VICTOR L. WIRASINHA

Career

Comments on

Interview One 52 pp

VICTOR LLOYD WIRASINHA, M.B.E.

b. 15 April 1913,
B.A.(Hons.) London,
C.C.S. 1936 - 1966(?).

3 Jan.	1936	apptd. by the Governor and attached to Ratnapura Kachcheri.
27 March	1936	attached to Badulla Kachcheri.
1 Aug.	1936	Additional P.M., Badulla as well.
26 Oct.	1936	attached to Jaffna Kachcheri.
30 Nov.	1936	Additional P.M., Jaffna Kayts and Mallakam as well.
31 March	1937	Acting O.A., Hambantota Kachcheri.
15 Feb.	1939	O.A., Nuwara Eliya.
12 July	1939	O.A., Mannar and Varuniya, Additional D.J., P.M. and Com'er of Requests for Mannar and Mullaitivu Districts.
3 Jan.	1940	A.G.A., Batticaloa.
27 April	1943	A.G.A., (Emergency) Pelmadulla.
7 Aug.	1943	Asst. Com'er, Dept. of Ceylon Govt. Supplies in India.
22 Aug.	1946	Asst. Director of Food Supplies.
11 Dec.	1946	A.G.A., Matale.
7 Oct.	1948	A.G.A., Kegalla.
1 June	1949	attached to the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development.
5 Aug.	1949	Com'er for the Registration of Indian and Pakistani Residents under the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act, No. 3 of 1949.
20 Sept.	1949	Acting Com'er of Parliamentary Elections as well
19 July	1954	On leave.
29 Oct.	1954	Com'er of National Housing.
21 July	1956	Director of Commerce and Controller of Imports and Exports.
11 Oct. to 8 April	1957 1958	Acting Perm. Sec. to the Ministry of Commerce & Trade as well.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. V.L. WIRASINHA

24 April 1967.

I. I think I asked you this before but just for the record I was wondering what subjects you did at the university? Science was it?

W. No, I did Classics.

I. Classics. Well, that was a bit unusual for the time among the Ceylonese wasn't it, because many people had done maths?

W. Well, I did maths for the Inter.

I. Oh, I see. And then you switched to ...?

W. I had done classics at school of course.

I. Of course, many of the Europeans were classicists, weren't they? A good proportion of them?

W. Yes. Yes, a good proportion of them were.

I. Do you think Classics provides a useful discipline?

W. Oh, very much so.

I. And does it, usually, have a sort of influence on your attitudes, on your work? Does it provide a sort of useful background?

W. It does. It does for this reason that Classics is ... For example, if you think of classical history, the problems that faced the classical world, politicians and statesmen of the classical world, their thought on general problems of politics and statecraft. All that kind of thing provides you with background.

I. If I may ask a question purely in relation to sociological approach[sic], from what school did you enter University College and then London?

W. I was at Richmond throughout.

I. Richmond, Galle? Oh, I'm from Galle but ...

W. Yes, I know.

I. My sister went to Richmond but I went to Aloysius.

W. Sister went to Richmond?

I. My sister went from Southlands to the Richmond H.S.C. form.

W. Oh, I see. That's the sister who's married to Sydney?

I. No, not that one. The one who's married to C.H. Fernando. She used to do life-saving with the Richmond College boys, ha-ha-ha.

W. I see. I know your sister of course. She was at Southlands throughout, wasn't she? The one who's married to Sydney.

I. Yes, that's right. Dodo. But would you say that your background was, nevertheless, Western and urban?

W. Yes, it was.

I. And then going into the Civil Service and working in the districts in particular, wasn't there a cultural gap between you and the villager? Even though you were a Sinhalese, wasn't there a ...?

W. There definitely was a gap but I wouldn't say it was a very wide gap. Because quite apart from the influences of the school and the type of subjects one did in school, still one had contacts. Through my relatives and their retainers and so forth. Because my family, of course, was from a village.

I. Oh yes, where was that?

W. That was Yatiyala(?) in Matara District.

I. Oh I see. So you have rural roots, don't you? But, now, take many of the other people who were entering the Civil Service about this time, the Ceylonese: many of them were from Colombo, weren't they, and St. Thomas's, Royal background. And while a few had rural roots there was quite a number who were very, very urbanised: and would it be correct to say that they would have had a more difficult time adapting themselves?

W. It would. Although I do know that quite a number of them who were much more urbanised, as it were, than I was, did in fact adjust themselves to those conditions and come to understand the villager and his problems too, to quite a rare degree, because most of the Civil Servants of that time they had to serve a period in the kachcheries. Unlike some of the others in later times who rarely went out of Colombo. Some ...

I. Mmm. Straight into the specialised departments?

W. Specialised departments.

I. So it was possible then for you to establish a rapport with the villager?

W. Oh yes. Of course.

I. Presumably you would have been better off than most Europeans because of the language question?

W. Yes.

I. I mean, did you feel that the European G.A's and A.G.A's were rather at a loss or rather at sea on some aspects.

W. Well, the younger European Civil Servants - those who joined about the same time as I did - ...

I. Yes?

W. They began with that handicap. I found that some of the older Civil Servants, the Government Agents, for example, under whom I worked, some of them at any rate, had a far better understanding of the villager's problems and his attitudes than the younger men. The younger men had still to learn. Not only were they from a different country at a different stage of development, but they had the language difficulty and the particular problems of the local Ceylonese villager on account of his different cultural background.

I. Did you have any other - did you have any European Cadets who were being trained with you in the same stations?

W. Not in the same station because I was shunted out to the country straight away. And it was very unusual to find two Cadets at the same time at a kachcheri.

I. No, I was wondering whether you had discussed it with any of these Europeans and, you know, problems of training?

W. Not so much that I discussed them but I could see them at work and of course you got reports about what they were doing, problems they'd come across, come up against and they would themselves tell you because we used to have conferences from time to time. We used to come up to Colombo for our quarterly examinations and then we used to get talking about things. Some of them I must say were very keen to learn. Now, a man like - who was it? - I've forgotten the name .

I. Regan?

W. Oh, Regan - yes. Now, he was very keen to learn and very outgoing. Whereas some of the others ...

I. Rennison?

W. Rennison too. Rennison too I would put in that same class. But I knew a man like, for example, ...

I. Sydenham-Clarke?

W. Sydenham-Clarke. Now, he was a very different type. He just kept aloof. He just wouldn't try.

I. One of these, perhaps these easy-going public school types? Taking it leisurely?

W. Well, I don't know whether I'm being fair to him but it was said that he had aristocracy connections in England itself and he was, even in England, ha-ha-ha, he would have been snobbish. And came here and continued. Just couldn't get down to work.

I. What about your training itself as a Cadet? Were you treated very much as a podian[office boy] and, well, a sort of general dogsbody?

W. No, I wouldn't say that. Of course we had to - we had to do a whole lot of routine stuff and it was useful at the beginning and interesting, despite the fact that there was nothing really subtle about it at all. Still while you got to learn it and saw how what you were doing fitted into the general pattern of things, it was interesting. But then you had to continue with it even after it had ceased to be any longer interesting from being novel. Say, signing drafts and signing those infamous and notorious gun licences and so on. You went on doing that.

I. Did you feel that you were taken out on circuit a sufficient number of times?

W. Yes. Of course, initially, one went out on circuit along with another staff officer. But very soon one was allowed to go out on one's own. Of course, the Government Agent or a senior staff officer would decide the type of circuits that you might go out on, where the possibility of you making mistakes was not very great and even if you did mistake the con... - make a mistake the consequences were not very serious.

I. Were they approachable, I mean, the G.A's? Could you take problems to them quite readily without having to worry about it?

W. Well, it was expected that it should be so, that we should have this access to them. Much depended, of course, on the Government Agent himself, the individual Government Agents; and the individual officer himself. If he was shy and rather apprehensive about going ...

I. I mean, was it permissable for a person to bring up official subjects in the club or over dinner if, you know, if you were having a get-together, if you had been invited, or were you

---

supposed to keep off administrative problems when you were having recreation?

W. Well, there was no rule about it. But generally one did not bring it up because - unless of course you could get the Government Agent or whoever it was into a corner by yourself and you could ask him. Because most of the others present would probably be interested in that type of thing and bore them.

I. Now, this is very much the empirical approach in making you go out into the field and do the job and learn on the job, rather than giving you a theoretical base?

W. Well, there was the theoretical side of this also in the sense that certain matters, say financial regulations, various regulations of government ...

I. Law?

W. Also law, civil procedure code and criminal procedure code, penal code and so forth. Also language: passing examinations in Sinhalese and Tamil; that you had to do. Those, of course, we studied largely by ourselves. But we could always get assistance on them. If there was some financial regulation, for example, the meaning of which you couldn't quite understand, you didn't see why it had to be done that way, you could always go along to somebody senior and get him to explain it to you. Similarly on the law, you could go to your Magistrate or District Judge and puzzle out a thing or two.

I. While not being against this trial and error process, I was wondering whether a wider theoretical base, say a short course which took in a little bit of economics, business administration, politics to some extent - civics say, or something like that - and land tenure, Sinhalese land tenure in particular, would have helped a Cadet?

W. I think it would. It would have profited by ... A course, say, of six months in Colombo on these various items. At present I think its the - the Cadets have a better opportunity of learning than we had in this sense: that they're not saddled with these routine items of work now as they used to be. And they do have a course where they go round. As a matter of fact even the divisional revenue officers, at a

---

certain stage, they were also afforded these facilities of being appointed, shall we say, to a ministry or a Colombo department where they were - they scarcely had any routine duties at all and it was expected of the head of department to provide some course of study for these Cadets, in relation, of course, to the work that was being done in the department. So there was the theory and they could check on what the - on what was going on in the first place against that theory. But still I'm not sure that theoretical training in the sense that you have in mind on, say, land tenure, Sinhalese land tenure for example, I don't think that it could be provided as such; people have to pick it up.

I. It is a bit more expensive this way. It takes expense both financially and in point of time but I was thinking that in the long run ...

W. It certainly would help.

I. Did the headman system exist in '35, '36 when you joined?

W. Yes, it did.

I. Would you say that the headmen tended to be rather servile and obeisant?

W. You mean the superior headmen or ...?

I. The others. Towards the G.A's?

W. Yes, in general, they did. In general they did. There were, of course, independent spirits among them but, by and large, they tend to - they tended to try to find out what the G.A. would like done and find reasons for doing it.

I. But for all that, couldn't they influence the G.A's in this manner: by, say, roundabout methods, by flattery perhaps, getting information through gradually - you know, step by step - and cumulative effect? I was thinking of the R.M. and the kachcheri mudaliyars in particular.

W. Influence them in what ways do you think?

I. If a policy question was coming up, or with regard to a village that wanted a particular thing done, perhaps to help a friend or relative ...?

