

Comments on Interview with Mr. G.H.Ferguson, 11.12.1965

Mr. Ferguson is 69 years old and has got all his wits about him. He is slightly deaf and this is what occasioned the repetition of some questions during the interview. It is possible that he misunderstood a few, but these should be pretty obvious.

He was perfectly candid on some matters; but being a Policeman he could not divulge some information. He was also reluctant to express forthright opinions of detrimental nature on individuals who were alive; and even held himself in check on others who had passed away. Being a principal in the 'Bracegirdle affair' his evidence here is of great importance though I doubt whether he said anything that is not found in Sessional Paper XVIII of 1938. I accept his truthfully on this matter unreservedly.

Mr. Ferguson is a man of a practical cast of mind - 'I have a scientific mind' he said himself. This was not claiming too much. He knew something about photography before he went out to Ceylon in 1915, he has several books of a scientific nature, he lives only in a large Tudor cottage with a garden and looks after the house, garden and himself all on his own. One should add that though of Scottish stock he comes from a long-resident Devonshire family with extensive lands near Borey Tracey. He was appointed a Police Probationer by the Secretary of State following a public school education in England. From his turn of mind and undoubted competency I should think he was eminently qualified to be head of the C.I.D. Department. He might sound opinionated on certain points to those listening to the recording but he never spoke in a boastful tone; it was a question of justifiable pride in some of his skill and achievements. It is of some significance that after the Bracegirdle affair had led him to resign rather prematurely, he was appointed to Mountbatten's staff during the war years and rose to the rank of Colonel, a title he dropped immediately after the war though entitled to keep it.

His view on many topics, of course, was essentially a policeman's outlook. To him 'Communists' were automatically a bad name and 'subversive'. As a British policeman in Ceylon of the 1930's presumably his ultimate loyalty was to Britain and not to his Minister - but British public servants of those days, and policemen in particular, must have inevitably been faced with this dilemma of divided loyalties. I would not, however, classify his outlook as diehard. He was willing to admit that trade unions were not bad per se, that the immigrants needed to have trade unions, and so forth. How far this was the mellowed outlook of an older man looking back from 1965. I cannot say.

M.W.Roberts

12.12.65

Subsequent to writing this I asked him a few more questions during lunch and these are recorded at the end of O3 contd.

P.S.

Mr. Ferguson takes the Daily Telegraph.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. G.H. FERGUSON, 11th DECEMBER 1965.

G.H. Ferguson.

b. 18th March, 1896

Ceylon Police, 1915 - 1937, retiring as  
Deputy Inspector-General of Police, C.I.D.

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I. Yes. What were you saying about the L.S.S.P., the Sama Samajists?

F. Oh, I was saying that when I was asked in the Bracegirdle trial in the State Council whether I thought that they were Communists, I said, 'No, I didn't think they were. I didn't think their aim was the ultra-Communist aim at all. I thought that they were really what I had described as sort of ultra-Socialist'.

I. Would it be correct to, would you say that they could be described as 'Nationalist-Socialist', if you see what I mean; without being tied to the wage-strings of a foreign power?

F. Er ... from a point of view, you mean, of British versus Ceylonese?

I. No, I mean Ceylonese-Socialists. Socialists from Ceylon rather than, say, agents of a Communist power?

F. Now I think that as - that in practice, it does appear that they were being influenced to a great extent in what they were doing by Moscow; because we know since - I mean, its even since I left - what has happened in Ceylon from the ... really from the Communist point of view: complete disruption of all kinds of economy.

I. Yes, but I don't know how you could put it down to the L.S.S.P.?

F. Well, they undoubtedly had - they were influencing certain voters and things of that kind on [sic] one way and another.

I. Well, they were a party seeking political power so they had every right to influence the voters one way or another.

F. I dare say. We have Communists in our Parliament too.

I. Yes. What - did you have - did you come across N.M. Perera and Colvin R. De Silva?

F. Any what?

I. Did you meet N.M. Perera and Colvin R. De Silva and Phillip Gunewardena? Did you know them personally?

F. No, I didn't, I didn't know them personally. I knew them by their histories, (ha, ha).

I. Yes, how was it, for instance, that these two agents of the Communist Party, who had been trained in Moscow, how was it that you got this sort of information?

F. Ah well, I got a ....

I. You had a secret ....

F. ...from er ... er ... various sources we get that sort of thing from, in fact I can't give you all the details of that kind.

I. Well, if its confidential, its perfectly alright, I was just having a shot. Would you with the view that the L.S.S.P. was (quote) 'a small local party run by young men with more money than brains' (close quote), and that these men were (quote again) 'generally regarded as half-wits and degenerates'.

F. No, I can't - I don't think I dare - I think that ... No.

I. Well, it happens to be a view put forward by Stubbs.

F. Stubbs.

I. I don't think it's a correct view myself, but what I don't like about this view is that he said that these men were 'generally regarded as half-wits'. Well, if he put it forward as his view ....

F. No, I ....

I. He wrote this in a despatch to ....

F. No, I should - no, definitely I shouldn't have thought that was a true description of them at all. Certainly not on information which I supplied him.

I. Yes; well, I think it was a bit dishonest of him to write like that to a to the Secretary of State and put it forward as a general view when he might very well have put it forward as his individual view, which he is entitled to.

F. He - generally speaking, on something of that kind, he - that we ought to have been consulted. I mean, after all, ....

I. You knew more about that ....

F. ... it was my job to keep tabs on the subversive elements and so on and my job to report anything which I considered was necessary for the Government to know about them.

I. When were you made D.I.G.P., C.I.D.?

F. I think probably either 1936 or somewhere about then.

I. Yes. Just about the time I think that, well it was a bit earlier, that this L.S.S.P. Party was formed and was getting on its feet?

F. Yes, I think so. I was acting before it was confirmed.

I. I - as soon as this party was formed, you did keep your tabs on them?

F. Oh yes, yes, definitely yes.

I. And was this sort of thing done with the knowledge and approval of the Home Affairs Ministry?

F. Well, we didn't specifically tell them exactly what we were doing about everything, but a practice, as I've said before, the Home Minister had every right to come into my office and examine any file he liked, and if he wanted to do so he could have done so. I mean no one would have raised any objection. He had every legal right to do so. And naturally, from my point of view, I was a bit chary in certain cases where you have a change of Minister or change of this or that or so, and you got a big file on that particular person, you see. All their activities over the years. At the same time I couldn't surpress it. It was there for anyone to see. And if they'd liked to - I mean even Sir Baron, we probably had a big file on him, and if he wanted to he could have sent for his own file and read it through.

I. Yes, I see. You did have a file on other politicians too?

F. Oh, we had files on dozens of people.

I. I suppose this is a rather ....

F. Anyone, anyone who came to, what I describe as adverse motives from the subversive or strong political point of view which was nearing subversion or something like that, we'd have a file on him.

I. If I may put a rather leading question; if you don't want to answer it, please don't. Who would you consider particularly 'subversive' at that time?

F. Oh, I can't. I don't think we had any particular people. I think we considered more the Sama Samajists.

I. Sama Samajists. What were the methods they were using to gain influence?

F. Well, that I can't remember at the moment; what the details about them [were]. It was a long time ago.

I. Can you remember the this Suriya Mal movement which began before them but - you know, the Suriya Mal, the anti-Poppy Day thing - you know, the Suriya Mal is a type of flower in Ceylon. Remembrance Day; they were against it. This was a bit earlier, 1929 - 1930.

F. No, well I don't remember much about that because I was then, I've forgotten where I was then, oh I was in Badulla.

I. Oh, I see.

F. 1930 - 31 I was in Badulla, an outstation, so I wouldn't have - right away from any of these political matters at all.

I. Did you have, did you go as far as to put tails on some of these men?

F. To put what?

I. 'Tails', to use colloquial slang. To put plain clothes men to watch them at times?

F. Well, when you say plain clothes - to watch their personal activities do you mean?

I. Yes.

F. I don't, I wouldn't say that we didn't do so, but I don't - it wasn't er ....

I. Continuous watch?

F. ... it wasn't a matter which we would ordinarily do. What we would do is : we'd have plain clothes people attending meetings and reporting on meetings but to trail them and see what they were doing, that not necessarily .... Someone from outside the colony probably came, and was going to - they might have been trailed and see [sic] if they were connecting up with anyone.

I. Did any such people come in your time? Any outsiders?

F. I don't remember any people coming up to join up with Sama Samajists. There were other people who came down sometimes. Some of the Indians from India and places like that but they were, they weren't really - pro-Communists more ....

I. This Gandhi-ist movement and the Indian political movement had some bearing on Ceylon I presume? Did you ever have fears that this Indian movement would spread to Ceylon?

F. What do you mean? The Satyagraha movement or what?

I. Well, there were a few terrorists in India and did you feel that the more extreme forms of ,...?

F. Oh no, no, we never thought that. The gada people you're referring to?

I. Yes.

F. Most of them were in California, the gada people, and they used to come back through Ceylon and when we knew that they were coming, we would look out for them and look after them and sort of shadow them ....

