High Court judgment by Orders in Council.

MM By the High Court, do you mean the Mauritian High Court?

DS No, the British High Court sitting in the Royal Courts of Justice or the Divisional Court. The High Court judgment which had been extremely severe – it was a forty page judgment and I would really like to read into this interview the text of my lecture at Bristol University two weeks ago, because that sets out the whole thing and rather than repeat it all since it was ten pages long, I think I'd like to dwell upon the areas which were not covered in any great detail in that lecture. *(Please apply to Mr Snoxell at Snoxells@btinternet.com for text).*

MM We'll append it.

DS So if I could stop explaining the background because I think it will just take too long, and just refer you now to that lecture. You will see how the various decisions came about when the Foreign Office decided to appeal to the House of Lords. I was involved on a daily basis with all the issues of Chagos. These issues include Defence of course. Diego Garcia is an important US base. The sovereignty claim of Mauritius, which we've always acknowledged come into it as do the environmental aspects of the most pristine uninhabited atolls left on the planet. And then there are the human rights and humanitarian aspects. I have described that as being one of the worst violations of fundamental human rights perpetrated by Britain in the 20th century. I had many meetings with the Chagossians. They naturally saw me as the face of the British government; the hard-hearted face of no compromise, who would always find an excuse; perfidious Albion. They demonstrated regularly against me. I had bottles smashed on my car. I had to be smuggled out of the High Commission on several occasions to avoid demonstrations, with decoy cars and so on. In 2001 I had a fifteen day demonstration against me with three hundred Chagossians camped outside the High Commission demanding in Creole, as they banged the crash barriers all round the High Commission, that I should come out and speak to them. It was a very

difficult time. I felt the Mauritian government actually encouraged that demonstration to mount pressure on Britain, and what the Chagossians could never have known and only now know, is that I sympathised with their plight and I was doing my best with the Foreign Office to try to encourage them to find a way out of the situation, and to compromise. Let me just go back to the first High Court judgment of 4 November 2000 – I wrote to the Foreign Office on 8 November to Overseas Territories Department saying this High Court judgment gives us an opportunity to review our overall position on the Chagos Islands and I advocated that now was the golden opportunity to cede sovereignty over the Outer Islands to Mauritius, and in a sense, pass the responsibilities for the Chagossians to the Mauritian government. I argued in that letter that I hadn't gone native, that I felt that this was something we should now with great urgency secure and take forward, and that it would in the long run save the taxpayer vast sums of money, and that it would respond to the humanitarian needs. I also said that we would need to compensate the Chagossians again. I never received a reply to that letter but I know that it is there in the files. On a visit back to London six weeks later, I had a meeting with Overseas Territories Department, a difficult meeting, in which I argued forcefully that we really ought to take the High Court judgment seriously and take this opportunity of seeing how we could transfer sovereignty. Of course the Whitehall argument was that the Americans wouldn't allow us. I never believed that. I never believed that having a group of people living on the Outer Islands, 150 miles from the base, could in any way compromise the intelligence, security and defence role of the base, which was what was claimed by the FCO, and I did not myself feel that this was a serious argument. I never succeeded. One other area that I did try to persuade our Overseas Territories Department to pursue was that if we were to fund projects in Mauritius to help the Chagossian community become more established; that is, training skills, education, scholarships, community centres and so – if we were to spend, say, and I remember suggesting a figure of £50,000 a year, then we might very well persuade them that there was really nothing much to be gained from actually returning to the islands. After all they were into their second, indeed third generation, in Mauritius, and they had their community there and their way of life and the jobs, so why not help them to be more comfortable and be more educated in Mauritius? The Ilois were the least educated of all the people in Mauritius, rather akin to the Creoles, and they had been largely ignored, and marginalised, although they are indistinguishable from the Creole

community in Mauritius, and speak the same Creole with a slightly different accent, but they are the same people. That request which I made several times was turned down by our Overseas Territories Department, and I was only talking about £50,000, which is trivial when compared with the likely bill for resettling the Chagossians.

