THOMAS WEBB ROBERTS

b. 27 April 1881.
Barbados.
B.A., Oxon.
C.C.S. 1902 - 1935

21 Oct. 1902	apptd.
5 Dec. 1902	attached to Matara Kachcheri.
25 May 1903	attached to Ratnapura Kachcheri. (Passed First Exam.)
1 Aug. 1903	attached to Matara Kachcheri.
2 Sept. 1904	Acting Office Assistant, Kurunegala Kachcheri.
11 Aug. 1905	Acting Police Magistrate, Matara. (Class lV 19 Aug. 1905)
15 Sept. 1906	P.M., Panadure.
31 Oct. 1906	Acting P.M., Colombo.
12 Nov. 1906	P.M., Panadure.
1 Feb. 1909	Acting D.J., Chilaw. (Passed Second Exam. July 1909) (Class lll Jan. 1910)
5 Sept. 1911	on half pay leave.
31 May 1912	Acting D.J., Batticaloa. (Class ll Jan. 1914)
12 Feb. 1914	Com'er of Requests, Colombo.
2 Nov. 1914 to 6 Jan. 1915	Additional Municipal Magistrate, Colombo as well.
21 June 1915 to 1917	Additional Municipal Magistrate, Colombo as well.
1 March 1917	Asst. Com'er of Excise, Central Division.
22 Dec. 1918 to 13 Jan. 1919	Acting Com'er of Excise.
15 Feb. 1920	Acting D.J., Badulla-Haldumulla.
5 July 1920	Asst. Com'er of Excise, H.Q.
1 Aug. 1920	Excise Com'er. (Class 1^2 July 1921)
April to Aug. 1920	on leave.
23 Sept. 1924	resumed duties as Excise Com'er.
27 Sept. 1927	D.J., Galle. (Class 1^1 April 1928)
Sept. to Dec. 1932	on leave.
8 Dec. 1932	D.J., Galle.

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1 Aug.	1920	Excise Com'er.
April to Aug.	1920	on leave.
23 Sept.	1924	resumed duties as Excise Com'er.
27 Sept.	1927	D.J., Galle
Sept. to Dec.	1932	on leave.
8 Dec.	1932	D.J., Galle.

Comments on Interviews with Mr. T.W. Roberts, Nov.-Dec., 1965.

That of 9th November 1965 was my first interview and was indeed my trial run. On his request and partly for my own benefit I sent my father a typed list of the questionnaire I had prepared for my own reference, long before the first interview. He had jotted down brief answers beside most of the questions (this MSS is with me). I had this MSS before me during the interview and some of my questions were based on views he had postulated here; others sought verification of these. The reader will find, therefore, that several questions involve quotations from answers written previously. I should also record that I had, sometime in 1963, asked my father to write his Memoirs and this document was naturally consulted previous to my interviews.

As he is my father I will refrain from any comments on his personality beyond saying that some of his views reveal much of the 19th century strain, that he has many liberal ideas and that, nevertheless, he is a Conservative in his politics. It is a reflection on the generations between us that I do not, personally, agree with many of his views on political and colonial topics. For a wider selection of his views I would refer the reader to "Problems of Public Life in India and Ceylon", a collection of disconnected essays by my father, published by Lake House in 1937 (which I did not know to exist and which I did not read till May 1966, a few days ago).

A West Indian by birth, my father ended up in the C.C.S. via Oxford. (See his Memoirs.) After his second marriage and retirement in 1935 he chose to make Ceylon his home, settling down in Galle where he last served. He lived there till 1962, gaining citizenship by registration in the process. At the time of the interview, therefore, his knowledge of Ceylonese affairs was considerably more than that of the normal run of foreign Civil Servants. His C.C.S. experiences were, no doubt, dimmed by the passage of time but his memory I found to be better than many others interviewed.

The intimate knowledge of Ceylon that he possessed in 1962 would not, of course, have held true in his initial years in the Island. Like the other West-Indian, John Rock, as well as the Indians in the C.C.S. he was probably in the ambiguous position of being neither accepted by the Ceylonese nor by the European ruling class. If at all, he seems to have gravitated more towards the former and certainly by the 20's had many close friendships in Ceylonese circles. With seniority and experience, then, he could be said to had had, perforce, a foot in both camps. But it is apposite to record that, till the 1920's if not later, non-Europeans were excluded from the administrative posts and shunted into judicial and subsidiary lines (though some Europeans also were). This was my father's experience too but he is not in the least bit bitter about it.

M.W. Roberts
5.6.1966.

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Mr. T.F.C. Roberts' Answers to Questions forwarded by M.W. Roberts,

6 September 1966.

Unfortunately my step-brother did not follow my instructions and return the airmail letter in which I sent my queries. I have therefore had to recall the gist of the questions from memory.[1]

1. I think I inquired whether D.S. Senanayake considered E.W. Perera a possible threat to his own ambition of becoming Ceylon's first Prime Minister and, therefore, (aided by John Kotelawala) put up and/or encouraged A.P. Jayasuriya to contest E.W. Perera on an anti-Christian ticket?

   Answer:

   It is possible A.P. Jayasuriya was passively supported by D.S. & J.K. but I certainly don't think D.S. was afraid of E.W. Perera.

2. I am rather at a loss here. It is possible that I inquired whether E.W. Perera was a kind of Gladstonian Liberal who scorned the idea of canvassing votes and preferred to rest on his laurels, particularly the agitation he had undertaken after the 1915 riots - work which a new generation were hardly aware of.

   Answer:

   It is true E.W. Perera's defeat was partly due to his refusal to canvas votes (a rather silly and unpractical idea but, then, although E.W.P. was a doughty fighter for self Government by the Ceylonese, he really did not give much thought to people as individuals, quite unlike D.S. who, apart from being a political animal, cared about the villager and the poor workers). I think in any event E.W. Perera would have lost as A.P. Jayasooriya[sic] was a Buddhist and the constituency a Buddhist one. E.W. Perera was a spent force from the time Ceylon got partial self Government under the Donoughmore Scheme. He had done his bit in the old council and was incapable of moving with the times and, although one of the band of fighters for self government, he was an obstinate old fashioned chap just like his brother Arthur Perera advocate of Kandy.

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1. Mr. Roberts' comments were sans commas and I have taken the liberty of inserting them.

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3. I inquired whether European officials showed bias in decisions involving cases between Europeans and Ceylonese, drawing a distinction between administrative and judicial bias (i.e. cases which arose before them as administrative officials as distinct from those arising while they were on the bench).

Answer:

I don't quite follow what you mean about Administrative & Judicial bias. Certainly there was, in the old days, bias in favour of European Administrators for the Europeans thought they were superior to the Ceylonese and as a general rule they were not far wrong although the Burgher Civil Servants and many of the Singhalese Civil Servants were just as capable as the Europeans. People like C.L. Wickremesinghe were just as capable as the Europeans. Judicially I don't think there was any bias. Even in the twenties there were Ceylonese Judges who were probably more capable and superior to the average European Judges and I feel quite sure the Europeans knew this, and certainly the Judges, even in the twenties, did not think they were superior. Mind you, as between Europeans and Ceylonese it was obvious that the former were more truthful and certainly I, and I think most Ceylonese Judges, would have accepted the evidence of Europeans. This does not mean that certain of the educated Europeans[sic] were not truthful and honest. I remember D.S. appearing as a witness before me and I would not hear of any suggestion that D.S. would have spoken anything but the truth. After all he was Prime Minister and in fact the lawyers appearing for the other side accepted my view of D.S. but I can think of many other Ministers whose evidence could not have been accepted without question. You would have read about the Bracegirdle case. Ask the old boy[1] what he thought of it. There was, no doubt, colour prejudice and some bias in favour of Europeans but much of the prejudice on the part of the old Ceylonese Civil Servants was no doubt imaginary like many of the coloured Civil Servants over here in the minor positions who think there is differentiation, when in fact there is no

1. T.W. Roberts.

discrimination.[1]

4. The question was almost certainly as follows: 'Would you know if any of the following were land speculators and land grabbers: Vanderpooten, Charles Batuwantudawe, E.A.P. Wijeyeratne, A.A. Wickremasinghe, Meedeniya Adigar?'