I. Apart from terrorist movement, did you ever fear that the Gandhi-ist mass movement - that sort of thing - would take hold in Ceylon?

F. No, no, we never thought that; no. They - there was no indication of any kind at all. I don't remember in Ceylon that it was likely to happen.

I. Was it a principle of police policy to consider foreign agitators coming to Ceylon - you know, any agitator who came a Communist and so on and so forth - as more dangerous than their local counterparts?

F. I don't think that other than Bracegirdle, that we ever had anyone other than a few well-known Indian political agitators; and they were well-known to everyone. I mean in India and elsewhere; we knew all about them and in India, of course, they kept very close watch on some of their political agitators of the ultra-subversive kind and if they came to Ceylon we were told about it and we would naturally keep - note who they were interested in meeting and so on. But other than that we didn't do anything.

I. Oh. One thing that strikes me about Stubbs is - from the Civil Service point of view, I think someone commented that he had a very sharp tongue. Was he quite a sharp man?

F. I didn't come across him enough to be able to say that.

I. Because if he was like that, he might have found it a bit difficult to get on with the Ministers.

F. Stubbs?

I. Hmmmm.

F. Stubbs was a man with a very quick and able brain and it might well have been that people who hadn't got as quick a brain as he had he was a bit quick with himself. You know people - when they are slow to react and you've got a very quick brain yourself its rather exasperating.

I. Governor Chalmers called him 'the perfect clerk', which was in a sense a detrimental remark.

F. Oh!

I. This I know from Stace's memoirs. And Stace was Private Secretary to Chalmers.

F. He was Colonial Secretary when I first came there.

I. No, no. Stubbs was Colonial Secretary, but Stace was Private Secretary to Chalmers.

F. Oh! Stace.

I. Yes.

F. Stace said that?

- I. Well, Chalmers told Stace. You know, just off-hand.
- F. Oh! Stace is not still alive, is he?
- I. He is.
- F. Is he!
- I. Hmmm. In America.
- F. Oh, is he. Didn't he marry umm ....
- I. The Beven girl, one of the Beven girls.
- F. ... one of the Beven girls. There were two Beven - two very beautiful Beven girls, weren't there?
- I. Hmmm.
- F. He married one of those?
- I. Yes.
- F. Yes ... I remember.
- I. Yes. He was in the Land Settlement Department.
- F. Yes, very clever chap, Stace. Academically clever, but I don't think he was a good officer from that point of view.
- I. Well, I don't think he claims that either. In fact, he is rather - he wonders how he landed himself there, I think, in his autobiography.
- F. Oh, he's written an autobiography.
- I. Well, in typescript, you know.
- F. Oh!
- I. Not very lengthy, just a short one.
- F. No, he wasn't - he was very academic - clever academically.
- I. Yes. What sort of man was Mr. C.V. Brayne? Have you met him?
- F. Brayne? Oh Brayne, Brayne [was] a very good linguist. He was very, he was very good on [sic] Tamil and he used to be - he was one of the Judges on the - at our Tamil exams. He used to adjudicate on the Tamil at the exams. I think he was a person who had a very good brain. Ha, ha. In spite of his name! I think ? as well as (?) ?? - he wasn't sort of outstanding personality. He hadn't got the sort of general push and presence and things like that which one needs for an outstanding job.



I. Another good linguist, I know, was Mr. Campbell.

F. Oh yes, 'W.H.K.'?

I. Yes.

F. He was he - I knew him ver well. He was known as Judge Campbell. He finally specialised in these Co-Operative Societies.

I. Yes. Do you happen to have any idea how successful these Societies were?

F. Well, I think probably these Societies were rather over the heads of the ordinary agricultural community of Ceylon. A bit advanced for them. I think that they - in principal, of course, they are good, but I think that he [was] probably a bit ahead of his time in doing that; in trying to institute them. I know afterwards, the Chinese Government got him [Campbell] to go out to China to advise them on thse Co-Operative Societies out there.

I. Oh, I see.

F. I subsequently met him when I was out in South Africa after I was retired, and I went out there and I met him in Durban. He came and had lunch with me in Durban. He was in Mauritius. He went all over the various places in the colonies in connection with these Co-Operative Societies. I think theoretically they're good, but I don't know to what extent practically they've been successful. I couldn't say.

I. Yes. Regarding the elections under the Donoughmore Commission, [sorry] Constitution, did you know that in certain areas the influence of Bus companies was crucial? You had to - the candidate had to win the co-operation of the bus company? Would you say that is correct?

F. Well, I should think it is highly probable. The bus people weren't magnates in (?) in those days. They were up to every form of subterfuge and, really, dishonesty and everything else to get the buses and things going. They had all kinds of tricks and things and they were a constant source of trouble to all of us.

I. Were there private feuds between rival magnates? Murders?

F. Oh, tremendous feuds. I remember one time - I can't remember ??? but I know one thing they used to do was, when these roads were very dusty and things like that, they used to get a bit of board and put nails in which came up through the board and put it in the pothole, so that when the bus tyre went over it, it punctured the whole tyre. In those days, of course, as (?) I was telling you, tyres - they couldn't be just patched like that; they had to be vulcanised and things like that. That caused endless trouble. Friction between - they had tremendous feuds between different bus people of the - the Panadure bus people - I've forgotten that man now ....

I. Rodrigo?

F. Who?

I. Rodrigo? - Dias?

F. No. I don't remember those names. Emmanuel? - I can't - I wasn't in that district but I remember that that Panadure Bus Company with the endless trouble ... cause of friction and trouble ....

I. Do you think that Government should have stepped in and had more regulations and, you know, more control? Do you think Government should have part of passed some legislation?

F. Beg your pardon?

I. Government should have passed some legislation to control these people?

F. Yes, undoubtedly, regulating the bus routes; the number that they were allowed on [sic] different areas and making fair competition between differnt people, instead of giving one man the monopoly to do this and that. That would have been certainly helpful; and it would have stopped a great deal of trouble which arose between the different bus companies and different disputes and fights and different things that went on.

I. Why didn't Government do anything?

F. Well, I couldn't tell you that - that was, ha, ha,.... I couldn't tell you to what extent they were pressed to do it. I don't know - I haven't - I wasn't in - concerned with - it was a provincial matter relating to the bus companies and I wasn't very concerned with that.

I. Just another off-beat subject. In the early 1920's some of these politicians were leading an attack on British land policy - well from the beginning of the century they were criticising British waste-lands policy, and there is some evidence to show that some of these politicians, not all of them but some of them, were themselves land speculators .... You see what I mean?

F. I see, yes.

I. ... who were being were hindered by Government's policies. Have you heard any stories to this effect?

F. No, no, I never heard anything in connection with that at all.

I. Oh, I just tried it out for ....

F. Yes, well, that isn't the type of thing that would ever come to my notice.

I. No. You might have - well, someone might have mentioned it in the Club?

F. No, no.

SWITCHED OFF

[The next section was recorded the next day in the course of a meal when the conversation turned round to something useful. I think the point at which this transcription commences pertains to the 1931 Constitution and the anomalous position policemen were placed in.]

F. Well, of course it affected us to a certain extent but we were - instead of being responsible to the Colonial Secretary - [no, to] the Inspector - General of Police, we were all divided up, you see. The Ministry of Home Affairs, we came under him; and so that anything which we required had to be mooted and done through the Home

F. Secretary. But it didn't really effect us in any way at all, the - we were quite happy with the change. As I say, I liked Sir Baron Jayatilaka and we worked very well together with him

I. But, after all, it was a British colony still and didn't it raise the head of divided loyalties? I mean, some of the Ministers themselves might do something which you disliked from the Imperial Government's point of view, and since you were a Britisher and a policeman and D.I.G., C.I.D., didn't you feel that there were two - in a sense, that you were faced with two loyalties?

F. No, I didn't feel that. I think we accepted that our loyalty was to the Home Minister. And we knew that there were certain things, for instance external Affairs, which affected the Chief Secretary, but as regards the Police a matter of external affairs was a very limited sphere and in my case you see there was only that one particular case the Bracegirdle case. But from the external affairs point of view we didn't - it didn't arise; and other than that there was no interference by the Home Secretary in our ordinary routine work; no attempt to make us do things which in fact we probably wouldn't have done if necessarily covered by the appropriate laws.

I. A rather leading question: in the Bracegirdle case, I was wondering whether there was a question of prestige involved?

F. No, none at all.

I. Because ....

F. No, it was purely subversive activities on his part which was causing great deal of labour unrest. Where none up to then had existed.

I. It was you who suggested that he be deported?

F. Yes.

I. The Colonial Secretary, I mean the Chief Secretary, he ....

F. No. It was my job as the D.I.G., C.I.D. to recommend a person for deportation if it was a question of subversion and I would put

all the facts and things together and discuss the case with the Attorney-General to ensure that I had all the necessary evidence and things like that and that, if then he agreed, then it would be put up before the appropriate authority, the Chief Secretary or the Minister of Home Affairs, for decision. That's what happened in this case.