W. There was quite a lot of that going on. But the - how they worked it I should imagine is that the R.M. having won the goodwill of the Government Agent by getting things done the way the Government Agent wanted him to, then of course he was

able to influence the Government Agent in various appointments. For example, lots of these appointments in the old days, even say to the Subordinate Clerical Service as it used to be called, used to be done purely on recommendation, and the mudaliyars and the R.M's and vanniyars and chaps like that, their recommendations counted for a great deal with the Government Agent, especially if he had won the favour of the Government Agent.

I. And presumably that sort of thing was more likely if the Government Agent was new to the district, and not an old-hand?

W. Not necessarily. Even afterwards, because, as a matter of fact, the Government Agent would have had to be there some time before the mudaliyar could ingratiate himself with the Government Agent.

I. Yes, I see.

W. But, of course, if ... This must be said: that very often the chief headmen had won the regard of the Government Agent by their own hard work and by their fairness and good conduct and so forth. If the Government Agents were not ... [they] were often influenced by men whom the Government Agents had come to have a genuine and justifiable regard for. Of course a chief headman might very well exploit that situation afterwards.

I. Yes. Good work here but occasional favours ...

INTERRUPTION

I. I was wondering whether the European G.A's and A.G.A's would have been more amenable - I mean, more susceptible, to this kind of influence than the Ceylonese? again, because, perhaps, of the language barrier?

W. Not, I think, so much on account of the language barrier as perhaps the ... The European Government Agents their - the information available to them was much more scanty than that available to us. We, knowing the general set-up, would be a little more suspicious and be rather more careful about taking the chief headman's word, or whatever he said, as being absolutely true and correct. But the European Government Agent had to rely on this. They generally relied on these people.

I. And you had the advantage, at least in some areas, of knowing

the family connections. The name would give it away.

W. Umm.

I. And regarding the Civil Service in the late thirties, that is really the British product, what would you say were its assets and good points?

W. We were, I think, less involved in a sense in the - because we were transferred out usually and we ourselves preferred to be away from the desk, from our homes. We were out somewhere and we could take a very detached view of everything that was going on. In more recent times officers have tended to be appointed to the very areas they come from largely. They themselves prefer to be there. And also I think the - on account of the European Government Agents being necessarily rather aloof from the people the Ceylonese Civil Servants too, almost through merely apeing the European, kept more aloof from the people. And although while there are disadvantages in that, there was the advantage that they - that they were ...

I. That they were impersonal and ...?

W. Impersonal and took a much more disinterested look at things than they probably do nowadays. Also, the Civil Servant in those days, he had much more the support of the Government than he now has in resisting the influence of an undesirable type. Or say, they were not so much subject to political influence as they are now. Political influence counted for much less in those days than it does now. And you always had the support of the senior officers against political influence. But there was, of course, the European planter influence and the European merchant influence, which rather worked against the Ceylonese in those days.

I. The G.A's generally were susceptible to that were they?

W. The G.A's generally were susceptible.

I. For instance, in an administrative issue between a plantation and a village, or, you know, a particular problem, didn't the G.A's, perhaps unconsciously, tend to side with the Europeans?

W. They definitely did. Say, for example, well, even where the - it was a matter of, say, Crown land, if an European estate competed with, say, a villager for a particular piece of Crown land on lease, to be had on lease, generally speaking the G.A. was inclined to let the estate have it rather than the villager. And when it came to, say, reservations for

streams and so forth the estates encroached on those almost with impunity. They got a lease afterwards whereas the villager would be very harshly treated for that kind of offence. And when it came to, say, a village versus the estate on various matters, in general it was the estate that was sided with.

I. What about the judiciary?

W. Judiciary, of course, there was - I would say there was no interference with the judiciary except in so far as a judicial officer or Civil Servant - for they did the judicial work too - except in so far as an officer who might have rubbed against the European interest in an area would be much more liable to be transferred out. But there was no interference in the judicial process itself.

I. No, I was wondering whether the European administrator felt that he had to be an impartial arbiter, and perhaps this was accentuated by the fact that some of the planters were from a lower class strata in the English sense - I'm not sure that this was so - but therefore they felt that they must hold the balance even in administrative cases?

W. Well, theoretically, yes. But the difficulty was, I suppose, somewhat as follows: that once a Government Agent - shall we say the Government Agent in Badulla - when he was appointed Government Agent, Badulla, he tended to associate with the Europeans much more, socially, than with the Ceylonese. You had your planters club there which had an exclusive European membership. The Government Agent himself was invited to be a member, probably an officer. It was not - it was not really a planters' - it was not simply a planters' club but generally they were planters who - you might have the bank manager if there was one and so on. And they tended to become much more friends with the Government Agent than the Ceylonese in the district did. There was - consciously or otherwise, Government Agents were influenced.

I. Regarding assets, would you class responsibility and integrity as features of that time?

W. Yes. Well, I should imagine so. At the higher rungs of the Service today, the Administrative Service, they still possess(?) those assets. Its not peculiar to that time.

I. And in any case ... Its a tradition which ...

W. Its a tradition, yes. Unfortunately, now, of course, they have a fair number of ...

I. Political ...?

W. Yes. People tend to succumb to political pressures far more than in the past.

I. Did European officers, within your experience, have a sense of mission or was it just a job which they were doing conscientiously?

W. There again its difficult to generalise. Some of them had a sense of mission. Others were there merely to - merely because they wanted a job. I can even give you instances: take a man, I mean, like Dyson for example, Government Agent Jaffna, and later in Kandy. Or a man like Freeman of course who's the ...

I. Ah, he's an exceptional ...

W. Yes, but there were others too.

I. Any others you could think of?

W. Let me see now. Of course, I didn't have so many people like - I didn't work under so many Government Agents. Sudbury. But in between these two there were people who, while perhaps not being - not feeling a sense of mission in the way that Freeman or Dyson, for example, did, they were conscientious about doing a job of work, whether it was in Ceylon or in England or even if they were in a bank, for example, the sense of duty to be done, performed, because you were being paid for it and you must do your very best by your employer. In that sense people like Sudbury or even a man like Millington who - a man who committed suicide - you might have heard of him.

I. A fussy sort was he?

W. I think the problem with Millington really ... I understood that Millington in his younger days was a very gay and easy-going kind of man. Unfortunately he trusted people too much and there was - and he had to pay for other people's sins. And he was surcharged for an enormous amount of money. After that he became very suspicious and very meticulous about things.

I. Would you class Sandys as one of the ...?

W. Yes. Yes. I shouldn't have forgotten him.

I. What about Lanktree and Davidson and Jones?

W. I don't know very much about Lanktree and Jones but Davidson I knew him quite well.

INTERRUPTION

W. Davidson: I would put him in that class of people like, say, Sudbury and the others who really were keen on getting a good job of work done. He was very conscientious about doing a job of work. He was a very intelligent man and extremely meticulous. And so he came - he rubbed against various other people who were much less efficient than he, or who didn't devote as much time and energy to their work.

I. Perhaps he was perfectionist and his tone and approach, eh ...?

W. That's right. He was - well, he couldn't suffer fools gladly in a sense.

I. If I may ask a personal question, in your case, if you can hark back to the days when you were first appointed, what was your attitude and approach?

W. Well, to begin with it was the novelty of it all that attracted me and I was keen on learning whatever there was to - had to be learned, quickly. As a Cadet I was moved around quite a lot, rather more than my colleagues, for example, generally. I'd just spent three months in a place, or something like that. So I got to Hambantota, where I spent about two years. And there, of course, I was able to go about the district quite a lot and I was left very much on my own and I had quite some responsibility there. And I did get to know the people there and their problems. And one interesting thing about Hambantota, of course, is that that was the place where Woolf had worked and his diaries were available there: they are now here. So that was a great help, reading through Woolf's diaries and even in - when I was there there wasn't really very much difference in the conditions of the people (?) (?) which existed at that time. So the approach there - well, my approach to it was that the main thing was to get the - to improve the conditions of the people as far as possible through the administration. And, unfortunately, those years when I was in Hambantota were rather bad years for the district, on account of drought conditions and so forth. A great deal of relief had to be provided for the people. And

---

that was a time when the Land Development Ordinance, that was of 1935, was really beginning to be put into effect. And through that ...

INTERRUPTION

W. That was a challenge to all of us in the administrative service at that time. To see how the Land Development Ordinance could be used to provide some improvement in the conditions of these people. And I remember my whole office was flooded with these permits. They were being changed over. The old type of peasant proprietor leases, as they were called, were being changed to the leases under the Land Development Ordinance, under which we were hoping to give them very much more assistance in the way of seed material, providing houses for them and so on. Of course, the limiting factor was, first, the staff and also funds from the Government. There was only so much allocated under that. But we did manage to get quite a lot of work done. And fortunately for Hambantota at that time, the A.G.A. we had there, a man called Hudson; he was absolutely first-rate on his land work.

I. Having been an Assistant Settlement Officer?

W. Having been an Assistant Settlement Officer. So I think we managed to get quite a lot of work done.

I. What sort of man was Hudson? Was he an orthodox type or ready to take initiative and disobey regulations?

W. I wouldn't say,'disobey regulations'. I think he kept well within the regulations, but he managed to get quite a lot done within the regulations. Also, of course, whenever he had difficulties he was not afraid of making representations to the Government and very forcefully. And persuading the Government to effect changes or to allow exceptions to be made where necessary. One point was, of course, not - I don't think he - he was, I believe, an Eurasion in the old sense of - not a mixture of blood. I mean, he was not half Indian, half European - his family was European, born in India. And I think he had a rather more sympathetic approach to the villager than some of the others did.

I. What about Leach? Wasn't he in your district just before, or ...?

W. He had been before, before Hudson came along there. I think

---

he too had been - had been quite sympathetic to the people and got things done. I'm not sure whether Leach was in Hambantota or in Matara. Was he in Hambantota? I can't remember.

I. I think its Hambantota. Coming back to the question of attitude, then, would it be correct to say that you went into the Service without any particular attitudes but found it inspiring?

W. That's right.

I. Did it draw a sense of paternalism or, shall I say, impersonal guardianship? did the responsibilities you had evoke that sort of attitude?

W. I wouldn't say quite paternalism. I think one's got to be a little older to have that kind of attitude. But its more a kind of glorified social service kind of attitude. You had your social service league in school. It was - I felt it was a kind of extension of that.

I. Oh, that's very interesting. This sounds awful, but was there an elitist concept in the Civil Service at that time? I'm using it sociologically, not in the snobbish sense.

W. I know. There was.

I. And did it continue right into the fifties too? I presume it did?

W. I should say it did.

I. Therefore, again going back to the late thirties and early forties, were G.A's and A.G.A's willing to override local public opinion if they considered it - if they considered their decision or their findings the right course?

W. Of course, local public opinion was not very articulate at the time. It was scarcely found, except perhaps in some of the local authorities, for example. You sometimes came up against - I mean something that the Government Agent might want to do was resisted by local authority.

I. I was thinking of sometimes - of the M.P's sometimes.

W. Yes. The Government Agent certainly: if he considered he was right and the M.P. was wrong about a certain thing, he didn't have much - he didn't hesitate to do what he thought right. Except of course that, if it was a very serious issue, he would consult Colombo. He would consult the Chief Secretary before

he acted.