Answer:

Batuwantudawa was hard up until he got into power and E.A.P. Wijeyeratne was a fly boy so it was quite possible they were speculators in land. I did not know Vanderpooten but one heard it said he speculated in land. I cannot really with any certainty [tell you] whether the people you mention were speculators in land. Certainly there was a lot of land speculators and one knows certain people took advantage of inside knowledge to buy land. A.A. Wickremasinghe was a rich man and obviously got rich because of land investment. I found him most upright as a lawyer and the others in the profession, i.e. local proctors, looked up to him. One must remember that anyone who bought land in the early days would have become rich and there was nothing to prevent people like A.A. Wickremasinghe and Vanderpooten buying, or rather, investing in land out of their earnings in court.

5. I would like your appraisal of any Civil Servants you knew with particular reference to (a) their sympathy to local aspirations (b) ability and (c) willingness to act on unorthodox lines?

Answer:

I find it difficult to answer your questions about the Civil Servants you mention because I did not know most of the European Civil Servants well and I did not come across several of the Ceylonese Civil Servants. However, I can answer in a general way some of your questions. Until the late nineteen forties I was rather anti European apart from the fellow club members of the Sports Club who were for the most part managers of business firms. I did not approve of the arrogance of the European in the Mercantile and Civil Service. Of the people you mention Dad[T.W. Roberts] and I are agreed that apart from one chap, Furse Roberts, they were

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1. My brother works in the British Inland Revenue Department.

decent chaps. On the other hand Paul Peries was just as Anti-European as Furse Roberts was anti the other way. In the thirties, and certainly by the forties, the Europeans were sympathetic towards local aspirations. With regard to the others - R.Y. Daniel was rather haw-haw and liked to be noticed by the Europeans (a failing of Burghers in early days). R.Y. Daniel was not able. Balfour was quite able as were P. Sara [P. Saravanamuttu], T.D. Perera, C.L. Wickremesinghe, Poulier and V. Coomaraswamy, E. Rodrigo, but like most of the other Civil Servants, including the Europeans, inclined to be orthodox. Bickmore, if I remember aright, was very much pro-Ceylonese. Wadia was a very capable man and quite receptive to new ideas and I think people like W.H. Moore, Rogerson, Luddington and Kaufman would have been receptive to new ideas. Prasad was a good kind man, as was Hunter, but they kept to themselves. Baruscha was inclined to be lazy and greedy and therefore would not have bothered much of anything much outside doing his work in office. Tenison was capable but inclined to take short cuts on the Bench which meant he would not have taken much trouble outside his immediate job. W.H. Moore was not very well known to me but I met him occasionally and he struck me as very conscientious. Lanktree was quite a good chap and he thought I was a donkey to retire as he felt Ceylon was nice and comfortable. Lanktree rather blotted his copy book at Trinco for he, along with the other Ceylonese Civil Servants including a Singhalese D.J., used to push off after work each day to some places about 15 to 20 miles outside Trinco to avoid possible Air Raids. As a result Rennison was transferred there as A.G.A. and I was asked to go as D.J. and take charge of the Warden Service as well. (This latter as voluntary unlike chaps in Colombo who got perks and good pay for A.R.P. jobs.) Pinto, Jansz and Gunewardene [D.C.R.] were not particularly bright. S.P. Wickramasinghe was bright but was too concerned with things not appertaining to the Civil Service. A.G. Ranasinghe was a good chap but quiet. The man who cared about the common man was Aluwihare who did very good work for the villager in Kegalle in carrying out D.S.'s rural schemes. One must remember that those early days were days where people did not appreciate the welfare of the common man. Even in England, although there was a dole and a 10/- a week pension for old people and of course the unions fighting for bigger pay etc., it really was not until the war years when people really began to think of a

welfare state and hence the Beveridge Report which was by a Liberal and set on foot by a Coalition Government mainly Conservative. In Ceylon, of course, there was the fight for self Government but it was the educated and upper classes who wanted this. (The village and poor folk couldn't care less at that stage.) The educated Ceylon folk wanted the plum jobs from the Europeans and did not think too much of the under-privileged. I was stationed mostly in out stations where, apart from doctors and engineers, I did not come across other Civil Servants. In Panadura I was President of the Mothers and Babies clinic as the two castes fought over the job. The M.O.H. and some fine Singhalese ladies plus the odd Singhalese man did some fine work at the clinic. I had to force the Chairman etc. of the local U.D.C. [Urban District Council] to take an interest. In fact, about the year 1936, at a general meeting I had to warn them that one day the common man would force them to do things for him if they did not pull up their socks. I ran a carnival and gave half the money to the U.D.C. to start a modern clinic centre. I got the local people interested and started an old peoples' house. While this was going on I never saw any Civil Servants showing any interest although, I must admit they were stationed in Kalutara. Ossie Abeysinghe did some wonderful work for the poor mothers and babies. I used to go round with him on talks about malaria and we even spent our own money to experiment with a pregnant mother who had lost eight children at birth. (His treatment was successful and didn't the villagers talk about it.) At Kalutara, where I was stationed for a short time, the senior members of the Public Services (not the A.G.A.) had their own club and thought they were too good for the town folk.
W. Sansoni and I therefore gave a lot of support to the Town Club to set an example to the Senior Civil Servants. At Trinco I did not find the A.G.A. (European) and Senior members of the Civil Servants taking any interest in the local people. Rajasingham[1] and I had to insist on getting an adequate stock of food in reserve in case we were cut off from Colombo. We ran cooperative stores and some of us subscribed and ran these(?) clubs to stop profiteering. In fact, in the end we did most of the sale of rice (the A.G.A. got us to do this but he did not take much interest in the people). In Negombo I was President of a number of Associations and we helped the poor and collected money for an area destroyed by fire. I

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1. Could be 'Rajasinghe'.

did not notice any Civil Servants about at the time apart from one minor one. True there was no A.G.A. at Negombo but one would have thought more interest would have been taken. Certainly at a place like Trinco interest should have been taken but I had to go to Colombo and get condensed milk for the mothers of Trinco. (This I did through Oliver G. but surely this was the responsibility of the Civil Service). E. Rodrigo did some good work for, or rather with, D.S.

I am sorry I could not help you more. I did not know most of the Civil Servants you mention very well and apart from some of the Ceylonese my knowledge is a bit scanty.

INTERVIEWS WITH MR. T.W. ROBERTS, NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1965

First Interview 9 November 1965

[I began with the query whether his University experience in Britain had helped him with regard to his life in the Colonial Service. He was inclined to say "yes", and pointed in particular to lessons he derived from a study of Roman history. He cited the attempts to plant colonies of small farmers in the countryside.]

R. It turned out in the end that those things rather failed. They would take a man from the town and put him on land; and he couldn't work it with success and compete against the produce of the big estates run by slave labour. You follow? All that sort of thing was just the sort of thing like we had in Ceylon. Then, this getting title by prescription, it comes from Roman law!

I. Ah ha, I see. And yet, I suppose it was unavoidable, but this sort of education and upbringing separated you from the peasantry?

R. Yes, I think so, because they had no culture.

I. And how did you first as you say, you didn't like working in the outstations, you know, the solitude in the outstations - where was this, what station?

R. That was at Matara and Ratnapura?

I. You say you felt like resigning then?

R. Yes, I nearly did resign. That was also because I was alone, my family in London. You see? Wife and child and two children in London. And no sign of anyway to bring them out.

Wasn't till my boss, Murty, got hold of Mrs. Ellis - Mrs. Ellis came round, she was the wife of the Controller of Revenue, a New Zealand woman, rather nice woman. Murty said, 'My assistant is thinking of resigning. Can't you do something for him?' And they said 'Yes, we will get the Government to advance him the money to bring them out.'

I. Ah ha. Now, you say that the prevailing shade of thought in the C.C.S. was largely Tory?

R. Yes.

I. What do you mean when you say that 'Labour and Liberal supporters were more inclined to give popular movements - were inclined to give popular movements more facility?'

R. Yes, I suppose where the man was a Liberal or pro-Labour man he would be in favour of the popular movement there.

I. That's of course, political?

R. Yes. For instance, the Irishmen I knew were definitely more so than the Englishment.

I. Oh yes! Were there any Irishmen there?

R. Oh yes! Not many. Ellis was an Irishman, that Ellis who. I ....

I. Yes.

R. Murty my boss, and Conroy and one or two of the others ..., not many.

I. Now as an O.A., did you go out into the field much?

R. Very rarely. Once, once [in] six months say.

I. You think you should have gone out more?

R. Oh yes, should have gone out more, but the poor O.A. didn 't have much of a travelling vote. He had to use it for himself. He was often a hard-up fellow. Murty was never a bloke who had money. He had some sisters he had to help.