I. When you went - after Jayatilaka asked you to take it to the Chief Secretary what did he say, the Chief Secretary?

F. I didn't take it to him, the Inspector-General of Police took it to him.

I. Oh, I see.

F. We were both together, the Inspector-General and I both went to see Sir Baron together.

I. I was wondering whether, apart from your recommendation, the Chief Secretary - well, he would naturally follow this recommendation - but I was wondering whether the planters had also written to him and ...?

F. No, I don't think the planters had anything whatever to do with it. They - I never heard that they had and as far as I was concerned there was certainly no question of anyone else other than I, myself, making a recommendation.

I. Did the Governor hear of it? I mean, did he know about the deportation order.

F. Oh, he made the order ....

I. Oh, I see.

F. ... on the advice of the Attorney-General and Chief Secretary. That was the trouble, you see; the other Ministers thought that Sir Baron - it was a matter for him to decide and that he was delegating some powers, which he ought to have retained, to the Chief Secretary. That was the - they were annoyed that powers which he ought to have exercised or which they, at any rate, thought that he ought to have had was being taken over by the Chief Secretary.

I. Have you any inkling whether the politicians, D.S. and others, knew that Baron was lying?

F. No, I couldn't say at all; whether they knew it or not.

I. Because, you see, in 1941, not very long afterwards, he was more or less kicked upstairs.

F. He was what?

I. More or less kicked upstairs.

F. Was he?

I. Yes. He was sent away to Delhi as Commissioner in the early 1940's and then D.S. became the acknowledged leader.

F. Oh, I didn't know that.

I. I was wondering ....

F. I wasn't there, I was away then.

I. ... No, but I was wondering ....

F. No. I wouldn't know that. No, I couldn't say whether they knew or not.

I. How long did Mr. Banks stay? Did he also resign? the I.G.P.?

F. Did he what?

I. Also resign?

F. No.

I. He stayed on?

F. He stayed on. He was there during the war years, early war years, and I think there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction with his I.G.ship. They wanted someone else.

I. The politicians?

F. Well, the Service. He didn't get on too well with the Service Chiefs and things like that; when we had these Government people. And they weren't very happy about it. And as a matter of fact that was when Sir Monck-Mason Moore was Governor, or - yes, the Governor-General ... and he was Governor and they were looking for someone else to replace Mr. Banks. And I didn't know it till later but after I saw Monck-Mason afterwards in Cape Town after he

F. retired and, he told me that he wanted me to take over the I.G. ship then but I was doing another job and they wouldn't release me.

I. What sort of man was Monck-Mason Moore?

F. Oh, he was very able; extremely able man.

I. I think he got on very well with the politicians?

F. He probably did.

I. Did you know him when he was in Ceylon earlier?

F. Oh yes, he was - I knew him very well in those days. He was - I can't remember what job - he was something in the Secretariat when I first went out.

SILENCE.

F. I should liked to have stayed on in Ceylon but I knew it was no good my doing so. I was very happy there. I liked working - I liked the Ceylonese people. I made friends amongst them. My only trouble was ill-health. I was a very sick man and I couldn't - I got very - when I was up in Jaffna, I got very ill - very bad dysentery and things and in those days there was no cure, of course, for these things and I, and I had that all the time I was out there. Various forms of ? dysenteries and malaria and one thing and another and I was a very sick man. They wanted to board me out of - the Colonial people wanted to board me out of the Service and I refused. I went back again and lasted (?) three years, but I lived on a terribly, terribly restricted diet.

I. Did you find that in your own relations with the Civil Service some of them were rather snobbish?

F. Some of them were rather ?

I. Snobbish.

F. No, I didn't.

I. No?

F. I never found that. You see, I was brought up myself in a very snobbish way.

I. Where?

F. Here, in England.

I. What were those ...?

F. You see, although we had no caste system, in this Country, particularly before the first World War, there was a very, very definite distinction between different classes, you see; most of it depending on your ancestry; how far back you go in your - can prove your ancestry back and how your, who you are related to and that kind of thing, and I happen to be related to quite a few people of distinction in the past centuries, you see?

I. Yes, I see.

F. And so I was rather brought up in a sort of snobbish way and that - I never found that anyone ... I was in a position to them to - rather to look up to me rather than the other way round. I never had to suffer like some of the people who did, as you were saying, even the English people suffer (?) from an inferiority complex. I always felt the other way round. I always felt like, what we describe in this country, as better bårn.

I. What school did you go to?

F. I went to a local school in Devon called Kelly(?) College. But it was a very stiff exam in those days to get into the Police. The examination then in those days was for the Indian Police, Colonial Police, Woolwich and Sandhurst. They were all the same exams. But tremendous competition, competitive exams and ...; even to go to Sandhurst, people used to go to coaches and things like that to get in. And the year I went there were only 20 vacancies for India and the Colonies and so You had to be one in twenty to get in and when the results came, I was twenty-one in the list. But two people failed their medicals at various steps and so I got the first of two places. There were only two places which were vacant in the Colonies in the year I was in, and I got the first of them, so I was very lucky.



I. Well, I was going to ask you about that, that was one of the things ....

F. Oh, I'll tell you all about that case, and ....

I. Well, I think I'll work it chronologically, and come to it later.

F. Yes, right-ho. And the other thing I was responsible for was the Kennedy, the big Kennedy case, the Times of Ceylon fire case. I've got all the details about it. You know, he blew up - the whole of the Times of Ceylon building was blown up, practically. This huge fire, by this Englishman called Kennedy. He had a boot shop ... It took me about a year to do that case, and it eventually went to the Privy Council, was all printed, and so on ....

I. Why did he blow it up?

F. He was in financial difficulties. He had his boot shop in the bottom. [He] soaked it all in petrol and set fire to it, you see. It was ostensibly a fire in the basement, you see; but in practice the petrol exploded, and the whole of the building was in a terrible state. And that case took me the best part of a year to do.

I. You couldn't pin it on him, could you?

F. Oh yes, he went to jail. He went for six years or so. But to do that I had to go to the University, I had to learn all about the explosives, and all the gas things and electric things, and umpteen different things I had to learn before I could question the expert witnesses. I had to prosecute the whole thing myself in the Police Court. And R.L. Pereira was defending that [case], and he afterwards told me - when I went back to Ceylon I met him - and he, on congratulating me on that case, said 'I couldn't have done it better myself'. Which I thought pretty good for R.L. to say.

I. I usually start from the beginning, so to speak. It's a pity that you weren't there in 1915 when these riots broke out. You came after that?

F. After the riots. I arrived just after the riots, yes.

I. But can you remember what the policemen were saying about these riots?

F. No, I can't say that the police had a great deal to say about the matter. I think that they felt that no undue force and things had been used to repel the riots, but if less force and less austere methods had been used it would have spread very much more than it actually did spread.

I. Yes, I see. No, I'm not only interested in that aspect but I was wondering what views they passed over to you as to the motives of the riots. Did they consider it an anti-British and anti-Government uprising?

F. No, it was nothing to do with the British at all. It was purely a local dispute between the Sinhalese and the Muslims.

I. You see, I'm asking this because Captain Northcoate, who was in military headquarters, wrote to the Government and said, 'There is strong evidence to show that this was a preconcerted uprising'; and then later on I heard an official, Bowes, Freddie Bowes<sup>1</sup>, he referred to it as an 'organised rebellion', and in the House of Commons, Bonar Law<sup>2</sup> called it - said it was 'premeditated', and implied that it was also anti-Government.

F. I never heard that it was in any way anti-Government, but [that] it was purely a racial matter between two different religious denominations, the Sinhalese Buddhists, and the Muslims Buddhists.

I. Well, that is very interesting that you heard this. That's of some value. What were your first impressions about [sic] the Ceylon Police when you went there?

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1. Principal Collector of Customs in 1915 and a member of the Executive Council. He retired in 1923. See typescript autobiography 'Bows and Arrows' in Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

2. Secretary of State for the Colonies.

F. Well, I thought from the start that they were very well organised, that they were smart, [that] they were well turned-out, and that generally speaking, even from the low ranks, lower ranks, that they were efficient. The training, I thought, was very good. When I started up in Jaffna, although I'd been the Senior Sergeant of my O.T.C. at public school in England, I had to go into the ranks and learn drill which they had, because you know, we were an armed force and there being no British regiment out there; we were entirely responsible for everything. And the fact that all those years we never needed any British troops to control anything, I think fully justified the fact that the police were armed and were trained as capable of dealing with riots. When I was there, there were one or two minor riots. There was one at Maradana, there was one at Kalutara, and they were certainly well controlled.

I. If I may say so in 1915 in Colombo, I don't think the police did very well, but it was because they were inexperienced; of course they had never had riots before.