I. No: I asked this question because in later years politicians, journalists and others, criticised the Civil Servants for being disdainful and neglectful of public opinion and being a law unto themselves. And I was wondering what you thought about this criticism, this sort of thing?

W. Well, I would say that Civil Servants were disdainful, but largely I think it was ... I suppose it was tinged with a certain snobbishness, an intellectual snobbishness because very many of the Members of Parliament were not men of education, some of them weren't at any rate. And their opinions were often quite absurd or poorly expressed and so forth. And there was a certain amount of looking down on what the M.P's had to say and their manner of saying it and so forth. There was that. And I think it continued until quite recently and perhaps its there even today. But I wouldn't say that a Government Agent adopted an attitude which was, say, hostile to the M.P. as such or that he resisted an M.P., or what the M.P. wanted to get done, merely because he wanted to resist him. I think the Government Agents did, largely, take an objective view of the problem and if they found that the M.P. was against it, well, they resisted that. Of course, the Government Agent may himself often be in error as to what the right was but I think he generally expressed ...

I. An honest opinion?

W. It was an honest opinion.

I. Yes, I didn't want to comment on that before but for one thing the Government Agent might have been disdainful because he considered himself impartial, whereas he felt that the M.P. was pushing for a particular group: or - and secondly, much of the criticism comes from the politicians themselves and some of them undoubtedly had inferiority complexes and felt frustrated and therefore expressed such a feeling[sic].

W. Yes. As you say, very often a Member of Parliament, quite rightly I suppose, would want to get something done for his electorate. Shall we say he wanted some irrigation work undertaken, but the technical advise given by the Irrigation Officer to the Government Agent, who had in those days to provide - to get the funds and so forth ... Because some of the minor irrigation works were really under the Government

Agents in the old days. The Government Agent acting on the advice of the Irrigation Officer would say, well, this either could not be done at all or it was far too expensive, and should not be undertaken. But the M.P., he wanted very much to get it done because it meant votes for him; it meant prestige, influence and so on. So the M.P. would press for this regardless, whereas the Government Agent just couldn't. Often he would be acting contrary to instructions given to him if he made a recommendation because there were certain limits of - if you - of expenditure per acre to be benefited and so on.

I. Again taking the late thirties, would you say that in the outlying areas, or even in the towns, that the Government Agents represented village needs far better than the average M.P.? This is a general question but ...

W. That is difficult to say, but the Government Agent did try to take an objective view. The M.P's opinion might very often be biased. The Government Agent's view was less likely to be biased but whether the Government Agent's view was as well-informed as the M.P's one might often doubt. The M.P. probably knew more about ...

I. The grass roots?

W. Yes, about the grass roots. But whether he was fair in his demands, whether he was asking for the right solution, was sometimes in doubt. Of course the Government Agent himself had to depend largely on his chief headman, the others, but he could himself go into - or send his assistant into the - to make enquiries.

I. What about political interference and pressure: did that begin even before independence?

W. It did. Much depended on the personality of the M.P. Now, I should imagine that a man like D.S. Senanayake could have made himself felt even in those days.

I. You did personally suffer from him, or come across him?

W. Let me see. No, I shouldn's say so. But I know that Hudson, for example, in Hambantota, he had plenty of trouble with one of the Rajapakses, D.M. Rajapakse. And ... Pardon?

I. What sort of trouble?

W. It was not pressure, not political pressure in that sense.

What had happened there was merely this: that D.M. Rajapakse was a judgement debtor. And there was a writ out for his arrest. And Hudson had to execute this as fiscal. And on account of Rajapakse's position and influence in the area Hudson took it into his head to execute the warrant himself, which perhaps was, ha-ha, a mistake - I don't know. But it happened that this was the very day of an election when Hudson had to go out and execute this writ. He had to - he had to report to court the following day I think it was.

I. He had no alternative?

W. He had no alternative. So he went along and he found Rajapakse at one of the election booths and he told him, 'Sorry, Mr. Rajapakse, I have to execute this warrant. But I'm going to - I'm not going to take you in straight away. I'll wait until after closing time. I'll be going around following you from station to station and after closing time I'll take you in'. So Rajapakse had agreed to this arrangement and he went along from station to station; Hudson followed; and immediately after five o'clock when everything was over Rajapakse - this is the story - got into his car and put on speed. And Hudson thought he was going to escape. Well, Rajapakse, I should have thought, according to the arrangement, should have placed himself in Hudson's hands. But he didn't, and he just speeded on. Well, Hudson gave chase and eventually overtook him and took him in. So from that day of course they were bitter enemies. Ha-ha-ha. And he had an immense amount of trouble because Rajapakse did everything he could to make trouble for Hudson, petitions about this, that, or the other. But political pressures, I know people were subject to them in those days. But, of course, they were not as serious as they became later, because the politicians had less power. Of course, it was worst of all during, I think, the Donoughmore period.

I. It was. Interference?

W. Interference. Because these people were on the Executive Committees. Every Member of Parliament was on them and he could interfere very much.

I. But didn't it take on different forms and really have a greater effect after '56?

W. Oh yes, ha-ha. It is much worse now. But after '56 I think it wasn't quite as bad as in the Donoughmore times.

I. It wasn't as bad in ...?

W. I don't think so. It wasn't as bad. Because - well, I had an experience, for example, in Matale. This was really not - I don't know whether to call it political pressure, it was just a personal hostility to me from one of the M.P's. I don't know quite ...

I. G.K.W. Perera?

W. No, this was a chap called - oh gosh, what was his name now? - Thanne(?). He was later on - he was at the time M.P. for Dambulla. This was something quite silly really. I didn't quite know the reason for his hostility to me until much later. I came to know of it from one of the politicians - from some other politician. This was merely - it happened like this. One day I was expecting a friend from Colombo. He was coming down by train and I had to fetch him from the railway station. I was bringing him home from the railway station. The train was due to arrive at such-and-such a time. And I'd taken the car out of my garage and I was driving myself. I came out of the front of the residency and as I came out there I saw the M.P. He had driven down the drive and he was standing there. He'd parked his car there; he was standing there. So I stopped my car and I got out off the car and asked him what it was he wanted. So he said, 'Oh, well, there is an appointment of a headman that you're considering just now and I want to make a recommendation'. I asked him which headman this was, which post it was. And he said it was such-and-such. So I told him, 'Well, unfortunately I've already made the recommendations only two days ago. The recommendations have gone to the Government Agent. So there is very little I can do now. In any case if you had made your recommendation in writing, given him a certificate or something like that', I said to him, 'Then we would have considered it then. It would have been the easiest way to do it'. So he said, 'Oh, well, then, it can't be done. Sorry its been like this'. And he got in his car and I got into mine and we both drove off. Much later I understand ... Of course he was hostile to me on various matters, all quite silly. And eventually I understood that somebody had asked

him,'How did this begin?' And he had said, 'Oh, well, you know, I went - called on the Assistant Government Agent one day and he chatted to me out in his garden. He hadn't even the courtesy to invite me into his house and offer me a seat'. Ha-ha-ha. It had never occurred to me that this was what was worrying the old man. So I immediately sent for him when I got to know about this and said, 'I'm very sorry indeed. I was driving out to the railway station that day you came along and I asked you what you wanted and it seemed to be something we could settle just by talking to each other in the garden. And that was all'. But, you know, that was merely his ... But pressures were being exerted in various ways and some of them quite subtly of course. Others were very blatant about it and ...

I. Subtly?

W. Well, you would ... Say, an M.P. wanted to get something done for somebody, shall we say. He wanted, say, a piece of land acquired [by Government] that belonged to his friend and the friend was in need of money or something like that or they thought they could get more money from the Government than otherwise. Well, get this land acquired. The main thing was getting the land acquired from the friend. Of course, they would think up various means of getting this done. They would get the villagers to petition that they wanted a community centre or something like that. The Government Agent might see through the whole thing; that this was just all eye-wash, there's no need for a community centre here, these people have various other facilities. So he wrote back and said, 'This is not really urgent'. Because these people would petition the Commissioner of Local Government or the Minister or somebody; then it came down to you for a report; you looked into it and you wrote: 'This is not necessary. Its a waste of government funds. You can find a better investment'. Then, of course, you would get these pressures. The M.P. would go along and say: 'Well, the Government Agent is just talking nonsense. We do want this place, and he is down on the villager'. This, that and the other, you see. And then this would build up.

I. Mmm, I see. I was wondering whether apart from some of the

Donoughmore councillors, D.S. Senanayake himself started this interference at the top level, not provincially as such but vis-a-vis departmental heads and so forth. He wanted men he had chosen, perhaps for good reasons, as heads of department. And also a tendency perhaps to have men of his way of thinking.

W. Yes, well, from the time of the Donoughmore Commission days, or when you had these Executive Committees, to get appointed to the departments in their charge men whom they favoured. Well, sometimes they favoured them because these particular people were efficient in those directions. It may have been purely objective. Other times in order to get their friends or relatives into good stations. But it was going on all the time.

I. Now, for instance, D.S. had clashes with some of these departmental heads who were Europeans, and its probable that the Europeans didn't like the change and were being somewhat obstructive; but its difficult to know when a Civil Servant is being obstructive and is giving genuine honest advice, you see. May be technical advice. And I was wondering whether D.S. was prone to take every objection as obstruction?

W. [Reflective pause]. He was prone to. Because he himself was, shall I say, convinced of the rightness of his views. So much so that he thought that any disagreement with his view was obstructive or not entirely honest. This, of course, is a problem one has, or often had, with Ministers: that they tend to disregard the possibility of honest disagreement with you. They think you are being obstructive, sabotage this, that and the other. But I think in very many cases where D.S. Senanayake criticised officers, in very many cases, it wasn't so much over difference in views or disagreement on what ought to be done but - lower down, not so much at the top - because he felt the officers were lazy or weren't energetic enough. And I think there was very good ground often for that distant judgment of his.

I. Now, this principle that began after '48 of having Permanent Secretaries whom the Minister liked. I suppose there is a case for that but I know that Mulhall resigned on principle on that issue.

W. I really don't know about Mulhall's ...

I. No, he wasn't transferred, someone else had been transferred. But he was against it on principle.

W. Permanent Secretary?

I. I think Jones was transferred because the Minister didn't want him and wanted someone else.

W. Hmm? I don't know about that.

I. No, but what do you think of the argument for having a Permanent Secretary whom the Minister wants?

W. This is a very difficult problem. Because unless the Minister can get on with his Permanent Secretary in the sense that they're very close and they think alike, not - perhaps not on matters of high policy about - not political matters but in a way, in approach to particular problems on how it should be got done and so on. It becomes very difficult unless there is cooperation all the way between Minister and Permanent Secretary. But on the other hand there - if it is merely personal likes and dislikes and favouratism and so forth which affects these things, it becomes very difficult and unfair of course by the officers concerned. I can tell you about my own case. How I was moved around for apparently no reason.