I. Now this. when I put this question of the British habit of pragnatism, you know, rule of thumb, you say 'There is no other way' er but what I was asking is whether it was pushed too far? Couldn't there have been more instruction and discussion? Whereas you were just sent out, sometimes without any instruction at all?

R. No, but we used to get instruction. Now Murty would have me to dinner about twice or thrice a week and we would talk over things. That was the instructions; and whats more, - now, a very interesting thing; Murty there was a very able Englishman named Thorpe(?), who was District Judge in Matara, and he was firm on keeping the Crown land protected. He wasn't in favour of giving chena licences to people. Now Murty was inclined to give, every now and then, a few fellows a licence to ....

I. This was according to whim?

R. Er?

I. Was this according to whim? Murty's whim? I mean....

R. Yes. It was, a certain .... The Government rule was 'don't give chenas' mostly, but where there was great need or valueless land, you know....

I. But wasn't most of the land, say, especially in Hambantota District, rather valueless.

R. In Hambantota it must have been very valueless, but I don't know about that, I wasn't there. In Matara it was mostly good land.

I. And what was their definition of 'need'?

R. Of?

I. Need. You said....

R. Poverty. If a man was really poor [if] the headman said he was very much in need of a block of acre, you would give him an acre to plant and let him pay a rupee a year or something.

I. But, you had to rely on the headman for this?

R. Yes, the only thing you had to [sic] do. But that sort of thing - the Headman wouldn 't be unkind to a man, you know. They weren't bad fellows like that.

I. I think I will come back to that later.

R. Thorpe and Murty used to be very furiously arguing about that. You know what I mean, I would listen to them and learn something about it from them.

I. I asked this question about British administration being all too often mere routine because that's what Stace says. He even calls it 'blind routine', and - you don't think so?

R. No. Fellows like Murty...! How could 'blind routine' produce that Irrigation Scheme in Kurunegala, a thousand tanks! Something, nowhere else happened (?). You follow what I mean. Done by local labour where the local gansabhawa ruled. Government didn't put money up.

I. Yes, but....

R. That was a C.A. who .. a man of his own mind.

I. Yes but that was a fairly obvious thing once they revived the ganasbhawa in 1856.

R. No, but to put a rule in that a gansabahawa could charge people, require labour from people, or else in place of labour, rupee two days labour.

I. Well, that was a sort of old rule that was used for roads and it was used by Ward and other Governors.

R. Yes, but to give gansabhawa power to put such a rule.

I. Well it was advocated at the top level in my period[1] in the 19th century.

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1. My period of research : 1840's - 1870's.

R. Yes, but that's because Fraser, [WO] Fisher first thought of applying it through a gansabhawa, isn't it? That's not a rule of thumb.[1]

I. At the same time you say there is a tendancy to preserve the status quo?

R. Yes, yes....

I. At what level, I'm not only speaking about the political level but, I mean, in the local situation don't you think sometimes more innovationism was called for?

R. Yes, yes, but then keeping the old system was peace, otherwise to bring something new would lead to rows. If an dhoby caste went by a goigama house singing there would be a riot.

I. Yes. I was not talking in political terms, I was thinking on economic lines - with regard to improvements. Well of course as you say, Fisher's idea was - that's a sort of innovationist idea, that's an improvement, but was there a general tendency to work on Fisher's lines? Or were Government Agents and the A.G.A's more inclined to, well, take things as they came, rather than....?

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1. I decided not to argue this matter out. But the principle of using local labour or money was stressed by the Secretary of State, Earl Grey, in 1848-49 and followed by Ward (Governor, 1855-60) while it was a stock-in-trade for many road works. Gregory (Governor 1872-78) and a C.A. J.F. Dickson used the gansabhawa to work this principle in the 1870's just about the time F.C. Fisher would have arrived as a junior recruit to the C.C.S. Thus Fisher did not start anything novel. But his interest in irrigation works cannot be gaiasaid. That, indeed, was his chief interest and he ranks among the best Civil Servants we have had, his suicide notwithstanding.

R. I'll give you another example of a G.A. striking out on an absolutely new line. It was Brayne who set the women in Kalutara....

I. B.R.A.Y.N.E.?

R. Yes. To using those reeds from the Bolgoda Lake to make hats. That was something quite new. Nobody ever thought of that. And because its the raw material there free, they could make them cheap enough to sell, you see?

I. Ahmm... No but at the same time you say that the Provincial or Central Headquarters tended to quash new ideas....

R. Oh yes, yes.

I. Why?

R. Just because it would save them trouble.

I. Yes, well.... Well, partly laziness in that sense?

R. Well ... not really; they wanted peace, ... You know what I mean?

I. Let sleeping dogs lie?

Yes .... They weren't lazy men. That is not true.

I. Not lazy in a personal sense, but lazy to go to extra lengths, to ....

R. Yes, they were afraid of, of ....

I. Trying something?

R. ...jumping out on new lines.

I. Now you say, at the same time efficiency was 'sometimes sought as an end in itself'. You say that 'sometimes' efficiency was sought as an end in itself?

R. Yes, some fellows were very particular about punctuality in the _kachcheri_, something like that you know.

I. Now to the question, 'wasn't there a lack of purpose and of drive in British Rule', you say 'No, they all wanted to see the proleteriat grow and thrive'. Yes, but what I meant is, what were the concrete ways in which they tried to make the prolaniat grow and thrive?

R. Chiefly by roads.

I. This is a typical laissez-faire attitude. Stimulate.... - open the part for commercial activity ...?

R. Yes, yes, ... they had no money to invest but if people could bring their goods to market comfortably on decent roads this is much ... they will grow, they will then grow.

I. This was am emphasis on the material sense, in the material sense. Did they have any further conception of, well, not only mere educational improvement, but also politically - being able to stand on their own feet and .... Did they have a conception of self-government in the future?

R. I don't think so, they didn't think of that.

I. They didn't think of that, in the Maclanley sense?

R. No. But they were all anxious to have more schools. Pressing the government to open a school here and open a school there. You know where there are not schools.

I. But they were not thinking in ultimate terms, what is the end of all this ...?

R. No. I don't think they were thinking very deeply of the ultimate end.

I. So, in that sense they had no ideal or drive? Well, you see what I'm trying to get at is, if they had ....

R. Well, what was the use of a G.A. with no money at his command, having an ultimate end.

I. Well, I'm not thinking merely of the G.A. but of the Central Government, Colombo.

R. I don't know exactly what the Central Government was thinking then. But Ridgeway was a very able man. I am sure he would have - if he had any money he would have spent it on furthering things. Whats the next man? McCallum, along with Clifford was very full of commercilisation of the Lake in Colombo to facilitate dispatch of goods.

I. Yes, I see there is some attempt to add material improvements but what I was getting at was, because they didn't have this ultimate ideal, in a sense there's a lack of, well, ... a lack of purpose in what they were doing.

R. Hmm... surely Governments, when they set out to improve things must improve it by improving material conditions. Thats the only way they can improve. Otherwise, there might be more schools. I can't think of any way to achieve an ultimate end for a Government to do than by putting up more schools!

I. Now you say that the non-European Civil Servants were excluded from the 'substantive administrative posts'?

R. Yes.

I. And this was partly because of the colour bar?

R. Oh yes.

I. And partly because they were biased towards their own folk?

R. Yes, they had an idea that the British had a monopoly of administrative capacity ... ha, ha.

I. Oh, I see .... Actually, you have given ....

R. Do you know, I remember an article in the British Encyclopedia in which a Professor Keefe of London argued that Negroes would never make good runners because something was defective in their instep shape, ... you know. In a few years Jesse Owens rather broke that ... ha, ha!

I. Did they also distrust the discretion of the Ceylonese and the coloured in crisis?

R. [It was not] discretion, they thought they would give favour to their own folk.

I. Their own folk, I see. Now what is your opinion on this sort of ...?

R. They [the Ceylonese] were good fellows .... There were one or two who might be bad ... but the others would be good.

I. And the trouble is they always catch hold of one exception and bring him up as a rule.

R. Yes, yes. Well, as a matter of fact there were good fellows. The two Bevens were decent fellows. There was only one crooked fellow called Loftus.