F. Well, I can't say anything about those riots, I wasn't there. What I do know, is, as a result of those riots, Mr. Dowbiggin who is now Sir Herbert Dowbiggin, set about organising the police on a riot basis, and we had a weekly test and trial, and instruction on riot drill in every shape and form. And the detail we had to go into was very great. For instance, after a warning had been given, nothing could be done for two minutes, and we were so exact on that two minutes that people used to count the numbers and things to ensure that we had actually gone two minutes. If you wait for two minutes, you'll realise what a very long time it is. Most people think it's up long before it is, and we used to be found fault with if we gave any order before that two minutes was up. And the other point was that we were armed with the old 450 Martini Henry carbines which were single-loaded carbines, and the lead bullet on those, of course, is a very heavy bullet, and is likely to do a

F. tremendous amount of damage. And our instructions were that they had to aim at the knees. They were never allowed to fire in the air, or anywhere else, but the knees. And if any man didn't aim low at the knee - which was to stop the people from running, you see, that was the idea. If you'd got an unruly mob doing this and doing that, which, after they had been warned that they were an illegal assembly and all that kind of thing, and they were found looting and one thing and another, that they were not going to kill them, or cause more harm to them than possibly a broken leg, which I think was a very, very sound form of training.

I. As a technical point, this is speaking from a letter I have seen written by a chap who had some experience of these 1915 riots. Don't you think that before you use rifles, it would be good to have one of your chaps use shotguns?

F. No, I think a shotgun is a very, very bad thing to use against any person at all, because of the spread of the shot.

I. Yes, but you don't kill people.

F. Neither does the method which we were taught, to aim at the knees or legs.

I. Yes, but the ricochet could kill anybody. If they missed the knees, the ricochet ....

F. Oh yes, but after all, a person's leg is a few feet from the ground. To shoot people with a shotgun - at 30 yards the spread from a shotgun is, I think, something like 3 feet. Well, you may make a man blind, by letting one pellet get in his eye, or do other damage to him. You may break an artery with one pellet.

I. Possibly. But just one shot, you see, will hit several, and it will have far greater effect on the whole crowd than just a couple of bullets at knee height.

F. I don't agree, because it's a question of the noise. Those carbines that we had, they could only be loaded once. It wasn't a question of repeating a thing, or breaking it open and putting in

F. another couple of cartridges. I mean, two barrels, as you have on most shotguns; you'd only got one, and you had to quite a lot before you could re-load and put in another one. And the noise from those things was far greater than any shot gun. I've had a lot of experience in shooting, rifle shooting, and revolver shooting, and a shotgun .....

I. Yes, but the point about 1915 was that these [the rifles they used] made as much noise, but many of them were loaded with blanks, because at the start they were not firing to kill, and people were not stopped at all, because they thought that they wouldn't be hurt. Of course, if you hit them in the knees ....

F. It's an opinion, if you're going to shoot at all, you must shoot at a particular part of the person, which is least likely to cause him any permanent harm. You may break a leg, but it can be re-set, and so on. That must be done, and you must never give a false impression, and firing in the air ....

I. Yes, that's what they did in 1915 ....

F. Or firing over the heads of the crowd, and that kind of thing, it gives a completely false impression of what is going to happen. And one shot - we used to practice that, you see. We used to say one man fires one shot, you see. Or we'd have a volley, according to what the practice is, you see. Perhaps one shot, and a man's broken leg, and the people see that man's broken leg, or see him fall down with a broken leg. Other than that, as I say, you have a shotgun with shot in it; the man may be blinded, you may hit more people than the person you aimed at. So I am totally against any form of weapon which is likely to hit more than the one person you actually aim at. And to only hit a portion of that person where you actually aim, and not allow it to spread at all.

Turning to a wider question, apart from the riots. Did you feel that there were any shortcomings in the Ceylon Police?

F. Are you speaking from my experience of the whole time I was out there?

I. Yes, the whole time.

F. The whole time I was there. Well, I should say that the main difficulty was in ensuring that they were absolutely honest. One thing which I insisted on when I was in the C.I.D., was that we never bothered about the result of a case. We didn't mind if a man got convicted of a thing, was found guilty, or not. Our job was to put all the facts we could find before the Court, and for the Court to decide, and if the man was acquitted, well, it's too bad, we'd done our best. I had one particular case which, my teaching on that was very well brought out. We had one case of forged currency. A big gang of people were forging the 2 rupee notes. I went out myself on this thing. We watched these people for 6 months. A lot of them were merely distributors, and so on. We didn't bother much about them. We kept watch on them. I put my plain clothes people on, watching every movement of all these different people, find who their contacts were, and eventually we found out where the notes were being forged and all the rest of it, and I went out on that particular raid myself. And in the course of this particular case, one man I had put on [to] watch a particular boutique, he was called in Court to give evidence on what he'd seen, and so on. And the defence alleged that it couldn't have been seen from where he said it was. I thought, 'My goodness me, all my teaching has gone west. This man has just been giving me this information because he thinks it's going to please me'. And anyhow, the Court and the jurors went to the scene and they found that this man's evidence was absolutely correct, he could have seen everything he said he could see. Now, there was a case in point where, if he'd been lying or had just been getting evidence which he thought would please me because I was trying to get a conviction or something like that, that would have gone west. I found that in other cases. I was always very concerned that we should only produce absolutely true statements, whatever they were.

I. Yes, could you give me a picture of Sir Herbert Dowbiggin?  
I mean he is quite a famous figure.

F. Yes, I can, very much so. When I arrived in Ceylon, I was told that the Inspector-General was a very young man. He was only 30-odd when I arrived, and I stayed with him for the first few days, and the first thing he did was to more or less sum me up. He found out what I'd been doing, what my interests were, and that kind of things, and he took the greatest interest in learning all he could about each of his officers. He knew them, his gazetted - we were gazetted officers, our appointments were from the Secretary of State, as opposed to locally; - our promotions were from the Secretary of State - all his gazetted officers, he knew them backwards. He knew their ability, he knew their failings, he was able to pick that person for this particular job, or found that that person wasn't suitable for a particular job, and so on. From that point of view he was an absolute autocrat. He was greatly - to a certain extent - feared by his officers, because he was ruthless in certain ways provided .... If they were inefficient, or lazy, or something like that, he would put them on the mat straight away, and have no nonsense at all about it.

I. Was he a good judge of men?

F. He was a very, very good judge of men. And I was telling you that about gazetted officers; and what is more, he knew the inspectors and the sub-inspectors equally well, and as a result of that the transfers and things took this man or that man from one place to another. He would do that from his own knowledge of the people. And when he went round to different [stations] - inspecting things, it was a great thing for the officer in charge to know that to the Inspector-General, he was not just an inspector so and so, but he was to him, he was Inspector Wukremaratne or whatever his name was.

I. Would you say that when you first met him, when he was fairly young, in 1915 and 1916, did you consider him relatively immature and

I. impetuous, at that stage? A bit impetuous, if I may use that word?

F. To a certain extent he was impetuous. He was a tremendously hard worker. He'd work morning, noon and night, he never stopped working. He never spared himself a moment. And he expected everyone to do the same. And in practice we all did.

I. There must have been a certain amount of griping?

F. We never stopped working, morning, noon and night. Whether we were under supervision or not, it meant nothing to us. We had that instilled into us by his example. When you say 'impetuous', it's rather difficult to think of any particular thing which he was impetuous about. Some new idea or something like that which had been thought of and was being developed, it would be published in our gazettes and things of that kind, and he would expect everyone to know that. And we used to have a weekly instruction for all our men, and they were very, very well-informed. Every constable, and things like that, it was astonishing the information and things that he gave. He was very fair. He never found fault unless there was good reason for his being critical of them in any way.

I. He was a confirmed bachelor, was he? On the lighter side of things.

F. Well, I think that perhaps he was. I think he realised that if he was married it would interfere tremendously with his career.

I. There are some anecdotes about him and his - for instance, his visit to married quarters on his inspections, you see. And his habit of saying, 'Good show, good show'.

F. One thing he did was he always gave credit to a person who had thought of some new idea, whether constable, or whatever it was. He'd put it in orders, or in writing, that so and so had suggested that. He never attempted to take credit himself for something which even a constable, or anyone else, had ever suggested.

I. What about his political views?



F. Well, I don't think in practice that his political views ever entered into the matter at all. As policemen we were always taught that we had a law, the Sir Robert Peel code, the various regulations and so on; our duty was to enforce that irrespective of what any politician or anybody else wanted done.

I. Yes, that is true, I agree. But invariably, in various questions you have, one's bias, you see. And I have read an autobiography by Freddie Bowes. And I would class Freddie Bowes as rather of the old school. I was wondering whether Dowbiggin was rather conservative in his views, well, very conservative in his views?

F. I've never heard him discuss politics at all. He never used to discuss them, I don't think ever. In the Mess, or anywhere else. He never did. Individual officers - in the Government service, and so on - he would, he might say that a person was particularly good, or that he wasn't any good. But other than that I've never heard him discuss anything. The political situation, of course, was different when he was Inspector-General. The first start of political freedom was in 1931, I think, and I can't remember now exactly what date he retired ....

I. 1935 or '36 I should think.

F. Well, up to then, I don't think that he was critical at all, you see. There were no major matters, not like the Jayatilaka matter or anything like that had occurred during his regime. And I've never heard him [being] critical at all, or discuss any of the Ceylon Constitution[s], or the government officials at all; I mean the Ceylonese officials.