I. Oh, I didn't know this. When was this?

W. Ho, well, I was in five different Ministries in fourteen months.

I. In '56, or ...?

W. No. This was very recent, immediately before I retired. And that was - I don't think it was due to any fault of mine.

I. And, anyway, its not administratively wise .

W. Its not administratively wise. Now, in my case I just couldn't get my teeth into any problem. Also, of course, this was aggravated by the fact that Mrs. Bandaranaike she gave it out, really as part of her election manifesto, that she was going to reduce the number of Ministries. And having come to power she did reduce the number of Ministries. And the ...

I. That's in '60?

W. That was in '60. And the allocation of functions to these Ministries is not frightfully intelligently done. You have

certain Ministries fearfully overloaded with work and these items of work were not at all homogenous. There was no kind of basis, any reason for this. Now, there was one Ministry into which I went. That was the first time I functioned as a Permanent Secretary - Ministry of Industries, Home and Cultural Affairs. And there were, if I remember rightly, twenty-two heads of revenue in the budget under this very - under this single Ministry. And one of those twenty-two was, again, provincial administration which in turn had twenty Government Agents. So you really had twenty-one plus twenty heads of departments in this Ministry and all matters as diverse as Industries and Probation and Childcare, Prisons, Excise, all this came into things. Muslim Charitable Trusts or Registrar General and Prisons, all this came in within this one Ministry. It was extremely difficult to keep track of what was going on.

I. Who was responsible for the allocation? Cabinet or ...?

W. Well, the Prime Minister is eventually responsible for it. I suppose she did it with Cabinet advice.

I. But she was a bit inexperienced. That was the time she was drawing on advice.

W. That's right. And some of the others also were quite inexperienced. Take Felix Dias Bandaranaike: with all his intelligence, well, he was quite new to this and I don't - and they didn't have very much time to get to this matter.

I. But surely they have to ask a Civil Servant, at least someone they know?

W. That is the problem, that is the problem. They - the Secretary to the Treasury, I know, was never consulted about it. He, at least, should have been consulted. But he wasn't. Then what happened. Of course, after some time they realised how stupid this was. They they did a recasting. They did - well, this was broken up quite a lot. And I know that Industries and Commerce then went together, which was quite a sensible arrangement. But subsequently again Industries and Commerce were split and now Commerce again is split down the middle again.

I. Trade?

W. Commerce and Trade. Some of the departments that were in

Commerce have now been taken away and placed under the Ministry of State. Now, for an industrialist - now, I'm looking at it from a private sector - this is very inconvenient. Commerce and Industries being split and Commerce again having some of its departments being taken away to the Ministry of State,

I. This is very useful. And you find it delays you, does it?

W. Delays. And I'll give you one instance where we have had delays in practice. We are making efforts to export tea in packets and bags. Packet and bag it in Ceylon and export it from here. Well, now, we went along to the Commerce Ministry and we convinced them this was feasible. We could do it with benefit to Ceylon. They agreed to this. But before we could get further - because we had to get quotations for the machinery and so forth - the Commerce Ministry was split and you found the Imports Control going to the Ministry of State. Well, then, when we went to the Import Control for the licences to import the machinery required he went consulting his Permanent Secretary, his new Permanent Secretary, to the Ministry of State. And the new Permanent Secretary, he began asking us questions.

I. Which had already been ...?

W. Which had already been answered. Of course, maybe in different - although the questions were really the same, we had cleared these in oral discussion with the Commerce Ministry. We'd had several conferences, we went along to them. And not everything was done in writing. So now the Ministry of State comes along and the Permanent Secretary asks us a whole lot of questions. Some of them of course quite - from our point of view quite silly because he probably hasn't very much understanding of these matters and he hadn't been with tea over the years. Of course Anandatissa de Alwis is quite an intelligent fellow and he has been in the private sector and the advertising firms and so forth, but he knows practically nothing about the tea trade. So we had to go and explain the whole thing to him all over again. Meanwhile this is being delayed. And its very irksome to be having to do this. Now, if we are to get a rebate on the import duty on machinery we have to go again to the Ministry

---

of Industries and persuade them about this business. That it is really a good thing. Will you please approve it as an industry so that we may get a rebate on the import duty, which is considerable. Its a difference between forty per cent and ten per cent, shall we say.

I. And presumably this sort of bad compartmentalisation would also effect Government work?

W. It does.

I. So did you find this was so even in the fifties in - say, before '56, in U.N.P. time - was this defficiency, this shortcoming evident even then? Bad ministerial coordination?

W. Yes. It was - it was bad even in those days, but there wasn't all that urgency that there is now for getting a job done quickly. What I mean is that industry hadn't developed to that extent and we didn't have to go so much and get permits and so forth. Since this kind of fillip to industrialisation here, this has begun to be felt very much more acutely.

I. And presumably there is more regularisation now than before?

W. That is so, that is so. Even in the old days. Well, I remember I myself had advocated for this coming together of Industries and Commerce: that they should be within one Ministry. As a matter of fact, in the old days, in, say, Bassett's time, was it? - Industries and Commerce were one department. It was the Department of Industries and Commerce. Now, the old D.C.I. I think stems from those days, Department of Commerce and Industry. Then they were split. Quite right because the departments grew big and you had more commerce to do and more industries, so I think that was sensible having two separate departments. But I think it would be very beneficial having a single Ministry doing both Industries and Commerce.

I. What made them - at least as far as you know - what made them shift you in this ...?

W. Ah yes, I know. Well, when this kind of heteregenuous kind of Ministry with Industries, Home and Cultural Affairs - well, that was broken up. Mrs. Bandaranaike herself eventually came to realise the folly of it.

I. Did you all make representations? Did Civil Servants make representations?

W. Oh yes, we had been making representations to the Finance Ministry really because the Ministry of Finance is really the head - the political head of the Service. Well, then Industries and Commerce were joined together. Were put together under a single Ministry and Maitrapala Senanayake became the Minister for that Ministry. At that stage I personally would have liked to go into that Ministry - Industries and Commerce. But V.C. Jayasuriya, who was at that time Permanent Secretary Local Government, he had to be found a place in the new set-up. And in the new set-up Home Affairs and Local Government went together. So that was about the only Ministry into which he could fit, although he hadn't had experience of the Home Ministry at all, because he was throughout in the Local Government sector. He was made Permanent Secretary there. Also my contemporary, G.R.W. de Silva he was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce. He had been there. And he had gone - now, this is really something that I was very annoyed about really. The moment he came to know that there was going to be this recasting of Ministries he had gone along to Maitrapala Senanayake and said, 'Please take me in as your Permanent Secretary when this reshuffling is done'. Because he was in Commerce. I was in the Ministry that handled Industries so it was really between him and me whether - which of us would go into this Ministry of Industries and Commerce. So if on an objective examination Maitrapala Senanayake had considered that G.R.W. de Silva was the appropriate man, the chap to take in, well, I would have no grievance. But I had had experience. I had been Director of Commerce for five years nearly. I had acted as Permanent Secretary in that Ministry of Commerce really. And now I had had experience in Industries so I should have thought that on an objective assessment I would have been considered the more appropriate man to go into the Ministry. But G.R.W. de Silva had seen Maitrapala and Maitrapala, not giving the matter adequate consideration, had said, 'Oh yes, yes, of course'. He had thought that I would be - I would remain in Home Affairs. So when I went and told him, 'Well, this is the situation. I understand V.C. Jayasuriya's coming to Home Affairs and I'll not be in Home Affairs. And my

---

first preference anyhow would have been Industry and Commerce. I would like to be considered for this Ministry'. He said, 'Oh, what a shame, I have already told G.R.W. de Silva that I would take him in and can't very well back out of this now'. So he was very unhappy about the whole business afterwards. But what's the use. You see, there is no proper consideration given to these matters. That was how I moved into that. And curiously enough I went along to the Health Ministry, where I didn't want to go at all. I had no special liking for it. I had been in the Health Ministry earlier acting for L.S.R. Perera when he had gone on leave. I was there for about six months. So I knew something about what was going on there, but it wasn't as if I liked going there. Then while I was in the Health Ministry with Badiuddin as Minister certain problems arose. I didn't see eye to eye with him on certain matters. But of course it was perfectly - I must say, to Badiuddin Mahamud's credit, he did not hold it against me personally at all. But still I think he would have liked to have had a man who was entirely of his way of thinking about certain matters.

I. Didn't Vimala Wijewardena and Gunaratna also have ...?

W. Yes, they also had some brushes. And eventually she got Van Langenberg of course there.

I. Was she prone to interfere?

W. She was.

I. And I think Ilangaratne also has a name for interference, has he?

W. Yes, he does. Of course, Ilangaratne quite plainly says, 'Well, I am - I am Leftist in my way of thinking. And I like to have Leftists, people with those sympathies, in my Ministry. So that's the situation'. So I myself now - in case you're interested - I was in the Health Ministry. There was this problem with Badiuddin Mahamud. I think - well, I'm quite sure that I was right in the stand I took up. This was about disciplinary matters, you see.

I. What did you want to do?

W. Well, Dahanayake had complained against a matron in Galle. That she was not allowing the - that she was too harsh with the nurses in her charge, particularly the pupil nurses in her charge. That she did not let them have time for their

---

religious observances. That she was anti-Buddhist. That she was a Catholic Actionist or something. Eventually it was found that she was herself a Buddhist. And then Dahanayake said, 'Well, a Buddhist who behaves in this way is worse than a Catholic who behaves in this way', and that kind of nonsense. Well, in any case I said, 'We'll have to hold an enquiry into this'. And an enquiry was held. An officer of the Department was sent down, a staff officer chap, to hold the enquiry. And he absolved this woman after Dahanayake himself had been allowed an opportunity of being present at the enquiry, and even bringing witnesses along. He was not allowed to question the other witnesses but he was present. And this man exonerated this woman, and in all the notes of evidence, they were all there. And they were available to the head of the Department too. Then the Minister wanted to see these notes of enquiry. I said, 'No. Under the instructions given to us by the Public Service Commission you may not see those. And so I personally cannot direct that they be made available to you but I can assure you that I have seen the notes myself and it has been a fair enquiry and a thorough one. If you wish it I can even send another man. I can have a second enquiry done. But its not possible for me to make the notes available to you'. Then he said, 'Alright, but I want this woman transferred'. I said, 'But why?' He said, 'Well, its much better for her and much better for everybody else that she should be transferred'. I said, 'This lady has been there only one and a half years. Its usual to keep a woman three years or so. So if we transfer her now especially after this enquiry has been held it will appear, even if it is not so, it will appear that she has been found at fault and this is disciplinary action being taken against her. You, as Minister, are perfectly entitled to order a transfer for administrative reasons but you cannot order disciplinary transfers. But for this action on the part of Dahanayake you would never have - you would not have asked for this woman's transfer. There is no reason for it. So we cannot honestly maintain that it is a - purely an administrative transfer. So in those circumstances I am not willing to order the transfer. Of course if you order the transfer above my head,

---

well, it will be carried out but I'm not ordering the transfer myself'. So he was very much huffed about this. That was how it started.