I. What was their principle argument?

R. Oh, Paul Pieris was a twister. Not ... He was an honest man - money, goodfellow; but he would give judgment for a Sinhalese against a Britisher everytime. Just like Furse Roberts who would give judgment for and Englishman every time.

I. Who was this?

R. Furse Roberts, my namesake.

I. Oh!

R. Other fellows like Bickmore and others were jolly good ....

I. What was the principle argument used by the British officers and by Colombo against employment of Ceylonese? I mean rapid Ceylonisation?

R. That they would favour their own kind.

I. That was the principle argument? Was there - er ... was there a question of status, since the G.A.'s were top with regard to status?

R. Oh yes, yes ....

I. It was so ....

R. They took precedence in every social gathering or ....

I. So they didn't want Ceylonese G.A.'s?

R. No, they did not.

I. Do you think that many of the village councils failed to fulfill their functions adequately? The village councils.

R. No, I don't think so. I think they did it very well.

I. You say that there was not much scope for corruption! I thought the general impression was that there was a lot of corruption?

R. There was a lot of corruption but one must... the subject with which they dealt did not involve much money.

I. Oh, I see.

R. He didn't bring people money to pay.

I. Do you think the work of the gansabha as judicial tribunals reduced your work in the Police Court and District Court?

R. I think so ... a little ....

I. But was it as much as anticipated?

R. No, I don't think so. Because if a gansabhawa decision was wrong it would provoke the wrong man to revenge and that would lead to bigger cases - a lot more cases in the bigger court.

I. Oh, I see....

R. Do you follow?

I. I mean, were their decisions final?

R. No, they could appeal to the A.G.A.

I. No, if one party disagreed , was it dependent on agreement by both parties?

R. Oh no, the idea was to try and get both parties to agree ....

I. Arbitrate, yes,

R. ... to settle their things, and they did settle a lot but when they wouldn't agree the President had to give a decision ... And there was an appeal against that to the A.G.A. and I think again to the Government.

I. Did - in certain areas did cliques dominate these gansabha ... you know, the headman ...?

R. Probably,yes, I don't know.

I. Yes. 'Probably, yes'. And what were the current criticisms of the Headman System? The current criticisms?

R. Criticisms?

I. Yes.

R. Yes. Corruption.

I. Anything else?

R. I suppose some of the Headman were too lazy to supervise the expenditure on roads, say, that they ought to give it certain amount of time. For instance, you ought to check the piles of material or piles of gravel. If there was a pile of gravel some headman might be too lazy to do it. You don't know.

I. You say that genuine dissatisfaction motivated the political criticism of this system? the politicians ....

R. Yes, well, the middle classes and upper classes were disregarded. They didn't have any voice in the things ....

I. Was there a question of jealousy?

R. Yes, a certain amount of jealousy, yes.

I. Ah ... because they attacked these people as feudal elements.

R. As what?

I. As feudal elements, they called the headman feudal.

R. Well, they were a feudal element.

I. Yes, they were. But I was wondering whether they were also motivated by - because they were educated - by a feeling that thay were _avant garde_ ... you know ...?

R. Who were _avant garde_?

I. The educated classes ... unlike the headmen.

R. Yes, I suppose so. Yes.

I. And ... in your opinion the Ceylon National Association was a 'solid body of respected folk'. But what was the Government's attitude to this body? Colombo.

R. I don't know exactly what the Government thought; I can't tell you. But I think they were rather against them because they were very critical, you see?

I. Yes, yes, you get this in Bowes[1]. For instance, there is a tendency to expect gratitude from these people for having got education and gone to England and so they take criticism amiss. Don't you think this was pushing things too far?

R. Well, where a man has received his education in England, surely he ought to owe some gratitude to England. I think that is natural.

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1. Frederick Bowes, 'Bows and Arrows', Autobiography in typescript and deposited in Rhodes House Library, Oxford. Bowes was in the C.C.S. from 1891 - 1923.

I. No but, I mean, the very basis of a liberal education is your ability to criticise. It doesn't necessarily imply that just because you got education from England that you must not be critical of the British rule.

R. By all means, but you mustn't be hostile.

I. I wouldn't go so far as to say that, I mean, while you might be ... if each sort of ... each case must be judged on its merits. You may have received something from them which you value but there are other things which you don't like and which you feel like ....

R. Oh yes, you're quite entitled to find fault. No doubt.

I. But one feels that they resented these people finding fault.

R. I can't say I ....

I. You didn't think that this was generally so of the Civil Service?

R. No, I shouldn't say that.

I. You say ... you think that - now for instance, the temperance meetings were political meetings held under the cloak of temperance.

R. Yes, yes. F.R.Senanayake practically told me so. He was the leader.

I. Yes. But why did they choose Temperance as a front?

R. He told me that there was no other subject which he could get the masses to be roused about [sic]. To show themselves in sympathy with the political movement.

I. Oh, I see, and ... weren't they also genuinely - some of them at least - genuinely want Temperance? Some of the Buddhist leaders.

R. Some of them. Some of them undoubtedly. For instance, D.S. was a Temperance man ... [He] seldom drank. F.R. supplied drinks liberally to everybody, he was a most generous person and he liked his drink himself.

I. And what about - you said sir, D.B. was not ...? Sir D.B. Jayatilaka?

R. He was a teetotaller. But he was - er .... not ....

I. Not really interested?

R. Not ... yes. An extraordinary thing, we had long meetings over framing the local option rules and he was one of the body, he and D.S. and Duraisaramy and others. We used to have consultations with the Colonial Secretary. He never showed much interest in the Temperance there.

I. This was when?

R. When I was Excise Commissioner.

I. 1920?

R. Somewhere in the 1920's. Yes. Between 1920 and 1926. D.S. Senanayake was the key man then. He was the man who did most of the drafting of the local option rules.

I. Now were these - because of this were the Temperance leaders rather disliked by most of the Civil Servants?

R. Nobody disliked F.R. Senanayake. Everybody liked him. Nobody disliked D.S. so far as I know. I don't think they disliked the Temperance leaders except in so far as there was a weekly attack in the Press on the Government for demoralising the Country with ....

I. Yes.

R. ... with arrack.

I. What were the Civil Servants' attitude to the Theosophists?

R. I don't think they had much attitude. They took no interest in them. Did not regard them seriously at all.

I. You say that Sir Hugh Clifford distrusted the mob and the East. Er ... 'distrusted the East', what exactly do you mean by that?

R. Didn't think it could manage itself very well.

I. He couldn't quite grasp them?

R. Oh, he could grasp them, he was pretty sharp at grasping them. His gripe was that they wouldn't work, that they were too far .... they were too savage. The relations between Tamil and Sinhalese, the relations between the Sikh and Muslims were ... - the divisions were too deep. Hatred was too deep. They (?) could never work.

I. But you get that in the West too.

R. Yes, yes; you get that in the West but ....

I. So but he is ... by analogy I mean.

R. But in the country. Not in the country, in the own country. The rankle between the Scot and British, the English is not like that; the division, the dislike between the Sinhalese and Tamil or between Muslim and Sikh, is very much deeper and violenter [sic] than between Scot and English.

I. And what is you opinion on the implication in Clifford's dispatch - because its really ....

R. I don't know what he wrote in his dispatch.

I. Well, by implication they deny that self-government was - they deny that Ceylon was ready for the self-government process ....

R. Yes, yes. Indeed it was not ready.

I. No, for it to begin?

R. Oh no, it should begin but not ... he was wrong about that if he said it shouldn't begin, bit it shouldn't be complete.

I. Yes, obviously. I mean, mainly their stand was that the memorialists wanted a share of the ... a finger in the political pie!

R. Yes, yes, they should have it; and they ought to have it! Thats the point, they ought to have had it. It should not have been resisted. The Home Government was always ready to give them some share in it

I. Their argument was that the educated class didn't represent the mass of the people, which obviously had some basis, but what I would argue, what I am arguing here, is that for instance the Magna Carta was a selfish baronial document ....