I. If I could jump to another sphere, what were your own impressions of the Civil Service proper? Of the Ceylon Civil Service?

F. I had a tremendously high opinion of the Ceylon Civil Service. In that, of course, I'm referring both to the European and to all nationalities of the Ceylonese. As you know, there were not only

F. Sinhalese and Tamils but there were Parsees and other people, and I had the greatest opinion of them. There were very few people I had criticism of at all, and I'm afraid one of those was in fact for dishonesty, and he went out. I reported the matter. He was a Judge, and he went out.

I. I'm bound to find out in time, so would it be ...?

F. Ha, ha. I don't think you will. No, I'm not giving his name; because the point is, I was responsible for him, and for his brother - his brother was in the Police, and I was responsible for his brother being discharged from the Police for dishonesty in various things, and later on I was responsible for the Civil Servant doing the same. [ sic ]

I. What was this particular case of dishonesty? What species of dishonesty?

F. Oh, bribery. The fact remains that those two brothers, in later years, when I was in the C.I.D., they used to come and give me all kinds of information. They bore me no ill-will of any description. They knew, of course, that I'd been responsible, in both cases, but they never bore me any ill-will at all, and I had great respect for them on that account, because they realised that I'd been perfectly honest and straightforward in what I'd done, and they realised too that well, they'd just been caught doing something they oughtn't do, and out they went, you see. But it was - I thought it was a tremendous feather in their cap that neither of them ever bore me any ill-will at all.

I. Regarding the Civil Servants in your time, would you like to single out any Civil Servants who struck you as being specially capable. You know, personalities.

F. Oh, that's a little difficult. I've met so many of them.

I. Fraser?

F. J.A. Fraser, the Government Agent, Western Province? No, I didn't know him really. It's a little difficult to think of them -

F. some of them were extremely efficient. I mean, Freddie Bowes, whom you mentioned before. He was really outstanding in many ways. I can't remember people's names ....

I. Well, it'll probably come back in time.

F. The man who was eventually Director of Education. He went into the ....

I. Sandeman?

F. No, he was a Civil Servant. Denham. He was, in certain ways, a bit of an actor. I remember that in one of the papers they said, 'elephants to ride upon, and bells wherever he goes; or something. He went into the jungle when he was Director of Education, or something like that, and went and saw all the little schools, something like that. But he was very able, was extremely able. Smith, who was Postmaster-General, he was extremely able. He, in fact, was in charge of the pearl fishery when I was there.

I. Woods?

F. He was a financial expert, but not a man who I'd say had a great deal of personality, and that kind of thing. He was very able, but not a person whom you'd look upon as a Governor, or something like that.

I. Yes, what about the Governors themselves. What did you think of Manning, for instance, or Thomson and Stanley?

F. Well, Manning, - oh, well, I was thinking of Anderson - Anderson came out to look into the question of the riots.

I. What did you think of his despatch on these riots, on these particular cases?

F. Well, I was a bit new then, and young, to have had, to have been able to express an opinion of, on what his views and things were. I think generally speaking, hearing people talk about it, I mean amongst my brother officers and things of that kind, they thought that he'd been a bit ill-informed over a good deal of it; that he was very drastic in his criticism, where in fact, if some stern action hadn't been taken, they'd have been very widespread.

I. Yes, but I've read his despatch, and it's not with regard to the stern action that he is critical, but with regard to, in fact, specific incidents which he discussed in detail, and in which he criticises three or four officers. They were not policemen, they were town guard, you know, volunteers. For the way they had interpreted their orders.

F. As I say, I haven't read his despatches, and I'm really not in a position to talk about it. All I can say is that what I heard as a very, very young officer.

I. Yes, but that is very useful, that sort of thing which you have heard. What about Manning and - of course, Clifford was a bit nutty when he was in Ceylon, wasn't he?

F. Clifford was the one Governor I never met personally. I think I met all the other ones, but I never met him. Manning was - I was still fairly young when Manning came, and our Inspector-General was very good when these Governors came. We used to have a dinner for - and invite the Governor to them, and every officer was taken up and presented to the Governor. The Governor had a few minutes talk with him, you see, which was very encouraging to the officers, and it also gave the Governor some idea of the officers who comprised the higher ranks of the police force. It was good in both ways. Another person who was outstanding in a way was E.B. Alexander; and Stubbs, of course. When I arrived, he was Colonial Secretary.

I. Yes, and later on he came as Governor. How did you find him as a Governor?

F. I found that he was very able indeed, and I thought he had a very shrewd and intimate knowledge, generally speaking, of governmental matters of all descriptions. I thought he was very good.

I. Wasn't he a bit of a Secretariat-wallah?

F. Well, I think he'd started off as Colonial Secretary and things, but I don't know to what extent. I wasn't so much concerned with his activities and thingslike that to be able to give an opinion on that.

I. And Stanley doesn't strike me as being a very forceful character. Sir Herbert Stanley?

F. No, I don't remember much about him. He didn't make any .... I didn't come across him very much.

I. Turning to another sphere. The early 1920's. Would you say that trade union activities were considered rather seditious? In the early 1920's were trade-union activities considered rather seditious?

F. That seditious activities were starting in 1920?

I. No, that the trade - you know, the trade-unions ....

F. Well now, there were one or two hot-heads. A.E. Goonesinha, and one or two people, I can't remember their names now, who definitely were, I think, rather, well not exactly seditious but they were undermining generally the good government which was being carried on. I think in practice, as in this country, that they had leaders, like A.E. Goonesinha, who rather exploited the people who didn't understand what it was all about, in order to build himself up.

I. In that case, it was not an objection to trade-unions per se, but to these particular chaps. Would that be correct?

F. No, I think that the underlings, the people who were members of the trade unions and so on, they were very subordinate and very under the thumb of the one or two people who were leading them

I. What did you think of A.E. Goonesinha himself?

F. Well, I'm afraid I had rather a poor opinion of A.E. Goonesinha.

I. Did you think he was an opportunist?

F. Yes, I think very much of an opportunist.

I. Was that the general opinion in ...?

F. Now may I ask this: is he still alive?

I. Oh, he is, but there are lots of files on him. I'm not sure whether he is alive. I think he is. Yes, he is.

F. You mustn't ask me to be critical of people who are still alive. It's unfair on them and unfair on me.

I. Because you see, he has changed his views. He's sobered down.

F. Yes, I can believe that. And I think that many of the politicians and people who at one time were very sort of hot on that particular branch of whatever it might be that they were interested in, have as a result of experience and maturity, and more self-government given to themselves, things have cooled down a tremendous lot. As a person the late Senanayake - I think they used to call him Jungle Joe - ....

I. Kalé John. [Jungle John].

F. I remember him when he was vey hot on local option on estates; that is, no coolies could get a drink on estates which, of course, was very stupid in a way, because whether you had local option or not, they still got drinks; it encouraged illicit sales, and people were having to pay more for something that they would ordinarily have. I'm not a prohibitionist in any shape or form. I drink very little, but I'm strongly opposed to any attempt at prohibition. It didn't work in America, and it didn't work in Ceylon. Well, I was in charge of Kegalla District when he was very hot on this local option, and causing a great deal of trouble on estates, and so on. And I met him in the resthouse at Kegalla one day, and I think he had a drink with me, you see. I said to him, 'Why are you doing this'. 'Oh', he said, 'We've got to do something, you know'. He really didn't believe in it himself, but it was just something which he felt was stirring things up and putting him on the map. But personally I liked him very much. I met him many times, although in fact he was once, I think, he was locked up during the riots, wasn't he?

I. Yes, but ....

F. I wasn't there at that time, but anyhow I was very friendly with him, I liked him very much. That's a case in point, you see, where he didn't really believe in what he was doing, but he was just working himself up into a particular position.

I. Did you find in the 1920's these politicians were interfering in your work; and making personal criticisms of police officers?

F. No, I didn't. No. The only case I ever had of that was much later. That was a case when I was in charge of Sabaragamuwa about 1923 or 4. There was a sub-inspector who was a relation of a rather hot-head politician. From our point of view and from the Government's point of view, the British Government's point of view, he was a bit subversive. Anyhow, he was a Member of Parliament, and this particular sub-inspector was some very close relation of his, and I found that this man had made a completely false report in connection with a murder case, you see, and I got him reduced. Well, he, as a Member of Parliament, and as a relation of this man, did everything he possibly could to get this man reinstated. But I had much too strong a case and he couldn't do it. But that was the only case that I ever remember of any politician ever interfering at all.

I. I asked because the Civil Servants proper found that they were criticised personally in Council, or that the newspapers attacked them, or that politicians in their area went above their heads to the Governor or the Colonial Secretary, and I was wondering whether you as a policeman found this so?

F. No, I never found it at all.

I. But did you know that this was happening to some of the Civil Servants?

F. No, I never heard of any such thing.

I. Returning to this seditious fear. When it came to trade-union - any seditious activity and a chap was suspect of being a subversive type, was it the practice of the police to watch their correspondence and the foreign mail. I presume the C.I.D. would have done this.