I. So did he order the transfer?

W. Eventually. What had happened was he had spoken to the Director - had spoken to the Director and said, 'Well, I've been having a chat with the Permanent Secretary and these are his views. But I want this woman transferred'. So the Director took another course. He'd sent for this lady. Called her along here [to Colombo]. And he had eventually persuaded the woman to ask for the transfer herself, ha-ha-ha.

I. Subtle method.

W. Subtle method. And eventually it was done. But of course later I had another row with him. And that was with the Cabinet or apparently with the Cabinet.

I. Earlier on, was all this on paper?

W. Not the discussions between the Minister and myself.

I. Oh, only this ...

W. No.

I. ... argument ...?

W. That was purely oral. But, of course, the notes of the enquiry and all that was there. And Dahanayake, of course, himself had stormed into the office one day - to Badiuddin Mahamud's office - and said, 'Why isn't this woman transferred?', and all that kind of thing. Well, apparently, Badiuddin had - on the surface he had resisted this chap and ordered him out of the office and so forth but eventually he wanted this done. But how I eventually got the worst of these exchanges was in connection with the Director himself. That is - that was Karunaratne. Karunaratne was facing some charges and the - quite serious charges. And the Public Service Commission had appointed a Committee to enquire into this, headed by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Justice, after a preliminary enquiry and investigation had been made by Rajendra. Now, before this Committee was appointed, just a month or so before the Committee was appointed, Karunaratne had sent in his - sent in notice of wanting to retire on his becoming fifty-five years of age. That was somewhere in November, he was going to be fifty-five, the age of optional

---

retirement. So he'd sent in notice to the Public Service Commission through me. And I recommended it because there's really no question about it. Normally one generally goes through. And the Public Service Commission accepted this notice. Acknowledged receipt more than accept it. Then this Committee was set up somewhere in June. They began their proceedings only about the end of August. And this man was to retire in November. Then Karunaratne sent in a letter to the Public Service Commission saying, 'Well, this Committee has now been set up. I want to go through this because I feel I've been wrongly accused and I want to have myself exonerated. Don't want to leave the Service with this kind of thing hanging. So will you please grant me an extension'. So I thought this was a fair request. He was in good health. He was quite capable of carrying on: so I recommended this to the Public Service Commission, giving my reasons. Saying, 'Well, here he is, on his own, asking for this. The Service will suffer no setback as a result of this man's being allowed to continue.' And I recommended it. The Public Service Commission sent for me, asked me why I recommended this. And I said, 'Well, the reasons are there. I have nothing to add to them'. They said, 'No, We don't think we ought to accept this. Besides we have already acknowledged receipt of his notice and - of retirement, and we don't think it necessary to let him continue'. So they refused this. Well, this was going on. At the beginning of November the Committee hadn't made very much headway. So I telephoned Goonewardena, the Permanent Secretary to Justice, and asked him how long this is likely to take. He said, 'Oh, well, we'd want at least another three months', he said, 'The end of January or so before this can be done'. Then Karunaratne sent in another letter requesting reconsideration of the Public Service Commission's decision, asking for an extension even of six months. And he would even sooner retire if these people's decision had been arrived at earlier. So I sent this along to the Public Service Commission, referring to the earlier letter and my recommendation but saying nothing further. This went along and I went up before the Public Service Commission. Again they called me. And they told me, 'Well, this is

---

unheard of. Anybody being allowed to withdraw his notice'. I said, 'Well, ...'

I. Is that correct?

W. I don't think it is correct myself. But I didn't want to challenge it because I had no - I couldn't produce any evidence of this, at the moment anyhow. So I said, 'Well, even if that is so if there is nothing in the law or in the Constitution or your own rules against it why wouldn't you let this man continue. Because he has stated his reasons, which I thought were excellent, for letting him continue'. Then I said, 'Well, if you have any doubt about the propriety of this I could consult the Attorney-General. Or you could consult the Attorney-General'. Well, they said, 'Well, we don't want to consult the Attorney-General. You may do so if you wish'. I said, 'Yes. I can do so, but there's no point in my doing so unless you're going to - at least, to look at what he says'. 'Oh yes, oh yes, we're perfectly willing to do that. You consult him and let us know'. So I went and saw - I couldn't see Jansze; he was ill or something at the time - I saw Alles. And told him: this is the situation. He said, 'What nonsense. The Public Service Commission can - is perfectly entitled to do this'. When I explained the situation to him he said, 'Well, I am entirely in agreement with you, that this man ought to be allowed to continue. Particularly because the moment he retires the Public Service Commission has no more control over him, nothing. And the Committee will just have to fold up. Because the man is no longer liable to disciplinary action'. So I went back and I told the Public Service Commission about this. And curiously the Public Service Commission said, 'Alright. Whatever the Attorney ...' Well, I wouldn't say curiously. They said, 'Well, whatever the Attorney-General says about this, we're not prepared to do this'. Well, I think they were all the time looking at it politically. They thought this man's continuance would not be - would not find favour in the powers that were at the time. So I said, 'Well, I have nothing further to say'. And I went away. Then, Karunaratne had seen the Minister about this. He'd seen the Minister about this and persuaded the Minister that it was a good thing to let him continue. And

the Minister had agreed with him. And he had brought this up at the Cabinet. And then one day I had a note from the Secretary to the Cabinet. The Secretary to the Cabinet had written to the Public Service Commission saying the Cabinet at such-and-such a meeting they'd decided that this man should be allowed to continue. And would the Secretary to the - this was written to the Secretary to the Public Service Commission - would the Secretary put this up to the Commission and have the necessary action taken. The Secretary to the Public Service Commission had written ...

INTERRUPTION

I. Yes?

W. So the Secretary to the Cabinet had returned this to the Secretary - I'm sorry - the Secretary to the Public Service Commission had returned this to the Secretary to the Cabinet saying, 'He regrets he cannot put this up to the Public Service Commission because it would be contrary to the Constitution'. That is so of course. You can't (?) (?). So then all this - the Cabinet's conclusion and the Secretary to the Public Service Commission's note are copied[sic] to me by the Secretary to the Cabinet saying the Cabinet now wants me to take suitable action with the Public Service Commission, to ensure that this chap was given his extension. So this came along to me and I then wrote back to the Secretary to the Cabinet saying, 'In view of Section Such-and-Such of the Constitution and Rule So-and-So of the Public Service Commission Rules I could not report to the Public Service Commission any views of the Cabinet or my Minister or anybody like that. I would have - I could only report my own views and these had already been represented to the Public Service Commission. And really there was nothing I could do about this. I could not report the Caninet's views to the Public Service Commission. So far as I was concerned I had already done this[1] and I had to be rebuffed twice. And there didn't seem to be much point in my doing anything further'. But I took the precaution while doing that of asking the Public Service Commission to be allowed to appear before them once again. On behalf(?) of Dr. Karunaratne. And strangely enough I had a call from the Secretary to the Public Service Commission asking me to come along at eleven o'clock that day. And the Cabinet too

---

1. That is, he had put forward his own views which were substantially the same.

was meeting that very day. So at eleven o'clock in the morning I went across to the Public Service Commission and they said, 'Yes, what is it you want to tell us?' I said, 'Its merely that I would like you to reconsider your decision about Dr. Karunaratne because I feel very strongly that we're not being - we're not doing the right thing by him. Or even by ourselves because we should like, and I think you would like, this Committee to complete its findings. And it won't be in a position to complete its findings unless you allow this extension. And here is the man offering ... He can very well sit tight. On the 29th of November he goes out and your Committee has to fall out'. They said, 'Well, alright, but we've heard your views before this'. 'Yes,' I said, 'You have, but the reason(?) (?) for reconsideration'. 'But is there nothing new you have to say?' I said, 'No, there's nothing new really; its all been said'. 'But you've not said it on paper'. I said, 'Well, I haven't put it all in detail on paper but on the first instance I had mentioned these points'. Then the Chairman, who was De Silva, who had been Minister of Justice in the Government, he put to me a strange question. He says, 'But what is the Government's attitude on - to this?' So I said, 'That's a strange question, because your own rules in the Constitution prevent me from giving you an answer to that'. I said, 'I'd be courting prosecution if I told you what the Government wants done because in your rules you say that I'd be liable to prosecution if I - if I tried to influence you in any way - or if I presented to you the views of my Minister or any other Minister on this matter. So ...'

INTERRUPTION

W. So I said I just couldn't let them know, tell them what the Government or my Minister thought about it. If they wanted me to do that they should first have their own rule amended, and possibly the Constitution also amended. Then they said, 'Oh, well, various Permanent Secretaries have told us what their Ministers thought about one matter or another'. And they mentioned one Permanent Secretary's name also to me. So I said, 'Sorry, possibly those Permanent Secretaries were men of greater courage than I really. They don't mind a jail

---

sentence. I don't' - ha-ha-ha - 'I don't want it. And, I'm sorry, I can't tell you anything about this'. So they said, 'Alright. Will you please go back and let us have your views in detail. What you've been telling us now'. Not about this matter of the Constitution but the views about why Karunaratne should be allowed to stay on. 'Please put it all down in great detail and send it to us'. So I promptly went back and wrote it out in detail and sent it to them promptly so by about one o'clock it was all there with them. Then when I went back to office in the afternoon I found a letter from the Public Service Commission allowing this extension for Karunaratne. And at the same time the Private Secretary to the Minister came along to me and said, 'The Minister seemed to be very disturbed about something having to do with you. And he wanted me to tell you to make it a point to be in office at three-fifteen when he'd be here. He wants to see you'. So, I waited and the Minister came along at three-fifteen. I went into his office and he was really very excited. 'Mr. Weerasinha, what have you been doing this time? You know, the whole Cabinet is in arms - up in arms against you. And they say, "Well, throw that man out. We don't want him as a Permanent Secretary if he's been acting in defiance of Cabinet conclusions". So I had to stand up for you and say, "Well, no, I think I can persuade him to do what we want"', and so forth. So I said, 'What is this all about?' So he said, 'Well, you had a Cabinet conclusion sent to you and you have returned it to the Secretary to the Cabinet saying that you were unable to do anything about it. 'Well', he says, 'that's scarcely the way to treat Cabinet conclusions'. So I said, 'Well, I intended no disrespect to the Cabinet. But I merely pointed out that by the Constitution and Public Service Commission rules it was not possible for me to do what was asked of me. But you will be pleased to know that Dr. Karunaratne has been allowed this extension but without my having to tell the Public Service Commission that the Cabinet had anything to do with it. And here is the letter'. So I was able to place the letter before him. 'But', he says, 'The Cabinet is very annoyed with you'. 'Well', I said, 'what's to be done? Perhaps you can explain further