R. Yes, no doubt that was for - wanted by (?) the upper and middle classes.

I. Yes, and they argued that the G.A.'s and the village headmen could represent the people better than ....

R. No! That isn't true. That is a faulty argument.

I. Yes. But of course it was really ... I think they believed in that.

R. I think they believed in it, yes.

I. Though, it was also a very useful argument for them. Now, if I may come to the 1915 riots?

R. Yes.

I. You say you don't believe it was an organised conspiracy against Government? As such.

R. I think, I'm not aware of any evidence of that.

I. It was not anti-British and anti-European?

R. No, it was directed against the Coast Moors.

I. Then how is it that the European community - definitely by the beginning of 1916 - I mean, and possibly earlier - I haven't gone into the evidence - they believed that it was aimed at them; and Bonar-Law used this as an argument, he said it was pre-meditated and that it was aimed against them. He used this in the House of Commons.

R. I don't, I doubt that .... pre-meditation against the British; but when they had broke out, erupted into this violence against the Coast Moors they were quite ready to go a little further and attack either the Burghers or British or anybody else and make a little money out of it.

I. Yes, but this was a general defiance of authority.

R. Oh yes.

I Whereas the European community feared that they would be attacked too?

R. Oh yes, there was a fear of that.

I. Hmmm ... Do you think that it was rather a sort of magnified fear?

R. Do you mean that ....

I. They made too much of it.

R. They made too much of it ... I think perhaps they made too much of it. You see, as I told you, this was - [this] coincided in date with that mutiny in the two Sikh Regiments in Singapore. I think a good many people suspected that it was German money behind that, and that there might be German money ....

I. The one in Ceylon too?

R. The one in Ceylon.

I. So that was a sort of underlying rumour in the British community?

R. It might be a fear; I don't know that [it was] a rumour exactly, but I think some people feared that.

I. Oh, you heard some people talked about it?

R. I can't remember hearing, but I think there was that feeling.

I. That feeling. And - as for instigation, who do you think instigated it?

R. I have no idea. No positive idea of that kind, but in later years - at the time I suspected nobody in particular ... - But in later years when I found that the uprising against the Tamils led to very specific attacks on people like the Brahmin priests in Panadure that led me to suspect that some priests were behind it - that later one, the Tamil ....

I. Yes, that's 1958.

R. 1958. And if it was so in 1958, it may have also been so in 1915. I don't know. Its only a guess. You know those two Brahmin were ....

I. Yes, I know....

R. ... burnt alive in the streets of Panadure and that was partly jealousy because people were beginning to appreciate them and go to their temple and leave - people who use to be purely supporters of Rankot Vihare had began to go to this Tamil Temple.

I. Regarding the 1915 riots. Do you know i f it was on Dowbiggin's advice that Senanayake and Company were arrested?

R. I don't know.

I. Who was Forrest?[1]

R. Forrest was a Magistrate.

I. Oh. In Colombo, Police Magistrate?

R. Yes.

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1. He had referred to Forrest in his written answers as having ordered some shooting on one occasion.

I. You think that if they been able to put down the riots in Colombo early, if they had adopted a firm policy in Colombo ....

R. Or in Kandy, you mean.

I. In both places would they have been able to nip the riots in the bud, so to speak?

R. I doubt it. Well, there was a slight mistake at Colombo. They arrested 3 fellows for throwing stones at the Railway on the 21st night[1] and then when the crowds grew bigger they let them go.

I. I see. So ....

R. In point of fact I don't think there was much evidence against them, you know. There wasn't anything wrong about letting them go, but anyhow that was probably misjudged and may have helped to encourage the uprising.

I. Because the distinct impression I get is that they were rather weak at the outset - [during] the first few days.

R. That was the impression I got by heatsay about Kandy,

I. Yes, but ....

R. I don't know, I won't say that about Colombo.

I. I thought in Colombo they were rather weak in that ....

R. Except for them letting off those three boys who threw stones at the railway porters in Maradana, I don't know of any weakness.

I. This is what Bowes says and Bows says, by pure coincidence the Colonial Secretary and the Governor were away and Dowbiggin was on his way to Kandy, so there was no one who was able to give the order to, willing to give the order to shoot.

R. There wasn't anything to shoot for that night, the first night.

I. I see.

R. And Daniel was there, Daniel was not a weak man.

I. Who was he?

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1. Error here. It would have been the 31st night. (May 1915)

R. Superintendent of Police. Attygalle was not a weak man. He was there, I think.

I. ... As regarding the Commission of enquiry, er ... what would you say about the view that the Commission found every person [who] had been executed by the Court Martials had been justly condemmed?

R. I don't believe the Commission found any such thing. What they held was, according to my recollection, that what ever done was done in good faith, following the orders from the General.

I. I see, and you wouldn't agree either with the view that only one person lost his life ... accidently?

R. No, I wouldn't agree with that at all.

I. Oh yes, you mentioned the fact that in one of your flying columns, a gun went off accidently, killed a man ....

R. Yes ....

I. And ... do you know of any other instances?

R. Not personally, but I've heard of some. I can't remember exactly what.

I. Was it ....

R. I'll tell you something else that might interest you. Just remembered that. Apropos of the idea that it was being - there was some pre-meditation and organisation ... I went to the Orient Club, met T.P. Attygalle one day early in the riots. Then he drove me, he said, 'I'll give you a lift home'. He said 'I must go first to the Maradana Police Barracks. I have business there'. So he drove me there. When we were entering there, out came from the I.C.P.'s office F.R. Senanayake. The crowd raised a tremendous cheer; he had gone to interview Dowbiggin or somebody there, I don't know who, and the crowd raised a great cheer. Then on the way home, we passed Borella Junction and found a crowd of people looting a boutique there. T.P. Attygalle and I in the car. I said 'T.P. Here's our chance, we can shoot them! They are in the act. Go and fetch some constables from the station, just at that corner'.

So he went and he found all the - hardly any policemen, one policeman came out, and all the ammunition locked up, and that policeman only had a gun with blank cartridges. So he and I - he and the policeman walked over towards the rioters and I went in the car, driven by T.P.'s driver, shouted at the people. I had a revolver - I had never in my life fired a revolver, ha ha - And the constable came and poked his bayonet at some of the fellows and they bolted. That - I went after them in the car and some ....

I. Why didn't you shoot?

R. Lot of women and children there, too; and also some of them might be just looking, I don't even know who I was shooting [at]. There was such a crowd.

I. It was night, was it?

R. Hmm ... No, no, daytime. I pursued them a little way, some of the leaders who had sticks and staves - up towards Maradana, then they went off the side roads and then I came back. It turned out that Inspector had disobeyed ....

I. Yes, this is W.A.De Silva, is it?

R. W.A. De Silva's nephew.

I. Oh!

R. He had disobeyed the orders to issue ball; and he was sacked for it.[1]

I. He was court Martialled, I think.

R. Was he?

I. Well, you know, in the Police sense, he was ....

R. He was sacked for it, and that event was made a ground in Ramanathan's book for attacking me and T.P. Attygalle.

I. Well, I read the book; he doesn't criticise you as such, he brings you see, in his Appendix he quotes this W.A.De Silva's version of the thing and there is no criticism of you there. But he's ....

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1. Inspector W.E. De Silva. For his version of events see Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon, 1915 (london 1916) by P. Ramanathan, pp 27-33.

R. I remember buying the book with all intentions of suing for libel, but when I found (laugh) that it wasn't much of a libel, I didn't do anything.

I. He tries to make out that W.A. De Silva was unjustly dismissed from the Service, that's what he tries to make out.

R. I see.

I. It's not ....

R. Its ... a total false, you see. But I want to ...

I. Reading between the lines, I thought he was dismissed for giving blank cartridges. Funny. I thought that myself.

R. Yes, yes, but he was -

I. That's right ....

R. Yes.

I. He doesn't say it, but I read between the ....

R. I mentioned this to let me remind you that W.A.De Silva was one of the leaders of the Buddhists at the time. He was a mild man. He wouldn't have done a thing like this himself, but a little bit suspicious that his nephew should be in sympathy with the rioters.