F. The position of correspondence was exactly the same as it is in this country. You couldn't look at any correspondence at all unless you got the Home Office warrant. And as far as I know, no such thing was ever obtained until after 1931, when the Ceylonese ministers were in charge of the different departments. After that there were one or two cases where we got what was the equivalent to a Home Office warrant . But they were very rare.

I. If it occurred before 1931, it would have to be through the Colonial Secretary, I presume?

F. I think I could say definitely that it didn't occur before.<sup>1</sup>

I. That's very helpful, thank you. Oh yes, the Donoughmore Constitution: What was your individual , what was your own reaction to this at the time? The changes?

F. The changes in the Constitution? I thought that in practice it was something which had got to come. I didn't request it in any shape or form, because I had the greatest admiration for many of the Ceylonese Civil Servants, and a certain amount for the others. Naturally you had to adjust yourself to something which was entirely different, and I personally didn't have much difficulty in doing it. I knew so many of the people. I'd known them since their younger days, they'd been out there for so long. In my particular job, particularly later on, as D.I.G., C.I.D., you see, I got to know so many of them. I was on many Home Office Committees, and I was involved in so many different cases with the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, all sort of people, you see, that I got to know them very well, and I had no difficulty at all. I think they had a certain amount of confidence in me, and as long as they had that, everything seemed to work alright.

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1. In the early and mid 1920's the police intercepted A.E. Goonesinha mail authority: Dr. (Mrs.) K. Jayawardena who has recently written a thesis on the urban trade-union movement of Ceylon. I was aware of this fact before this interview. Mr. Ferguson was junior at the time and is probably misinformed.



I. What did you think of the grant of universal franchise?

F. I was not very keen on that. This question of universal franchise: I think it's a very, very difficult question; because I think that - perhaps not so much in Ceylon, but in other colonies - because, if you get down to it, you'll find that many villagers and people like that haven't the least idea what it's all about at all. They know a certain individual who is going to be in the State Council, or is going to be doing something or another, and they say, 'Oh yes, we like him', and they vote for him, you see. Whether they know what his policy is or don't know what his policy is, or agree with his policy or disagree with it is a different matter, you see. They go more on the individual than they do on the individual's policy.

I. Well, isn't there something to be said for that?

F. There's something to be said for it and something to be said against it. It depends on certain individuals, you see. There are certain individuals who are people of great personality, and there are people who mix a lot with their constituents and help them one way and another. Whatever party they belong to it's a good thing. But on the other hand they may be red hot Communists, which I strongly disagree with.

I. Yes; but also these villagers, didn't they sometimes have a certain amount of horse sense?

F. The Sinhalese villagers that I met, I think they were really - except those in the towns and things - very, very few of them had the slightest inkling of governmental matters at all, or who was in power, or what a particular party represented and so on. Unless say, in their particular village they had a branch of the Sama Samaja party, or something of that kind. Unless there was one particular person who would get up and talk to them, and I think the Sinhalese were extremely good actors and speakers. Any person could get up in a village and act and talk for hours on end. No Englishman could do it.

I. Have you any comments to make on the elections and the electioneering methods under this Constitution? 1931 and '35/36?

F. Well, I think that the method was very good. It was very fair, and there was no question of a form of dishonesty or anything like that creeping in. As long as a person was entitled to vote, there was no-one who could sort of influence him to do it other than the way he wanted to or the way he'd been taught to do it.

I. Didn't the colours influence people? The different colours? Certain colours were popular?

F. This was the whole point, you see. Like in Africa they have a cow or they have a giraffe, or have something else, and they say - or a motor car - and say, 'Would you like a motor car'; 'You vote for a motor car', you see. They all think they're going to get motor cars. Well, that's happened in Africa. In Ceylon the people are very much more educated. I think a ninth of the whole revenue went on education. They're very well educated. And so I don't think to that extent things went on. But as I say, the villager, he really wasn't interested. Someone said they'd got to go along to a polling booth and vote for this or that, and so on, and very few - I should say a minority of them knew what it was all about.

I. But wasn't it only by chucking them into the water that they could swim? Wasn't it only by pushing them into the water that they could learn to swim? Politically speaking.

F. You'd teach them this to a certain extent, but I think you've got to go lower down the rung to teach them. You're getting at the top of the ladder. In teaching - when they do the voting, it's much lower down that you want to do it.

I. What about impersonation at these elections: was there too much impersonation?

F. I think very little indeed. I think that the point was that people knew each other so well. And that was so throughout every-

F. where, you see. You had your very intricate headman system. You had the R.M. and the Korale and the various headmen of different (?) and so on, and right the way down they knew who the people were, and what they were.

I. What did you think of this headman system?

F. I think it's a very good system. I think the village courts are a very sound system.

I. Did the headmen help you in your police work?

F. Generally speaking, they helped us very much indeed; and we encouraged very close contact with the headmen. The police always had to go and see the village headmen when they went there, and we on inspections, we used to collect the village headmen of a particular police station area, and talk to them, and so on.

I. Weren't some of them corrupt, or when it came to such matters, didn't some of them favour their family or family members and turn a blind eye to their misdoings?

F. Well, those were the sort of things that we didn't come in contact with. That was something which was in the knowledge of the village and the lower - and the people on the spot, more than the people at headquarters.

I. Up at the top ....

F. Undoubtedly that happened. But wherever you have a caste system, you always have this question of nepotism of people of an outside caste not being allowed to do this and that and so on. If a man happens to be a galagama, a goigama won't have anything to do with him, and so on.

I. Coming back to the Donoughmore Constitution: did you ever happen to sit on any of these Executives Committees? Did you attend any of these Executive Committee meetings?

F. No, I was too junior.

I. Did you happen to know whether Jayatilaka was ever able to handle his Executive Committee? Jayatilaka, the Minister of Home Affairs. Did he control his Committee?

F. Oh, I was on many of his committees. On prison reform, government analyst's reform, and various other committees. He was good as head of his committees and I think, generally speaking, he was very popular. We liked him. I personally liked him very much, until this case of dishonesty for political reasons. That was a shocking case. That ultimately resulted in my resigning. From that matter I was completely exonerated, but I knew perfectly well that it was on my evidence, on my records and different things, that they [the British officials concerned] all got off, for forgery, and cheating and all the different things we'd been charged with, and I knew very well that they'd [the Ceylonese politicians] be out for my blood, and so when I was home on leave I resigned. I couldn't go on working under those ....

I. Before coming to that, have you any idea how the three Officers-of-State - you know, [those] created by this Constitution - how they got on with these Ministers?

F. No, I couldn't tell you that. That was completely outside my sphere. I never heard of any difficulty in the matter. I think they all worked together, as far as I knew, perfectly happily, but I don't ....

I. I am following the evidence - I mean, this is what modern writers have written about the working of this Constitution - some of them have said, and I think Jennings also implied, that earlier on, in the early 1930's, the Officers-of-State and the Ministers didn't always hit it off?

F. Ah well, you must admit, that where you have a complete change-over of anything that you almost invariably have teething troubles, what we call teething troubles. And I've no doubt that in those very early days there were teething troubles.

I. Yes. What sort of man was Sir Graem Tyrrell?

F. Well, personally he was an extremely nice man. But I shouldn't have said that he had all that amount of brain. He was a very

charming man, and had great personal charm and things. I personally didn't come across him from an official point of view very much, But he never struck me as being a person of outstanding brain.

I. I know that his predecessor, Sir Murchiston Fletcher, was not very popular in the Civil Service.

F. No, I don't think he was.

I. Do you know why?

F. One thing was that Sir Graeme Tyrrell had started in the Ceylon Civil Service as a young man, and he'd grown up with it. He knew all the British people who'd come while he was there, and the Ceylonese people as well, and so he was in rather a different position to Sir Murchiston Fletcher, for Fletcher came as a stranger, and he didn't know all the Ceylonese people he had to work with, and he knew very few of the - he had to learn to get to know the Europeans. It was a rather difficult job. It was much easier to grow up with an organisation and to know the people.

I. What about Bourdillon? He also was from outside, wasn't he?

F. Now he too came from the outside. I think he was in one of the African colonies, Kenya or somewhere. I don't think we had a very high opinion of him either; though of course you don't know; you may be ultra-critical of people because you don't know them, you haven't been brought up with them. When I say brought up, I mean served with them all the time.

I. Yes, but of course Wedderburn was a real C.C.S. man, wasn't he?

F. Yes.

I. But again from what Jennings said, I don't think he got on very well; but of course, the Bracegirdle affair rather strained relations, didn't it?

F. Which man?

I. Wedderburn.

F. Ah, well, he was in trouble with [sic] the Jayatila business,

F. and he perhaps made some rather unfortunate or restrictive replies in connection with the Jayatila matter and that caused some difficulty in the State Council.

I. Apart from that, I was wondering whether he was of a very much older generation and hadn't quite adapted himself to these changes?

F. No, I don't think that. No, I think it wasn't a question of that, it just was that he wasn't a man of very great personality and ability.