To just go back to the sovereignty issues, I now want to talk about things that are not in my lecture. I think Valerie Amos, then the Minister responsible for Africa in the Foreign Office and Jack Straw, were taken with the idea that we really ought to try to negotiate a settlement with Mauritius, which would include the handing back of the Outer Islands, but of course not the base. I got the Deputy Prime Minister, Paul Bérenger, over to the Foreign Office and he had a good discussion with Jack Straw in about January 2002, who undertook to consult the Americans about this. That was all we heard for quite some time. Eventually I was instructed to deliver a letter to Bérenger from, I think, Jack Straw in which he said he had consulted the Americans, but they wanted to leave the situation as it was. He was very sorry he couldn't help. My own feeling was that whilst the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Africa saw the merit in going down this road and agreed with it, there were officials in our Overseas Territories Department who did not, and I think it is very easy in the Foreign Office, when the Foreign Secretary gives instructions to consult country 'x' about subject 'y', for officials to go to an ally like the US, and put the question in such a way as to get the answer that they want. Not surprisingly our Overseas Territories Department were closely in touch with the Counsellor of the US Embassy in London and a lot of things would be cross-checked there first. So it would not surprise me to learn that officials ventriloquised the answer from the Americans that they wanted. I think that was a huge mistake. We had an opportunity and we lost it, but Jack Straw was taken up with so many vital issues following the 9/11 events that this could not really feature very much on his agenda. I believe that had we approached the Americans in the right way; had Ministers themselves personally taken it up, we might very well have persuaded them that the only sensible solution to this clutch of issues was in fact to cede sovereignty of the Outer Islands. I think we could have easily convinced them that they actually didn't need those islands for defence purposes, if they ever believed they did. I'm not sure that they did, or that we asked the Americans to help their old ally out. Britain had been extremely helpful to the US, and was about to be helpful over the Iraq War, and Britain was in a jam.

Personally I believe that it was not beyond the bounds of possibility for negotiations to have resulted in the cession of the sovereignty of the Outer Islands to Mauritius. As I say, that would have meant that Mauritius would have had the problem of what to do about the Chagossians

I should perhaps say something about the Orders in Council of June 2004 which overturned the High Court judgement, Robin Cook's decision and by-passed Parliament. When I first got wind of this stratagem I strongly advised against, for reasons set out in several telegrams. Officials were very cross with me for opposing their scheme but in the end I was instructed to inform the Mauritian Government. I did however persuade OTD to give me a short stay of execution. The Orders were signed by the Queen on 10 June which was a Thursday. That evening I had my last QBP and I didn't really want that sabotaged by having to make such an announcement on that day. This would have meant that none of the Government of Mauritius would have been able to attend. So as far as I remember OTD agreed to keep it secret and announce it to Parliament the following Tuesday. Now the lawyers today have questioned how an Order in Council could have been held over or not announced to Parliament for five days. The actual reason was in order not to sabotage my final QBP, which was nice of them. And then I continued to fight a rear-guard action up until retirement, and still do so. I set it all out in my valedictory despatch as well.

MM And your valedictory despatch?

DS Well FCO told me that a Reuters journalist asked under the Freedom of Information Act for a copy of it, and that was refused by the Foreign Office on the grounds that it would be prejudicial to both Anglo-Mauritian and Anglo-American relations, so therefore I'm not assuming – I don't suppose that my valedictory will be available until 2034 when I propose to give my next lecture on this subject.

MM If you're spared that long.

DS – If I'm spared that long, by which time I assume the Chagossians will have long since, those who want to anyway, returned to the islands, and that chapter of Britain's history will be long behind us. Is that enough on all that?

MM I think that's fine. Thank you very much indeed.

DS But may I finally come back to your earlier question about my involvement with prisons. It started in Northern Ireland and resumed in Mauritius. I was visiting a young Brit who was facing a thirty-year life sentence for drug trafficking. I later discovered that he had been at school with my sons, and I got to know his mother. To cut a long story I persuaded the Mauritian Government to adopt legislation to make the transfer of prisoners possible. Neil was the first to be transferred and the Lord Chief Justice recommended four years. He is today a totally reformed person working hard (he's even made a film) in the community. I see him, and the other two I got transferred, regularly. I've visited my three prisoners in five different English prisons and one in Rotterdam. My wife got me involved in the Women's prison in Mauritius and during my last year I conducted a singing group there. So I concluded my valedictory despatch, sent on my sixtieth birthday, with the words. 'Before joining the Service I was a volunteer in Senegal, my wife to be was volunteering in Nigeria. I returned to Senegal as Ambassador thirty years later and resumed the links with the *lycée* and leprosy village where I worked. Perhaps for both of us the most rewarding work of a fascinating career was at the start, helping to run an orphanage in Pakistan, and here at the end, visiting prisoners and running a singing group in prison. We leave with a sense of fulfilment and gratitude for the enormous opportunities, friendships and all manner of experiences that the Service gave us and our family, which when I joined at age twenty five, I could never have imagined'.

Transcribed by Evie Jamieson