I. Regarding this order, 'Take no Prisoners', you think that was the factor that led to lots of these shootings?

R. I think so.

I. And Malcolm was definitely the person who issued them?

R. I believe so. I don't know for sure, but I believe so.

I. But surely the Governor had some control over Malcolm?

R. No, no; martial-law, it gives the power to him.

I. Yes, but he could advise the ....

R. Oh he could do, but, I mean, you give the power to the General, you leave it to him.

I. And you say Malcolm was a bit of a joke?

R. He was supposed to be off his head.

I. Off his head?

R. I mean, that was the general impression later on ....

I. Later on or ....

R. When you got to know him, more about him.

I. How long had he been in Ceylon?

R. I don't know how long he had been in Ceylon.

I. Did you know of it then; that he was a bit eccentric?

R. I think I knew! I'm not sure.

I. And so, definitely in several cases you know that these patrols shot people on the spot? Court Martial ....

R. I don't personally - I didn't see it but ....

I. But you heard?

R. I had ample reason to believe it, yes.

I. I mean, was it Charlie Lovell's [sic] case? ... you said that he...

R. I don't want to mention names. He might be alive for all I know.

I. This Punjabi - it was a Punjabi Sergeant who ....

R. Yes.

I. Conducted the shooting.[1]

R. Yes. It would have never occured to Charlie to do that. He was a man like you and me. You know what I mean, a harmless sportsman.[2]

I. Ahmm. And also do you believe that the Moors well, took this opportunity of bringing evidence against people, against their enemies, and sometimes they secured convictions by false means?

R. Very hard to believe that. They may have charged their enemies but that the Judges were fooled by them is rather hard to believe.

I. No. I'm not thinking of the Judges. I was thinking of - sometimes in this case of - I know there is one case in Ramanathan's book, I don't know how far it is true, - one of these executions on the spot was on the evidence of a Moor.

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1. See Unrecorded Information provided by Mr. T.W. Roberts during interviews for this story.
2. So no doubt were Sudlow and Sly and others who (with Lover) conducted some arbitrary executions in the Kelani Valley! See <u>Sessional Paper VI of 1917</u>, Sir J. Anderson's despatch.

R. Yes, that might be. In fact, there was some reason to believe that a Roman Catholic chap named Leo Fernando was unjustly executed.

I. Oh, I see. Because I also read Solomon Dias Bansaranaike's book, and he is by no means critical of Government on this issue; he says that one of his overseers was accused by Moors and jailed in fact, whereas he was fortunate enough to prove conclusively that he was in Kandy.[1]

R. Yes.

I. Whereas he was ....

R. Could be, could be.

I. What about the - what was ....

R. I remember acquitting one lot myself. They were tried before me. One woman came on charge with a lot of people including one of the proctors or a proctor's clerk. I wasn't quite sure about it, so I acquitted them. There might be such cases.

I. Er ... now Sir John Anderson when he came, he said that he'd examined certain particular cases - and he thought the decisions there - I don't whether it was by the Courts' or the Courts-Martial, had been very bad.

R. Hmmm ....

I. What would you say about the view that Anderson, in these cases, was 'fooled by cases which were specially engineered and concocted by lawyers'?[2]

R. I shouldn't think so. No.

I. You think his judgment was ... er ... he was ....

R. I think they had done some very wrong things.

I. Was Anderson unpopular among the Civil Servants largely because of this?

R. I think so. But also he was unpopular for other reasons too.

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1. Remembered Yesterdays. (London, 1929).
2. Views postulated by Freddie Bowes ('Bows and Arrows' p)

I. What other reasons?

R. I don't know quite remember what it was. I was in an outstation. At least - No, I wasn't in an outstation but I didn't have anything much to do with him. I never came into contact with him.

I. There is distinct evidence that the railway workers and also some workers from Mercantile firms led the riots, in the sense that they came by tram and they broke into some shops and everyone joined in?

R. Yes, I remember one case in which a sort of Head Clerk employed by one of the harbour firms led some people in. I tried him myself and found him guilty. And Ennis acquitted him. Wrong verdict. (Laugh)

I. Oh, I see ....

R. It was a case in which Moore himself gave evidence. You know, Moore the Civil Servant, against this man. Can't remember his name.

I. But you see, in 1912 these railway workers especially the skilled workers at the Locomotive workshops had struck. Then they had given up the strike on the promise that their demands would be considered, but the Commission met and salaries that were granted - well their decisions were hardly generous by the workers, and they were still discontented. There's proof. So won't it be fair to say that this ... er - Government's failure to give any concessions at this stage had caused some industrial unrest in Colombo which had a bearing on the riots? The Government ....

R. It might be so. I'm not sure. I do remember that there was some dissatisfaction among the Railway men over the discontinuance of some men, but not about salaries.

I. That was before the riots?

R. Yes.

I. Yes, well, there was some discontent. Definitely in 1912 I think it was, I'm not quite certain about the cause, but there was a Commission which was this - which was regarding their demands and ....

R. I don't know much about that, I can't tell you much.

I. What, why do you think - getting onto another subject - why do you think Ramanathan began to work against the Ceylon National Congress?

R. I don't remember the facts there.

I. You have written here 'I believe they ignored him and the Tamils'.

R. I think so but I'm not sure of that.

I. You say ....

R. Mark you, Ramanathan was the only man who stood up for them. They were mostly afraid of it - to do ....

I. That was in the 1915 riots.

R. During the riots ....

I. Yes. Thats right, it seems inexplicable that he should change his views in the later period.

R. I think he found that they were ignoring him. He found they were ignoring him.

I. Now you say that the nationalistic outlook of the 'Daily News' was 'very natural'. But you also say it's 'racial.' What do you mean?

R. Well, they were more pro-Sinhalese than Tamil.

I. Tamil, I see. You could see a distinct anti-Tamil threat, in ....

R. No, I wouldn't say that.

I. You say that everyone distrusts Goonesinha?

R. I think that's the general opinion ....

I. That's even the other political leaders?

R. Yes.

I. You're not certain whether caste had anything to do with it?

R. No.

I. Or perhaps, it was just [being] jealous of his influence in certain circles?

R. He was rather a bully.

I. Yes, I see. Er ... you say that he - er ... that there was a rumour that he was blackmailing some employers in the late twenties?

R. Yes.

I. That is promising peace and quiet if they gave him some support ...

R. I suppose so. I don't know the details.

I. This is a rumour?

R. Yes. And the rumour I heard, specifically concerned certain firms.

I. At this stage, or say, if I go back early, in the 1900's, around 1910, were Indian events kept in mind by officials? Were they ever ....

R. I kept them in mind. I don't know, perhaps others did, I'm not sure about that.

I. You didn't ... do you recollect discussing it at the Club or over dinner?

R. Yes, people probably discussed the ... Yes.

I. And the implications they had for the future in India and in Ceylon? I mean, did that come to your mind?

R. Yes, I think so. It came to my mind.

I. And you say in the 1920's the Civil Servants resented the attacks on them in Council? [the Legislative Council]

R. Yes.

I. Were there many such attacks?

R. Oh yes. Any number of attacks.

I. Very personal?

R. Oh yes.

I. The Donoughmore Commission felt that they were demoralised as a result?

R. I wouldn't say they were demoralised.

I. Of course, that's rather a strong term.

R. Yes.

I. Was it Smythe you said preferred Judicial Service after that.

R. No, it was me!

I. Oh ... (Laugh).

R. They removed me from Colombo from the Commissioners' job for their own reasons. It was largely a cabal, I think. Then the Sinhalese - don't put - is this goint down?

I. Yes, but it needn't be copied ... Yes.

I. I think it has been deduced anyway. I've seen it somewhere saying that the Civil Servants felt that Government should have protected them more?

R. Oh, yes.

I. So Government was sort of ... was leading a plactory policy after deliberation, I presume?

R. Yes, yes, a policy of retreat.

I. Regarding these attacks by the politicians, would you say that the arrogance shown by some of the British Community - I'm not speaking of the officials but of the community - needled them to attack Britishers?

R. Yes, yes, very probably yes.

I. And you think the 1924 Constitution was a bad Constitution?

R. Not in itself but as applied to Ceylon.

I. Uh huh. Why? Specifically?

R. Certainly (?) power was distributed among the Committees.

I. No this is not the Donoughmore Constitution. Pre-Donoughmore? Oh, Pre-Donoughmore. I wouldn't say that was such a bad Constitution. I thought you meant Donoughmore's constitution.