I. Oh, I see, he didn't have any drive?

F. I shouldn't have thought so. Now, [look] ..., you're asking me ....

I. I know he was a very good L.S.O. - you know, a hand settlement Officer - and that he did very good work there, and he knew the villagers quite well.

F. That's the thing, you see. He was - as I say, he'd grown up in the Civil Service, and for certain jobs undoubtedly he was very good indeed. But people may be extremely good in certain positions, but when you put them into position of having to answer questions in a State Council, and things of that kind, they're naturally perhaps a bit nervous, or something of that nature. They aren't adaptable for that kind of thing.

I. Yes. Now to come to this famous Bracegirdle case. What exactly happened? Because I don't know all the details, I have the barest facts.

F. Well, the facts are these. Bracegirdle was a Communist, and he was, I think, probably a member of the Communist party, and he was sent really by them - I think he was sent out to Australia, and was helped to go out there. And from there I think he came to Ceylon. He was appointed on a tea estate.

I. You think he was acting under orders all this while?

F. I think he was, I don't know; there was no proof, ....

I. It's just an assumption.

F. ... but from his actions I should say yes. He was an Assistant Superintendent on a tea estate, and he started stirring up labour, not only on the estate he was on, but on other estates. The labour, as far as one knew from the planters and I knew from serving in districts where estate labour was employed, that there wasn't any real difficulty with the labour at all. He started stirring them up, obviously causing trouble, and to such an extent that he was disrupting the whole economy of the country, which was dependent on the tea and rubber industry. And so it came to the state where we wanted him deported because of the trouble he was stirring up; strikes and things like that, which were quite unjustified.

I. There were a series of strikes, were there?

F. Well, I think so, I can't remember the detail now. Anyhow, the position was that I had a lot of information of his activities, and I kept track of them, and eventually I consulted the Attorney-General.

I. Who was that?

F. I think probably Illangakoon. And we decided that it was possible for him to be deported by the Governor under an Order-in-Council. The Order-in-Council was one which had been enacted during the war, and in most colonies it had been recinded on the termination of war. In Ceylon it hadn't been recinded. I think partly because we had Indian terrorists and things used to come through Ceylon - you know the Gada (?) party people - and they were real terrorists and people. And so we had to have some law which enabled us to take action on people of that kind; and so in Ceylon it wasn't recinded. And so the Attorney-General agreed that we had sufficient evidence to justify his being deported. I was the D.I.G. then, and I went with the Inspector-General, who was then Mr. Banks, with all the details of the case to Sir Baron. We both went to his

F. office which was next door to mine in the same building. And we told him all about the activities, and what we thought about them, and so on, and that it was a question of deportation. To get this order, and that the Attorney-General had backed it and so on, you see. And so he said, 'Well, I'm just off to England for the Coronation, and this is bound to create a lot of political trouble in the State Council and so on. I don't want to become involved in that. And I would like you to treat it as a matter of external affairs.' Well, external affairs was the Colonial Secretary. And so we both went away. Unfortunately, he saw all the paper which was addressed to him, but he didn't initial it at all, just handed it back. I was there you see, we two were there. He just handed this report and things back to Mr. Banks. I think that was a report which I'd drawn up, you see. Just handed it back, and said, 'I would like the - you can deal with it as a matter of external affairs. Let the Chief Secretary deal with it, you see, the Governor'. So we took it back, and it went to the Chief Secretary, who was Wedderburn, and the Governor. And the Governor issued this deportation order, and he was to go within a fortnight or whatever it was, you see. In the meantime some of the Sama Samajists got hold of him and hid him.

I. Oh, I thought you got hold of him?

F. Hmm?

I. ... and he escaped from your hands?

F. No, no, we never got hold of him; they hid him.

I. Oh, I see.

F. They hid him for a long time. And we couldn't find him.

I. How did they know that you were ...?

F. Oh, but we issued this, I think we, we served this order on him, you see.

I. Yes, but ....

F. We served this order; he hadn't been hidden until the order was served.



I. Yes, but why didn't you see him on board ship? You know what I mean, bundle him on board ship.

F. Oh, you see, he was given so many, so long. It's not a question of saying here's your order, out you go today.

I. Yes, I see.

F. He was given time to pack up and all that kind of thing, you see. He was given reasonable time to quit, you see. Well, in the meantime, the Sama Samajists got hold of him - I don't know whom; it must have been N.M. Perera or something like that - got hold of him and they hid him and when the time was up we couldn't find him and then the, of course that was then public property that this order had been issued by the Governor. And when some of the other Ministers' heard that the Governor had issued the order, they were furious, because they said this is a matter for the Home Affairs, and not the Governor, and they thought the Minister of Home Affairs had been ....

I. Away?

F. No, just handing over some functions which should be his, handing them back to the Governor. So they sent the telegram to Sir Baron, who was in England, and asked him about this, 'Why did you do this?' 'Why didn't you take action?' you see, and he replied, 'I know nothing about this, I've never been consulted'.

I. Which was a direct lie?

F. Which was a complete lie. Then the matter was then debated in the State Council and so on, you see; and then, I've forgotten how it came about, but Bracegirdle was traced, or he came out, and then a writ of Habeas Corpus was issued on me to produce the body of Bracegirdle and we had this Writ of Habeas Corpus - they had never had one in the living history in [sic] Ceylon - and so we had the Chief Justice who was Solomon Abrahams and I've forgotten who the other was, Mr. Justice Sampayo or someone else, three judges, who sat on this case of Habeas Corpus.

I. Didn't they declare the deportation order ultra vires?

F. Hmmm?

I. Didn't they decide that the deportation order was ultra vires?

F. Yes, I was just going to tell you. They then had this Writ of Habeas Corpus in the Supreme Court case and they decided that this, that this Writ was ultra vires because they said this Order-in-Council should have been repealed and, in fact, wasn't valid. Of course, that was a cause celebre, because no Chief Justice had ever gone against the Governor before, and tremendous acclamation for the Chief Justice and all the rest of it, you see. But then in the meantime Sir Baron came back. And he demanded the Inspector General's dismissal, for acting in an unconstitutional way, for lying and goodness knows what. And I, of course, was one of the people, the Chief Secretary, Mr. Wedderburn, and Mr. Wodeman, Deputy Chief Secretary, we were all on the mat. In the meantime, just before Sir Baron came back - Batuwantudawe was acting for him - Batuwantudawe came in to see me, ? ? ? ? and he asked me all about the whole thing, you see, and I told him the whole history of the whole thing, you see. I handed him my file, he's entitled to see all my files, you see. I gave it to him. I wrapped it up in paper and he took it with him. He then went into the State Council Chamber and he was asked about this thing. He said he knew nothing about the matter at all; he'd never been - he had no knowledge of the thing. [As a matter of fact], he'd got my file with him in the State Council Chamber and ....

I. Was he consulted - was he there when you visited Baron earlier?

F. Oh no, he wasn't. He came, as I say, he came when Sir Baron was still away; he came and asked me about the case, and I told him about the case and I handed him my file ....

I. Oh, this was before the contretemps had developed?

F. Before Sir Baron came back.

I. Yes.

F. I handed him my file. This you say you want for the State Council Chamber. He took it there, he took my file and when asked in the State Council, he said he'd never been told anything about it ....

I. Whereas he'd been told earlier.

F. ... he'd got all my papers and had only consulted me a few minutes before. Well, anyhow ....

I. But he may have been referring to the period immediately after Baron left and before you had given him the file. You see what I mean? You had just given him the file. He may have been referring to the earlier period?

F. No, no, no, he was, I don't think, you see that wouldn't have arisen, because he wouldn't have been in charge of the Home Office, because Mr. Baron was in charge then.

I. Yes.

F. No, I think that there was no question that it was a deliberate lie on his part. Anyhow, then there was this trial. We had all the - R.L. Pereira and a very leading K.C., what's his name? not De Kretser, I've forgotten what his name was now, some leading, very leading K.C. and all the leading lawyers were appearing for the Ministers. And it was really the Ministers against the British Government Officials; that's what it turned out to be in this trial, in the State Council Chamber. Well, they had all my file, which they were entitled to have, and they had various reports which they had to obtain from the Secretariat on this thing, and one of these reports which had been prepared by one of the Office Assistants on the whole case had corrections in it. That was because when they were preparing this report I had - they'd asked me to come along and I had pointed out different things which were incorrect, you see, and so they'd amended it. But anyhow, my own personal file which I'd got was in addition to the official file, which [the personal file?] I kept in the

F. most minutest detail in notes of my own, you see. Well, they said this was all forgery and one thing and another, you see. And they got big enlargements and goodness knows what of all this, and I was the first witness to be called. I was three days in that witness box being badgered right and left by all the leading counsel in Ceylon. It was the most exacting thing I've ever had to undergo. And at the end of my evidence they scrapped all this question of forgery and all the rest of it, you see. And as you know the whole trial went on for 6 months. In the meantime Sir Baron reported sick (laugh) and eventually they found that he was the person who was telling lies and, of course, everyone thought that as he was virtually Prime Minister as well he'd resign. But in practice he said, 'There's nothing in the Orders-in-Council which requires me to resign in such a case and I don't intend to resign'. Well, I knew that it was on my evidence that all this - they'd got all this, and that if I was working directly under him, under his ..., and Batuwantudawe, his Deputy, that they'd be out my blood, and so ....