---

to them what the situation has been'. Whether the Cabinet said all that or whether this was all his fairy-story, I don't know. I never enquired about it. Well, anyway, not much longer afterwards I was transferred to another Ministry. But of course, the reason given was that the Permanent Secretary there - that was Rajendra - he was going on six months leave or so abroad. And I was moved in there. And curiously of course - well, at that time Felix Dias Bandaranaike was not very happy about Balasingham in the Treasury who was D.S.T. [Deputy Secretary, Treasury]. So here was a wonderful opportunity. Balasingham was moved into Health and I was moved out into this other place. And though the - well, in three months time I got moved out of the other place again. Or rather - no, about four months time. That was: Rajendra came back. Now, the intention was that when Rajendra came back he would go into the Ministry of Home Affairs. Because I think V.C. Jayasuriya was moving out or something like that. But then the Buddhist priests and various other people had gone in delegation and said, 'Oh, well, we don't want a Tamil in Home Affairs. We must have a Sinhalese in Home Affairs'. So, I was Sinhalese. It was no use my saying I'm Sinhalese but I'm not a Buddhist. Ha-ha. And I was moved in there. Just a matter of convenience. Of course, I was very happy there, I must say, because Jayasuriya was the Minister and he was really very easy to work with. I moved into Home Affairs and eventually I - I'm sorry, no - from this place I moved in - not into Home Affairs - I moved into ... I'm sorry, that's all wrong. I think being - having been in Public Works and Posts ... Before Rajendra came back the Coalition Government came in. The coalition was formed and there was these three Leftists who moved into ministerial positions. And Anil Moonesinghe went into Nationalised Services. And - what's his name? - Cholmondley Goonewardena was Minister of Posts. Now, this was entirely a personal matter now. I don't suppose I was found wanting at Posts and Public Works but Cholmondley Goonewardena had known Moragoda in Kalutara, as Moragoda had been A.G.A. in Kalutara in the old days. And here was his buddy. So Cholmondley Goonewardena, when he went into this Ministry, he wished to have Moragoda there. And I had to be

____

found a place and I was moved into Nationalised Services from which V.S.M. de Mel got ousted. V.S.M. de Mel was apparently not persona grata with the Leftists at all because he was known to have U.N.P. sympathies. So Anil Moonesinghe wanted V.S.M. out and Cholmondley Goonewardena, although he may not have wanted me out as such, would have preferred to have Moragoda in. So here was an excellent arrangement whereby I went into his [V.S.M's] place.

I. And V.S.M.?

W. He was sent somewhere else. He went to - Labour was it? Somewhere or another.

I. Then Rajendra came back?

W. Then Rajendra came back. And then it was that he was - being a Tamil he was not acceptable to Home Affairs. So I got moved out again in three months.

I. This was again in Mrs. B's time?

W. Mrs. B's time. Oh yes, yes, yes. Then I got moved out, yes, [to Home Affairs].

I. A general question. Was - I mean, in your experience, were there several Ministers who didn't know much about their job and therefore relied on the Permanent Secretaries and let the Permanent Secretaries run the Ministries?

W. Well, of course, the details - of the details the Ministers - most Ministers are not well-informed. A man like D.S. Senanayake, on agriculture - when he was Minister of Agriculture he knew about it [the job] more than the Permanent Secretary did. The Permanent Secretary hadn't been out to these places and so forth. But, in general, on details - on the details the Permanent Secretary is better informed than the Minister is. So for those matters the Minister has to rely on him. But on matters of policy the Minister, of course, must make up his mind; though he can seek the advice of the Permanent Secretary. But it did happen in the case of certain Ministers that they were less forceful personalities than others. And they tended to depend a great deal more on their Permanent Secretaries than the others. Some of them. I would say, for example, that Jayasuriya, although he knew quite a lot about the details and so forth and he had his own ideas about how it should be done, still he was - he tended to rely on the

---

Permanent Secretary rather more than some of the others did.

INTERRUPTION

I. I mean, being a Permanent Secretary in the political set-up here can be somewhat difficult in the sense that in several cases the Minister is definitely of a lower intellectual calibre and therefore there is always a feeling [among the Permanent Secretaries] that they [the Ministers] have been very foolish in their policy and they haven't studied the issue, and the Minister himself [in turn] may have a complex.

W. Also I think traditions have not been built up. The Ministers tend to interfere too much in the details of administration. Instead of concerning themselves more with broad outlines of policy and leaving the details to the administration they interfere a great deal too much in the details. For example, now, in the Health Ministry when we had this hospital lotteries thing quite a large sum of money came into the hospital lotteries fund and under the act itself the Minister could determine what works to get done out of these monies. And the Minister then laid himself open. The act itself, I think, was bad in that sense because it left it to the Minister to define what items were going to be done. And the Minister therefore made every decision in regard to each of these items. So we had a whole number of requests from Members of Parliament. And the Minister tended to apportion these monies electorate-wise. And the M.P's tended to ask for works which would bring them the greatest amount of popularity in the area. So a Member of Parliament instead of, shall we say, asking for a single ward in the biggest hospital in his area ... Instead of doing that he might ask that with the same sum of money that five maternity centres be opened. So the country became dotted with maternity centres. Although the Permanent Secretary might recommend against them the Minister took an interest in this himself and he himself was in a sense currying favour with the Members of Parliament by acceding to these requests and having maternity centres all over the country. And eventually it was found these maternity centres were a complete mistake. Because the maternity centres could not be adequately staffed. The most you had was a midwife there; and when you went along there wasn't adequate equipment, there

---

wasn't adequate staffing, of these maternity centres. And no man who had any regard for his wife would take her round to these maternity centres when he could travel another ten miles and get to a properly equipped hospital. So there the Minister was inferfering, intervening too much in the details of this or appointment of headmen or appointment of a peon and various things like this, Minister began to interfere in. Things that they should never have interfered with.

I. Hasn't there been a general tendency in Ceylon, both among politicians and even among some administrators, on big issues to temporise, to take ad hoc measures looking only to the year or two ahead, and not taking their time and studying the real issues?

W. There definitely had been that. That, of course, for a long time has been due to lack of any kind of planning organisation. And even when planning was set-up, planning hasn't been done at all intelligently. They were largely a kind of list of items of work that various Ministries proposed to get done. There wasn't coordination of those items and there wasn't a proper working out of prioritites. Each Ministry went its own way, tried to get as much as done - possible as done.

I. Yes, in fact, would you say that throughout there hasn't been, apart from - apart from bad allocation which we were talking about - hasn't there been bad inter-ministerial cooperation?

W. There has been. That has been unsatisfactory. How the Government - there is already machinery in this sense: that at the district level - coordination at the district level has been sought through these consultative committees of which the Government Agents are chairmen. Where the Government Agent brings the heads of departments, the local heads, local or branch heads of departments into confidence. And they look over the next year's programmes and try to coordinate. For example, now, if the Education Department has a plan for a school, shall we say, in a certain area to be built in the next year the Government Agent would try to ensure that the Public Works Department provided a road up to it perhaps. Also that the medical authorities would make arrangements for dental services to be provided at the school and so forth. Now, at the district level this has been sought to be done

but there have been certain jealousies and rivalries. The heads of departments in the provinces and districts, many of them, they think that the Government Agent is taking unto himself powers that he should not and that this is derogatory to their own powers. Or the heads of departments here in Colombo feel that their total plans are being stymied by various proposals put up from the districts. So there has been these jealousies and so forth operating against planned - proper planning. And then in Colombo itself it - as you said, the Ministries often don't work together.

I. How can you get the Ministries to work together?

W. Well, I suppose this - the Planning Ministry is intended to coordinate these efforts. And even the Department of Planning when it was set-up, when Gamini Corea originally and subsequently this chap Prins Siriwardena was in charge of it, they got these various Ministries to put up their proposals to the Planning Ministry. And then the Treasury was also associated with this Planning Department and the Planning Department's function really was to examine all these in the light of funds and staff and so forth available, to work out a scheme of priorities. But, actually, in practice I don't think they got very far with this.

I. Isn't it rather complicated?

W. It is complicated.

I. And don't you need a lot of staff to do it?

W. A lot of staff for this.

I. And they hadn't enough staff, that's the point?

W. They haven't had enough staff. And again, the monies that they thought would be available were not forthcoming. Because whether in the way of foreign aid or resources which we could ourselves put together, we found that the monies were eventually not - were insufficient for these things.

I. In Mrs. Bandaranaike's time wasn't policy and administration also affected by the - several changes in the Finance Ministry? They had Felix Dias and Ilangaratne. They had three Ministers at least there. Kalugalla was there at that time?

W. Yes, Kalugalle was there for a short time. That was when Ilangaratne resigned, gave it up, and they couldn't find anybody, Then Kalugalle came along, then N.M. That I don't

____

quite know ... Probably the taxation itself from year to year there had been so many changes people did not know what was coming next year. They [the people] couldn't assess [matters] at all. Of course, in a sense of course, it has to be - it had to be secret. I mean, the budget proposals and so forth. But the changes had been so violent and some of it so ill-thought-out ...

I. Yes, that sales tax seemed - I mean, they couldn't even implement it.

W. They couldn't implement that. Then various taxes which were largely vindictive and really ...

I. The T.R.P., you mean?

W. No, take a thing like the tax on lawyers, was it?; something was proposed at a certain stage, I don't know whether they paid the tax ever; anybody. On Crown Counsel - the King's Counsel had to pay more than the others and so on. Then there was the debits tax. The cheques - the - yes, I think on bank debits; each time you cashed a cheque there was a certain per cent taken off, which was discouraging the banking habit.

I. Were you ever called to any council - any Cabinet meetings in Mrs. Bandaranaike's time?

W. Not in her time. I got called to a Cabinet in the old days, in Dudley's U.N.P. Government time once. That was on this Indian-Pakistan resolution.

I. I meant to ask you about that but before ...

W. I think I was called to one meeting in Mrs. Bandaranaike's time. I can't remember what it was now. I can't recollect it straight away.

I. Talking about coordination and planning ahead what about the switch-over? From '56 to '60? How did that work out? Not only to '60 - afterwards?

W. Well, apart from the tensions, as between, say, the Tamils and the Sinhalese and so forth, the language switch-over tended to delay work quite a lot. And it was ... It created difficulties for the Tamil officers. Now, the Civil Servants, for example, they were expected to have passed language examinations but not all of them had kept in touch. I think most of them had not kept in touch with the other language.

____

With Sinhalese, the Tamil officers had not kept in touch with the Sinhalese. And even the Sinhalese officers who had not done Sinhalese at school although they may have passed the departmental examination they couldn't read their - they couldn't read Sinhalese fast enough. And so they tended to rely on the translations or - translations that were provided for them, and often they were not translations, just the gist of what the Sinhalese said. And they might have missed quite a lot of what they should have known.

I. Wasn't it that the position and the procedure and the process for switching over was not clarified sufficiently? and there was a sense of insecurity?

W. You mean, in the sense of the personnel adjusting themselves?

I. Yes. Yes.

W. Yes, that wasn't - that wasn't very clearly spelt out. And Mr. Bandaranaike in his own statements seemed to be uncertain about what he wanted. On one hand, he felt that this was unfair by the older people; that they should have to have, at any time, to work in a language which they had not agreed to work in at the time of their - of the time of their recruitment. But at certain other times he appeared to think that it was a fair demand to make of them in the interest of the country. So the Tamil officers were never very certain. Of course, some of these issues have been taken up in court also, as you know.