I. No. The 1924 ....

R. Oh no, that I don't say is a bad Constitution. Oh no.

I. But in that there was ... er ... I mean looking at it theoretically, there was lots of friction between the Legislative Councillors and - they had no real executive power - and ....

R. Yes.

I. And er ... but they had lots of financial power and they had no responsibility. Utterly unsound ....

R. Yes, but all the same it was a training ground. It acquainted them with problems.

I. Yes. So did the Donoughmore Commission [sic, Constitution] .

R. Yes, so did the Donoughmore Commission [sic]. But when the Donoughmore Commission went further and gave the power to these Committees, small sections of the Parliament, that meant the rag-tag and bobtail, sometimes got power ....

I. Yes?

R. And they used that power to feather their own nests, which is what you expect of people of rag, tag and bobtail. You follow what I mean?

I. I see. Yes. But getting back to the 1924 Constitution, there was ... I mean, they had lots of power with hardly any responsibility. They could - they had financial power which ....

R. Yes, they had financial power, but that financial power they couldn't use beyond a certain thing because then the Governor could override them, if he wanted to.

I. Well, he ....

R. He was frightened to generally but he could do.

I. And ... so what was the general attitude among the Civil Servants to the Donoughmore Commission as soon as it ...?

R. I think at first we rather welcomed it. We thought it might work.

I. What did you think of the universal franchise?

R. I was rather in favour of it provided there was a Senate, Appointed by the people of wealth and intelligence. With a limited veto.

I. Yes.

R. That was omitted by Donoughmore.

I. Yes, but the very idea of universal franchise was to prevent an oligarchic control?

R. Yes, might be that is your idea bout .... Our idea was that universal franchise in Ceylon would be ruinous unless it was controlled. Heavy brakes, there must be brakes on the hoipoloi.

I. Yes, brakes on the hoipoloi.....

R. The brakes we thought of was the Senate with a power of veto,

I. But that's the very oligarchy which the Government had been resisting earlier.

R. Maybe that [had been resisted] but that was a necessary oligarchy. And now my own idea if you want to know?

R. Well, it varies, youknow? People like Senanayake were alright. D.S.

I. What other shortcomings did they have as Ministries? Of course you said there was some - was there any corruption?

R. At what period is this you are talking about?

I. 1930s'.

R. 1930. Well, I don't know much about that. There was some blundering. I remember advising them, advising Rock and through him Sunderam Pulle to open a cement factory at Ambalangoda and they ran away with the idea that would only supply a small quantity of what Ceylon needed and they had better make it at Jaffna which would supply enough for the whole island; and that was a fundamental blunder. Because the distance of Jaffna makes it so expensive. Both to take the gypsum there and bring the cement back.

I. And you think, do you think their lack of experience in administration had anything to do with their rather sanguine hopes of what they could achieve? Did they have sanguine hopes?

R. I think they did, yes. Like opening a large sugar factory, a large paper factory, both of which I understand are failures. Financial failures. And the sugar factory, the blunder was terrific this way: nobody, no businessman opens a sugar factory unless he has already opened a distillery to make rum from the refuse.

I. I see, yes.

R. You follow? They brought the rum idea in a year or two later. It was puerile.

I. What do you think of Sir D.B. Jayatilaka as a personality and ...?

R. He was a mild barrister without much practice.

I. Capable?

R. I think he had - he was fairly capable, but I don't think he was keen. He was a careerist.

I. Sir James Pieris?

R. Oh, he was an able man and a good man.

I. And Arunachalam?

R. Able man.

I. Do you know Ramanathan?

R. Oh yes. Able man. Brilliant debater.

I. What about, do you know Charles Batwantudawe?

R. Oh, fine - nice man, but unfortunately found guilty of ....

I. Bribery!

R. Personal friend of mine.

I. Oh yes.

R. Much loved man.

I. He had been in England.

R. He gave your mother a good present, a nice gem when we got married.

I. And you didn't know Dharmapala at all:

R. No, never knew Dharmapala.

I. He was supposed to be a firebrand. Was he?

R. So rumour had it, I didn't know much about it. Wasn't he one of the Hewavitarne's?

I. Yes.

R. Well, Dr. Hewavitarne was a very pleasant harmless person, but that was an earlier period. He was killed in an accident. I married him.

I. Oh, I see, yes. What about the Governors of the time. I mean ... what sort of Governor was Stanley?

R. Well meaning, good man; kindly man; not very able.

I. Not very able! Clifford was a bit eccentric in the 1920s', wasn't he?

R. He went off his head.

I. How was it that the Colonial Secretaries never reported that?

R. That I don't know. I can't explain. I think ....

I. What about Thomson?

R. Genuinely able; particularly able and kindly man.

I. Bower remarks that he hated Ceylon. I don't know why.

R. He was a very sick man. He died of cancer on the way back.

I. Oh! And what about Stubbs? Was he capable?

R. He had some ability; considerable academic ability. And also a good boxer. But I think a little bit crusty, a little bit ....

I. Was he ...?

R. Hidebound.

I. Hidebound! Was he very red tapish?

R. I wouldn't say red tapish, no.

I. And what would you say about Bowes' opinion that Clifford was very vain? Highly vain.

R. Oh, highly vain, yes.

I. And what was your attitude to the rise of the L.S.S.P. in the 1930s

R. Rise of?

I. The L.S.S.P., the Marxists.

R. I didn't ....

I. This is just after you retired, I think.

R. I thought young Bandaranaike was a careerist.

I. Then?

R. Yes.

I. Yes, of course he was not a Marxist. I was referring to Phillip and N.M. and Colvin. R. at that stage.

R. I don't know ....

I. They'd just come in.

R. I knew very little about them.

I. Well then you see Stubbs called them 'small local party run by young men with more money than brains'.

R. No. I wouldn't say that's just at all ....

I. Yes, I know.

R. Old Phillip Gunewardena and N.M. were people with brains.

I. And you can't remember anything at all about the Bracegirdle affair?

R. No, except that Stubbs made a blunder there.

I. Yes, I think so too. Banks and D.B. Jayatilaka? No?

R. There was the Commission appointed to find out who was a liar.

Second Interview, 10th November, 1965.

I. Do you think the Department of Agriculture should have been given more priority in the twentieth century than it was given?

R. It had a good deal of priority, but it didn't seem to make a success, don't know why. It had a lot of priority.

I. Well, was the staff adequate?

R. No, I shouldn't think it was. They didn't have enough money to have staff all over the country. They had only a few.

I. But wasn't there a lack of liasson between this Department and the G.A.s and A.G.A.'s. Wasn't there some jealousy?

R. I don't know that. I don' remember that.

I. Regarding land policy as such: Now to the question ....

R. I tell you one thing about agriculture, the astounding thing, For the first 25 years of my stay there, coconut estates were applying certain manures, 4 or 5 manures, which was what was recommended by either the Department or Bauer and Company, you know, the firms who sold the manure; then they opened an experimental agricultural farm in Negombo somewhere, and they made some prolonged and careful experiments with these manures, and they found that out of those 4 manures, three did no good at all. The only thing that did good was potash; for that type of soil which was being used. It might have been alright for tea, or for some types of soil, but for the soil in that part of the world, like Chilaw, Negombo and Colombo, the manures being used did no good at all. A complete blunder.

I. Regarding land policy: To the question "what was the official policy to the question of Sinhalese working on the plantations, did they prefer them to be a resident force or ...."

R. No, no. There was no preference at all. [They could] do what they liked about it.

I. Yes, you have given that to answer. But that's why I said, this is a basic question. One would have thought they would have had a policy on this sort of question, because if they were a resident

I.(cont.) labour force, it would imply that they had no village base, because if they were resident they would have left their lands.

R. No, they never did become resident.

I. Yes but ....

R. The question did not arise. They had their huts within a mile or two, their own house, and they used to go on the nearest estate and work.

I. Yes, but that's an alternative policy which should be considered. It is only in the light of alternatives that you can ....

R. There's no reason to consider about their residence because they didn't reside.

I. But then, hypothetically .....

R. Why should you consider a hypothetical case?

I. Well, in order to define your land policy. If you wanted them to migrate to the estates, if you preferred that, your policy would be aligned to that.

R. But they weren't thinking of migrating. Nobody wanted them to migrate. They didn't want to migrate to the estate. So there is no reason to think about it.