I. What sort of man was Batuwandawe?

F. Hmmm?

I. What sort of man was he in ability?

F. In ability? I shouldn't say very much. No, I don't think very much. No, I shouldn't have thought he was very able. Sir Baron I liked; he was a very nice man. I got on with him well, except for this particular thing. I say I was on many Committees, I went to see him on many occasions about one thing and another, I got on very well indeed with him and I liked him very much,

I. I'm not taking up the Jayatilaka episode but taking the Bracegirdle affair and looking at it, well, if I may say, put the other side, don't you think your failure to carry out this order of deportation gave these speeches and so on and so forth a greater weight than he would have had in normal times? You see what I mean.

I. After he went into hiding and after he then became a cause celebre and his - when he did speak ....

F. If the Order-in-Council had been one which required him to leave the colony within 24 hours, all that wouldn't have happened. It was the fact that there was latitude given to him to pack up and go out and that type of thing that enabled people to exploit the position from the political point of view.

I. Looking at his - at what he was doing on the estates, unless you can prove that he was acting under orders from outside, I have a feeling that you are exaggerating his influence and the effect he had on the tea and rubber industry; at the most he could influence a few estates.

F. I haven't quite got that.

I. You see, I think it could be said, it could be argued that it is an exaggeration to say that he was bringing the economy to its knees.

F. Well, you see, if you stir up labour troubles on a number of estates and it is a matter which grows from one place to another, you are effecting a large area of the country. For instance, there was - some years before there was someone who was talking about five-headed cobra and the - this was something that the estate coolies went for miles from one estate to another because of this five-headed cobra, which was alleged had been seen somewhere or another. They were so influenced by this statement, which in fact was a complete fabrication on someone's part, that they were all influenced and they weren't working. They didn't go to work; they wanted to go and see about this five-headed cobra. And you see, they are influenced to such an extent that they - that one or two capable organisers amongst them can influence a labour force of several thousands or hundreds ....

I. But the fact is ....

F. ...and that spreads from one estate to another.

I. Yes, but the fact is that the estate labour had no trade unions and, therefore, anybody had the right to say that these people should have trade unions; that they needed to have trade unions. And in saying that he was not being subversive.

F. Well, I think it was a little bit more than just saying, to try and order trade unions amongst them. I can't - I mean it's a long time ago, I can't remember the full facts of the case, but it was certainly more than that. It wasn't a question of trade unions, but a question of organising strikes more than disrupting labour forces more than causing trade unions; and the fact remains that the disruption of matters which are - which effect the economy of the country is one of the Communist systems of carrying out this.

I. I don't say that Bracegirdle was necessarily right or that his motives were altruistic. I doubt it. But I was wondering whether one should look at the question from another way and think, perhaps - after all a strike is a legitimate weapon .... Would you go so far as to say that in certain circumstances a strike is a legitimate weapon?

F. That a strike is a what?

I. In certain circumstances, ....

F. Yes.

I. ... a strike can be quite a legitimate instrument of pressure?

F. Oh yes, oh yes. Definitely.

I. Of course, I don't know the specific circumstances here, so I was wondering whether in these cases there was some genuine grievance?

F. I should have said that there wasn't any legitimate grievance. I don't think - I think you're right in saying that at that time there were no trade unions, but in spite of that the fact remains that on most estates the, a tremendous amount was done by Superintendents of the estates for the welfare and happiness of

F. their labour. I mean the schools that they had; there was no legislation that required them to have these different things; the dispensaries that they had .... They had a certain amount of welfare, pre-natal welfare and things like that, and apart from that it wasn't a question of one person ordering three or four hundred people to do this or do that. They knew each individual. They knew them by name.

I. Yes, I see.

F. And many of them were people who'd been, whose, even grandparents had been on the same estate for all those years. And they never had any trouble or complaints, you see. The thing which was bad on estates which was eliminated by law was the tundu [chit] system, where the kangany had complete control over a certain number of people, and if a man absconded and didn't pay him up [sic] he could be arrested, you see.

I. Who could?

F. Mmmm?

I. Who could be arrested?

F. The coolie who absconded. And the curtailment and actual elimination, the complete [elimination] of the tundu system. That was a tremendous step forward in the ....

I. A step forward in what way?

F. ... welfare of the coolies.

I. In what specific way?

F. Well, it made them free, free of the very strict control which these kanganies had over these people.

I. You're saying, 'kanganies'; but when you come to look at it the kangany was the agent in many ways of the planter?

F. No. He wasn't the agent of the planter. What happened was it was a pernicious system. A kangany, perhaps, would go over to India and collect say ... 20 coolies and they would all have no money at all, and so he would advance each of them, say, 20 or 30 rupees each ....

I. But didn't he get this advance from the planters?

F. Hmmm?

I. Didn't he get this advance from the planters?

F. No, no, no, he didn't.

I. Well, certainly in the nineteenth century he did.

F. Well, what happened was this, you see: he would go over there and collect these coolies and as a result those people were under an obligation to him and if they wanted any more money he always lent it and so the coolies became more - instead of being worth to him 30 rupees, he'd be worth 300 rupees and so on, you see. And a kangany would have under his control, [say] twenty coolies. Well, to get those coolies from one place to another, one estate to another, the estate would (?) tempt (?) from one place to another, would have to pay the debt which that man owed to enable him to come across.

I. Yes, I see.

F. That was known as the tundu system.

I. Yes, I know something about that.

F. And that was - of course, he got into an enormous figure. In one case ....

I. Was it the kangany or was it the planter who took out - who tried to arrest - I mean took out an order against absconding coolies?

F. Oh no, it was the law of the land.

I. Yes, it was the law, but who was the chap who ...?

F. No, the Police.

I. The Police arrested them but ...?

F. The Police had to arrest ....

I. On behalf of the planter or kangany?

F. No, because the man had committed an offence against the law of the land.

I. Oh, I see.



F. Irrespective of who the planter was - didn't - or the kangany, didn't matter tu'pence. The fact remained that the man had absconded from a certain place, and therefore, he had committed an offence against the law of the land and so he was tried in court.

I. Returning to the Bracegirdle affair; did planters - it was the planter who brought his activities to your attention?

F. One planter did certainly. And that particular private letter to me was also in the file which Batuwantudawe had, and from my point of view someone had given me information and I was naturally very loath to allow anyone else to see that, because this is confidential to me, you see.

I. Apart from that did the Planters' Association and other planters and Europeans bring pressure, at least not pressure, did they bring any form of - well, I could use the word 'pressure' I suppose - to bear on you to get him deported? Did they suggest it?

F. No, I was entirely responsible. On the information which I had collected and from the various police people and so on, who I'd put on to obtain information.

I. Yes, I see.

F. No, there was no pressure from any source or anyone ever suggested to me. It entirely my own idea.

I. Oh, I see, thank you very much for telling me that. Well, I think the Bracegirdle affair is about exhausted.

F. I think it is.

I. What about the Marxists, what was your policy - this is coming now ... - the Marxists who were coming [up]. You know N.M.

[Perera] and Colvin R. De Silva?

F. The which?

I. The Marxist Party. The Sama Samajists?

F. Oh, we knew ....

I. Who they were?

F. ... some of the people. We knew that at any rate, two of them had obtained false passports and they'd been trained in Moscow.

I. That's - well, it would be S.A. Wickremesinghe.

F. Well, people are still alive. I'm not giving names at all.

I. Well, I don't think they are ashamed of being Communists at all.

F. The two I'm thinking of were definitely trained as Communists in Moscow.

I. Oh, I see.

F. In practice, I said, in this particular case of deportation that I didn't think the Sama Samajists ....

In reply to a point made by me regarding the I.G.P. Banks, he said: 'We all knew he was extravagant.' I gathered that he did not think very highly of Banks. Certainly he felt that Banks was 'not a patch on' Sir Herbert Dowbiggin; as he added, it is difficult to follow and act under the shadow of an outstanding personality.

In reply to a question whether the politicians suffered from an inferiority complex which led to aggressiveness, he said that the Ministers were fairly able but fought shy of accepting responsibility. 'A case in point' was Jayatilaka and the Bracegirdle affair. Among Ceylonese there was some 'nervousness' about accepting responsibility. He felt this applies to Civil Servants, Ministers and Police Officers alike and was 'the major criticism' he would make about them - their one 'big weakness'. There were several exceptions of course and, on the other hand, one found several British G.A's who were regarded as 'weak' and not good at accepting responsibility. But 'initially' this was 'generally so' among the Ceylonese. In reply to further questions, he felt that this was a major reason for not appointing Ceylonese G.A's.

In reply to a query as to whether some of the Ceylon Civil Servants were stuffy and wont to stand on their dignity, he replied that British rule was not based on force but on prestige and a respect for their authority. Hence prestige was an important thing and something they sought to maintain.

\* This is a retyped version. It was originally typed in elite and copies in London and Oxford are in that form.