I. Was the pace too hurried?

W. I don't think the pace was too hurried because, as you know, extensions were being given over and over again. It was not so much that the pace was being hurried as that there was no - as you've already said there was no clear indication of how this would work. Even with a shorter period than was eventually given had been set down but officers would have felt that they were being fairly treated. For example, if - well, this, of course, in a sense it means that the pace was hurried. If the older entrants could have been allowed to continue throughout in English unless they voluntarily agreed to work in Sinhalese and only the new recruits were to be worked in Sinhalese it would have been much fairer by the staff, by the personnel. And I think it could have been worked very much more smoothly that way, only it would have

---

taken a much longer time.

I. In fact, if it was left to them to do it voluntarily, sometimes, conceivably, they might have made greater efforts to do so?

W. They might. It would have been possible I think to say that appointment to certain posts would depend on a man's having knowledge of Sinhala. Objectively considered. Not because you wanted to force people to study Sinhalese but on an objective consideration you found that for a certain job you wanted this knowledge of Sinhala, and then ... Now, for example, say, a Divisional Revenue Officer. It should have been possible to appoint say even a Tamil even to a Sinhalese area I feel, if he knew his Sinhala. Or various other appointments. Say even - say even prison appointments. If it was laid down that for all prison appointments in Sinhalese areas, an officer must know Sinhalese before he could be appointed by - a jailer. Perhaps the Tamils would have learned Sinhalese in order to be able to qualify for this. And it is a fact that a jailer knowing Sinhala would be much more preferable to a jailer who did not know Sinhalese in a Sinhalese area.

I. In view of this [fact], and the generally increasing political interference after '56 was there a fair amount of demoralisation?

W. Yes, there has been. Demoralisation in this sense for example: that quite a number of officers had begun to feel that it was not so much efficiency that gets you the plums; that it is really on your toeing the line, the political line. And so they began to try to please the politicians rather than try to do what they honestly considered was right.

I. Just as in another form, something like the headmen did in those days?

W. That's right.

I. And sometimes perhaps, knowing the Minister's view, they even went further than the Minister in that direction?

W. [Pause][1] In fact, very often they might even do something that was definitely wrong. Quite apart from merely trying to please the Minister more than - more than they need have. They even did something that was positively wrong perhaps to please them. For example, now, there was that - it was in the popular press - C.W.E. Commission. The C.W.E. Commission

---

1. I think he took my question as a statement of a point of view.

and various Government officers had done things they should never have done, just to please the powers that be.

I. That Karunaratna case brought up the question of discipline. Wasn't disciplinary procedure in the Service rather complicated and tortuous? And time-consuming for all those concerned, especially the superior officer?

W. Yes, and it continues to be like that. In the sense that, well, you've got to collect your evidence, frame charges and hold your enquiry. And then there is the right of appeal to the Public Service Commission. Of course, it is complicated but I think it is very fair. And although it is complicated, if the officers to whom the disciplinary powers have been delegated go about this energetically it need not take all the length of time these disciplinary proceedings do, in fact, take nowadays.

I. I was wondering whether because its time-consuming, officers try and avoid them wherever possible? And therefore discipline suffers?

W. Quite right. It does happen that way. And even on these confidential reports it has tended to come in. If you rate somebody below average on any point you've got to justify that, and that has to be communicated to the officer concerned and the officer concerned can take it up and say, 'Why do you hold with such a view? Why do you rate me below average on this?' And then you've got to prove it to him and so forth. So on account of this, even if an officer is very much below average, the tendency for the reporting officer is to say, 'Average' and leave it at that. He doesn't want all the bother.

I. In fact, when it comes to disciplinary procedure of clerks and minor employees, hasn't there been a tendency in Ceylon to look at the other side of the picture, think of his family and other things and therefore not punish the fellow? Though he has made it - done something fairly serious or, if not serious in itself, if it continues its cumulative effect would be serious?

W. I think that ... Well, yes; there definitely must be quite a lot of that. But I think what more often happens is that there is a tendency in such cases, if the officer is transferable, to transfer him rather than to punish him in some substantive way. Its utterly foolish of course because he'll

____

go and do the same kind of thing in the other place.

I. And what was recruitment taken from the Civil Service - and there has been criticism that the Civil Service in the last ten-twenty years has been - the Civil Service has been far too much on the Arts side? But does it bear on performance whether a man is an Arts man or a Science man?

W. I don't think it bears on performance. You find that both Arts men and Science men fit in the top.

I. No, I was thinking of orientation.

W. I don't think it matters a great deal whether he's an Arts man or a Science man, unless of course except in so far as a Science man would be more acceptable in a post like, say, Director of Industrial Development or some post like that. Otherwise what you need is a man with a trained mind who can look at it intelligently and analyse a problem.

I. In general, recruitment to the whole Public Service - I mean, did you think that before the recent changes there was no standardisation at all, each department went its own sweet way?

W. For recruitment?

I. Yes. Say, Land Development, each department had its cadre and basis of pay and promotion?

W. Yes, there has been - well, so far as salaries are concerned there has been - it has not been rationalised. And these various Salaries Commissions that have sat from time to time have been trying to remedy this, and have a fewer number of scales. So that, say, for example, departments employing graduates or at graduate level, there would be the same salary scale for all graduates or maybe slightly higher scale for honour graduates and so on. But - and also on the other side, the Public Service Commission in approving schemes of recruitment, they have been trying to rationalise this as far as possible so that at the same level of employment - at the same level of responsibility in various departments, you've got people of the same education and qualification and even on the same salaries. Because the Public Service Commission itself, in approving schemes of recruitment approves also the salary scale in consultation with the Treasury. So that I really feel that in the past there has been - there hasn't been uniformity or any kind of standardisation but in the

recent years an effort has been made to remedy it.

I. No uniformity in the past. How has this new system been worked out, the Unified Administrative Service? Were you there when they began it?

W. Yes. The Unified Administrative Service; there, what has been done largely has been to fit people in on the basis of the salaries they were drawing at the time of - at the time of the coming into being of the scheme. So that if you had, say, an Assistant Commissioner of Local Government drawing such a salary he would be placed above members of the Civil Service who were drawing lower salaries but below those who were drawing the higher salaries. So they tried to work it out on the basis of salary levels. Of course, there were various anomalies resulting from this.

I. There was bound to be some unfairness, no?

W. Yes, there was some unfairness. And, in point of fact, you did find some of the officers from outside the Civil Service who came into the Administrative Service, although drawing higher salaries, had earlier been holding posts which were junior to those held by some of the Civil Servants drawing lesser salaries. I think that happened in the case of the Marketing Department. I [can] think of an instance where the officer was subordinate in rank in the Marketing Department actually [was] drawing a higher salary than the Civil Servant who was holding the higher post. Now, in the Administrative Service he ranked higher as well. That was a personnel problem. Then I think by and large the scheme is satisfactory from that angle but of course there are other problems connected with the Administrative Service.

I. Like?

W. Like - now, you find the various classes, and the posts in the Administrative Service are within those classes. So you may find that there is an officer, who by salary, who actually is within that class - in the cadre, but whose experience is such as not to fit him for any of the posts in that class. So some of these officers who've been functioning in recent times as Government Agents, for example, have not really been satisfactory. They may be excellent chaps and they may be able to get on with people and so forth. Like - I'm thinking now of a man like, say, W.J. Fernando who is

today Government Agent, Kandy. But a vast area of his duties, say, like land work and irrigation and headmen's affairs, completely outside his experience. So he'd have to depend on his assistants or do a lot of reading and so forth himself, at this stage.

I. Did you feel that the Public Service as a whole was over-staffed, especially at the lower levels?

W. Very much so.

I. And then this habit of getting temporary employees, who then without qualifications perhaps because they're temporary, but who by virtue of being temporary get their foothold in the department and a claim to permanancy.

W. Yes. Theoretically that should never have happened. But it did happen and you had a thing like the Quasi-Clerical Service, as it was called, made up of all these chaps who had been taken in temporarily for food control, or election work and things like that. That's because sometimes you do have rush periods of work and you take people on in the rush to help with the rush. And often through lack of care these people are allowed to continue when there's no work for them.

I. How effective were the efficiency bars? Were they practical tests or were they just formalities? Even now?

W. Efficiency bars. Some efficiency bars have examinations attached to them, paper work and so on. So far as the examination work is concerned, of course, they're effective in the sense that you have something tangible to go by. But for the rest of it, its largely a matter of the assessment made by the head of department. And there again, as you say, if the head of department is lethargic about this, doesn't want trouble, he just lets the fellow go through.

I. Well, one noticeable feature of the structure of the Civil Service here is the gap between the salaries paid to the top-grade officers and the lower levels. Computing statistics, I think 99% of the Public Service get the - less than half the salary of the highest. You know, you could work various computations. And the gap seems much - I mean, obviously there has to be a gap - but the gap seems wider than in most Western countries certainly. And ...

W. You're thinking of the Administrative Service alone or ...?

I. The Public Service as a whole.

W. The Public Service as a whole.

I. I was thinking of the minor employees and the clerks in particular. Clerks.

W. Yes, the clerks get very little indeed. As compared with salaries in the private sector. The salaries of the - even of the highest ranking officers are low. I suppose you have to pay those salaries to the people at the top to be able to attract people of that calibre. Even today the waste is tremendous from the Public Service; people going into the private sector. Well, of course, at the level of the clerks you can still continue to get them because the difference between the emoluments the clerks in Government Service and in the Mercantile Service - emoluments - the difference is not very great.

I. But I was wondering whether this level of pay creates economic - well, general frustration among the clerks?

W. I don't think to any great extent, from my experience. I don't know how it is, unless ... Of course, they accustom themselves to that - to the incomes that they can get; the more provident among them anyhow. In fact, I find now, having been in the private sector, that the clerks, for example, in the private sector seem to be more improvident than the people in the Government sector - than the clerks in the Government sector. Now, in my own firm ...

I. That's Lewis Brown's?

W. Lewis Brown's. We gave these chaps a bonus of three and a half months because we did quite well in the last year. The end of '66 we gave them a three and a half month's bonus.

I. Basic salary or ...?

W. No, gross. Three and a half months gross. Well, in spite of that - that was at Christmas, immediately before Christmas - in spite of that they've been asked - every one of them has asked for and got his festival advance. And every one of them draws his weekly advance every week of the month. And its not as if they have saved anything. And the Government Servant of course has the advantage of a pension which they don't have. Of course they get their provident fund which is just one large sum.

I. In fact, ... a personal question if I may ask; would you say

that your experience in the mercantile sector has provided you with any lessons which you would use if you went back into the Civil Service?

W. Yes. One thing that strikes me very forcibly is the absence of minuting in the private sector. There is no minuting at all. I think in Government Service too it should be possible to increase the number of staff officers and reduce greatly the number of clerical servants, give greater responsibility to the staff officers, and eliminate minuting almost wholly. Because what happens now in a Government office is on practically every paper that comes in the tappal to the Office Assistant, the Office Assistant takes a letter and passes it down to the clerk. Before it ever goes up to the staff officer, to the Assistant Government Agent or the Additional Assistant Government Agent or whoever it is, it first goes down to the clerk. The clerk fishes out the file into which this letter must go and then he writes a long minute about it tracing the history of this and so forth. And it used to be considered a virtue of the clerk that he should set out all the pros and cons, course of action to be taken, pros and cons, doing this or the other, and make a recommendation. And the staff officer says, 'Yes', or 'No' or suggests something else. And the staff officer, more often than not merely reads this minute that this chap has put up. He doesn't go bothering with the papers. And there it is. So a great deal depends on the clerk and his intelligence and so forth. But if you have the staff officers themselves dealing with this, you would have a man at a higher level who really puzzles this thing out. And if you could have more staff officers with a restricted number of subjects assigned to each of them they could carry this in their heads, most of the subjects. Now, for example, I, in my firm, or the man who is doing the imports, the radio batteries and the vacuum flasks and so forth, he carries all that in his head. He knows. So if I get him along today and ask him, 'Well, what is the situation? When are we expecting the next lot of vacuum flasks? How much are we getting? What are the arrangements you've made for distribution?' and all that kind of thing, he knows. And he doesn't depend on any clerk to minute and so forth. He has a few subjects to deal with and

he's quite an authority on them. He knows exactly how it stands. But in Government Service you have, say, now, the Permanent Secretary ... Now, when I was Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of that funny thing I told you about, it was utterly impossible to keep track of any of those things.

I. Again here, too much red-tape?

W. Too much red-tape.

I. Clerks and forms?

W. Well, that is one thing. And another, of course, is that in the Government sector there is quite a lot of waste. Well, you're given a certain - you're given certain allocations in the budget. So-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so. And the return from this doesn't bother you very much. Well, say, for example, you have an allocation for providing village wells. Well, you don't bother very much about, you don't go at all closely into the question of the siting of these wells, whether they're in the right place and so forth. You would directly depend on reports from the headman; it goes to the D.R.O. [Divisional Revenue Officer]; then it comes to the office; and the clerk sits on it and he puts up something or other. You often - the chap who makes the final order often doesn't have enough time to go into this - into all this because he has a host of other things to do. And eventually it may be that the headman is getting it close to where his relatives live or something like that. And so you don't get the best return for your money. Whereas in the private sector you can't do that.

I. Mmm, but hasn't the private sector got a special advantage here. However big the firm, it is still a much smaller concern than the Government?

W. It is but then you can kind of - the Government work can be so divided up and compartmentalised that if you have the responsibility taken at lower levels, and if you have a dependable officer at a lower level taking the responsibility for these things he can work it. Today I think there isn't sufficient devolution of responsibility. We found that ... Now, in the Health Ministry, when Badiuddin was there - I was Permanent Secretary - we appointed that Committee, also headed by Moragoda, to go into the possibilities, but nothing came of it. There was so much jealousy and so forth in the

Department that it was very difficult to get a thing done. In any case I moved out from about the time when they were considering this. The Superintendants of Health Services in the provinces, they're not given enough authority and they don't take responsibility for getting things done. They refer everything to the head office here and ask for instructions. There's delay, loss of time. For example, now, in the old days, say, the medical superintendant in charge of a hospital, he had no authority to get even some item of maintenance or repair done, if it exceeded, say, twenty-five rupees. He had to refer to the Superintendant of Health Services; he referred here; and the accountant went into it and so forth before anything was done. I was told of instances like this for example: there was a leak in the gutter; the poor old medical superintendant couldn't get anything done; he couldn't get a tinker from the town and get it done, the simplest thing to do; but it might have cost him about fifty rupees or so because it was a long leak in the gutter. He just couldn't get it done so he had to refer to the S.H.S., the S.H.S. referred here and they had to see whether there was money in the till and all that kind of thing. Whereas if that chap had been given the authority he would have done that. Meanwhile, while all this was happening, the rainy season came on and this gutter was leaking onto the walls and so forth and eventually what you might have got done for about sixty rupees now cost you a five hundred rupees. So there is a great deal that can be done in the way of getting responsibility down to the people at the lower levels.

I. Anything else?

W. Of course, we don't have to bother with political interference at all. Then, of course, where we have to get a decision higher up in the private sector we can get that much more quickly. In Government Service you refer some point somewhere and it takes months sometimes before you can get a decision.

I. If I may ask, before you entered the private sector, as a Permanent Secretary or as a person in Colombo rather than in the districts, what was your attitude to the private sector? For instance, when you were Permanent Secretary [for] Industries and Commerce, what was your attitude to the private sector?

W. Well, quite candidly, so far as commerce was concerned, I was suspicious of the honesty of a whole lot of chaps. And I think when you work these controls largely, Import Control for example, you find fellows up to so many tricks that you get suspicious of them. But having been in the Commerce Ministry I could see, as I had not seen before, how important the private sector was. And how necessary it was for the Government to give all possible assistance to enable them to get on with their job, and fast. I can see that even more now from having been in the private sector. How important it is, for example, for a chap to get an import license for something. To the chap who sits in the Import Control Office, the Assistant Controller of Imports and Exports, its just another paper. Just another subject which he can attend to maybe in three days, he can put it over the weekend. It doesn't matter. He doesn't see the urgency of it, half as much as you see when you are in the private sector and it is so important to be able to get your piece of machinery or to get your batteries in to satisfy your customers and so on. But you come to realise that, although not as acutely as when you're in the private sector, when you are in a department which brings you into immediate contact with these people. Because they come along and discuss their problems with you across the table, and you see how important it is. But I think, still, however keen you may be about doing the best you can by the private sector while you're in Government service, if you have not actually worked in the private sector you don't realise how important that is. Because, now, for example, take a thing like this: today there is a floor price on coconut fibre; your mattress and your brush, your bristle fibre, coconut fibre, there is a floor price. This was introduced in the old days by Suntharalingam when he was Minister. The idea - well, the idea was that Ceylon should get a fair price for the coconut fibre, and that these prices should not be manipulated by the exporter in collaboration with the fellow abroad, especially when there were non-nationalist exporters of coconut fibre. For example, they were the same people here as there. Importers, exporters were often the same lot of people. So Suntharalingam introduced this fair price - ground - floor price scheme: no exports

---

of fibre at below such-and-such prices, at such-and-such prices. Of course, these people adopted various devices to defeat this and they still adopt[sic] it. But by and large the scheme has been working satisfactorily. But the Government is itself not well enough informed about what is the realistic floor price from time to time.

I. Mmm, it varies?

W. It varies. Because you may find ... If the size of the crop, or synthetic fibres are available at a certain time at lower rates, even if those are not exact substitutes for the coconut fibre, the fact that they're available at cheaper prices because they've got bigger crops of them or something or other, of the (?) means that the chap abroad is not willing to pay that same high price. So you've got constantly to be adjusting the floor price to enable any coconut fibre to go out at all. Now, today, it would seem to us in the trade that the floor price is too low because with the greatest efforts we make we just can't sell it. And I was in - I was out in Europe ...

I. Too high you mean?

W. The floor price is too high. [I was out in Europe] when I met G.S. Peiris, who is our ambassador in Germany. He himself said that this price is too high and unless the Government does something about it, we may lose the market. Because if the chap who has been importing coconut fibre, because the price is too high he changes over to (?) or something else its difficult to win him back again. But the Government officers who are dealing with this don't see the urgency of it; the need to make a quick decision. If - it is better to err on the side of putting the floor price a little too low while you make your investigations rather than let the high price continue ...

I. And lose the market?

W. ... and lose the market. These things don't strike you forcibly enough while you're still - even - however well-intentioned you may be, while you're still in the Government Service. Not having been in the private sector you don't quite realise it.

I. And are the big firms the mercenary capitalist institutions which, well, I for one, and generally people believe it and,

---

I presume, the socialist Governments consider them to be?

W. Mercenary?

I. Yes.

W. Of course. Of course profit is their motive and they want to make the largest profits they can. Some while remaining within the law and the other people even defeating the law. That is there. Now a firm like ours, Lewis Browns, we keep well within the law. But we make profits which people may consider inordinate. But on the other hand it is not as if we are profiteering.

I. Yes, ...

W. Because within the margin of profits, say, that the price control allows you. Now, very many of our articles are price-controlled, say, radio batteries which is our main source of income, you see, the prices are controlled. And we have made our figures(?) available to the Government. And the Government has fixed what they consider is a fair profit. But since the volume of our business is so great, and we don't require any marvellous amount of staff to handle it, still we can make quite large profits on that. But if you knew what profits we make at the end of the year you might very well feel: 'Well, why can't you sell the batteries cheaper to the - more cheaply to the public'. But, of course, it would be - to the individual purchaser of a battery it may mean say five or ten cents only ...

I. A final question on the Civil Service as a whole, apropos of what Saparamadu wrote in his introduction to Woolf's Diaries. He said that because of the traditions and so on and so forth, the Civil Servants were cast into a mould; and somehow I am sceptical of this: [that] because of the strength of the Service traditions they were cast into a mould.

W. Does he amplify that? What does he mean by a mould?

I. I presume he means: well, something of the tradition of responsibility, integrity,and so on and so forth here. I mean, he was talking of the white man, of the Europeans and I think they had a superiority complex too. I mean, he was alluding to those sort of things. But he implied that they tended to be orthodox you know. I'm afraid I can't remember the context altogether but ...

W. Well, of course, in the old days the Civil Service was - well,

we started off as revenue officers, more interested in collection of revenue. And more concerned with not doing the wrong thing than doing something right and positive. It has really been in more recent times ... Of course, there were exceptions. I mean, even among the British Civil Servants. A man like - who was it now?

I. Brayne?

W. Brayne. Who wanted to do something positive, improve the conditions of the village areas, the peasants and people like that. But in general there was a tendency for a kind of negative attitude. Well, you collected your revenue, we saw that your votes were not exceeded, saw that you travelled only when it was necessary too and kept the expenses at a minimum. That kind of thing, rather than going out and doing something positive. I think that has persisted and a change is very necessary there. In regard to this kind of superiority complex I think that has also been there. That was because the selection was made as a - from this competitive exam, Civil Servants began to feel that they were intellectually a cut above the rest. And even from the days of their - from the higher forms in their schools they looked forward to this and the end of this and groomed themselves for it through the higher forms and through the university. And I think there was that snobbishness and so forth. But about being cast into a mould, I wouldn't quite go all the way with him in saying that because there has been so much diversity or so much - so great a difference from one to another. Some took certain privileges and so forth that they had very much more seriously than others.

I. No, I mean there's bound to be differences in temperament and I'm sure there were many with initiative, and willing to do the unorthodox thing.

W. There were quite a number.

I. I think I'll call that a day because I'm ....

END OF INTERVIEW