I. Well, you go on to say that British land policy was "to sell any land available, that is non-forest reserve - (that includes chena, does it?)

R. (Yes, oh yes.)

I. ... to anyone willing to buy it, and plant it up," and then secondly, you say that "peasantry were so ubiquitious (that is, general?) on their own small plots that no-one guessed conservation pf peasantry land to be necessary, until recent years." By this you are implying that not many peasnats were landless.

R. Landless?

I. Had no access to land. I would put it that way.

R. Most peasants had a little share of a land.

I. Had a little share?

R. Yes.

I. Or they were share croppers?

R. I don't know what is meant by "share-croppers".

I. _Ande_ tenants.

R. That applies to a paddy field. You mean ....

I. Yes, I'm talking about paddy fields, and any other land, highlands too.

R. Paddy fields are one thing, highlands are another thing.

I. Yes, but didn't some of them cultivate highlands too on _ande_ tenancy.

R. I don't think so. Oh, I expect they did in - oh yes, they in this way. Sometimes they worked a land on condition that they got half of it in the end. [1]

I. That's what I meant, both highlands - that question applied to both.

R. That's highland. I've never heard of a paddy field that way. But that was not very common, you know. In some places like Chilaw it was fairly common, but in most other places I don't remember it.

I. You see, why I am posing this question is, in the - one of the factors leading to the Wastelands Ordinance of 1897 was the fact that Government Agents, especially Davidson, I think it was in Sabaragamuwa, and Wace in the North-Western Province, brought this issue up of peasants dispossessing themselves of land. They were selling land to various planters, English and Non-European, and to their own detriment. And so by your statements you imply that this was not happening extensively, and that it was not necessary to do anything about it; that you didn't try tp prevent this?

R. There was no such selling off of village lands to capitalists in any areas in which I worked.

But you were in Kurunegala and Wace was ....

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1. i.e. _ande_ tenancy.

R. Wace was never in Kurunegala, so far as I know. At least, it might have been, but not in my time.

I. Yes, but this was in 1897. And again, Cookson, in Sabaragamuwa, brought it up; that ... they went so far as to suggest legislation preventing alienation[1] and this was [by] the provincial officers - and this was an extreme step, which they would never have suggested unless they felt the problem was serious.

R. No, I don't recollect anything of that sort.

I. That's why I want to know whether the British policy was aimed at trying to conserve, trying to prevent this, and trying to conserve ...?

R. I don't think it was aimed at that. I don't think they recognised any such problem. I've never heard of it.

I. So, what would you say to this view: Government's policy was trying to place the European and other capitalists (quote) "near enough to the native to influence him, but not so near as to dispossess him"?[2.]

R. Oh yes, they didn't want to .... Their idea was, encourage them to plant up so that some of the villagers who were starving should work.

I. But - and this happened occasionally, [its] not merely a hypothetical question - what happened if some of these speculators bought lands from the villagers to the detriment of either the whole village or specific individuals?

R. I know I have given you examples of Jacob De Mel buying land. They didn't buy villager's land, they bought Crown Land. The villagers claimed the Crown land.

I. Villagers were using chena land; it was necessary for their existence. It may have been Crown land, but it may have been - just because of population growth ....

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1. L. Jayawardena, The Sypply of Sinhalese Labour to Ceylon Plantations (1830-1930), (Cambridge 1963) Ph.D. Thesis, Economic History. pp 137-39 151-52. Wall and Davdson brought the issue up in 1896-97, Cookson in 191
2. Quoting Dr. Lal Jayawardena, ibid, p

R. You must understand that the villager would plant half an acre of chena, or so, and then he would go up from that next year to another chena, but what he sold was 50 acres.

I. Right. Agreed. But that 50 acres inclyded about 10 acres which the village or he might need, a few acres?

R. Yes, but it was not his land.

I. Yes, but which they needed for their subsistence?

R. Oh yes, yes.

I. So, since it was necessary for their subsistence, though it may have been Crown land but Crown land which they had used, was it the Government policy when they came and found this sort of purchase to give, say, the five acres, reserve the five acres for the village, and make the speculator pay for his - the rest of it?

R. No, no. They would sell the whole.

I. Even if the villager suffered?

R. But the villager would not be expected to suffer. He wouldn't suffer, because he would get more regular employment from the capitalist.

I. Oh, they did not mind that?

R. Oh no.

I. No, but, in other words they are asking the villager, instead of planting up his five acres of chena land complementary to his paddy field, to go and work on the estate?

R. That's what would naturally happen. There was no harm in it, because there was more regular labour, and the output would be so much higher, the man would get more to eat, the villager would get more to eat. His chena was a poor product; and what's more, the chena was frequently used to produce kurakkan which was supposed to give them parangi in those days.[1] It was a curious belief among the doctors.

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1. Kurakkan= the warse or finger millet, the ragi of India; parangi = yaws.

I. Yes, but I very much doubt it, somehow.

R. I doubt it. I don't think it's true, but it was a belief. So you can't blame Government for contemplating the cessation of chenas with equanimity.

I. Yes, but didn't sometimes the speculators purchase these 50 acres for paltry sums?

R. Yes, yes. Regularly, for paltry sums. This case of T.Y. Wright [1] probably was a paltry sum like that.

I. Yes, I see.

R. You see. 50 cents an acre.

I. And of course you say that they were .... But the point I'm trying to make is, in buying this land, they may have bought more than the peasants needed, but a portion of this land would have been needed for the village as a reserve for pasture, and such things, and in effect that ....

R. Not pasture ... he, well ... for ....

I. Cattle.

R. Yes, yes, it might be.

I. And in effect, in approving of this sale later on, by giving C.Q.P.'s[2] etcetera?

R. No, no. Where land had been sold, there was no need to give C.Q.P.

I. Well, if it was on a dubious title ... ?

R. No, no. It was sold by the Crown. That's a good title.

I. No, what I mean is, where the peasants had sold it ?

R. Oh, where the peasants had sold it.

I. ... and then not - in a sort of ....

R. On a weak title?

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1. Colonel T.Y. Wright, Ceylon in my Time 1889 - 1949, (Colombo, 1952 p.59.
2. Certificates of Quiet Possession which district officials could gove as evidence of prescriptive title and planters under clause 7 of Ord. 12 of 1840.

I. On a weak title, yes. In settling it on the speculator, in any way, if part of this land was needed, absolutely essential for the village, weren't they hitting at the economy of the villagers?

R. No, as I tell you they were putting in place a much better economy, because the capitalists would employ the villagers and give them higher wages than they ever earned.

I. Yes, but what if there was an individual villager who depended solely on chena whose land was included within that lot. In effect he would be dispossessed of his land?

R. It's not his land to be dispossessed of.

I. Oh yes, but dispossessed of land that he needed?

R. Oh yes, yes.

I. So you would say that even before the L.S.D. started work, Government Agents and A.G.A.'s did not try to prevent this process of dispossession, where it was a ...?

R. There was no such big process of dispossession. I've never heard of it.

I. And did they try to sort of deter this effect by feeding the land market with land at the proper time, so that speculators wouldn't buy from the villagers but would buy from the Government?

R. As soon as plans were ready, they were ready to sell it, but I don't think they had any such idea in view.

I. Oh, I see. Do you know much about the work of the Land Settlement Department?

R. Not directly.

I. So besides defining what land was Crown and what was not, they never decided between rival claimants?

R. No.

I. What about issuing C.Q.P.'s between two claimants?

R. They were - I imagine that they used to give to the man they thought had the best claim to a C.Q.P. But if the other man pressed for it, they'd give him [one] too. Both of them.

I. How? For the same land?

R. Yes, for the same land. The C.Q.P. simply meant a disclaimer of Crown title.

I. But then this was encouraging litigation to give both of them C.Q.P'S.

R. Yes, yes, but [their own fault ???].

I. So you don't think they consciously sought to protect the villager from speculators and land brokers.

R. No, not aware of that.

I. You say that most of these speculators were not from the ranks of lawyers, proctors, and government servants, but were business men, like the plumbago families?

R. Yes.

I. But surely many proctors and lawyers dealt with land cases, and they were familiar with their area, and they had influence in their area?

R. Oh yes. There was one man in Matara, one proctor who became a sort of millionaire from buying up lands like that.

I. Yes, that's why I said, there were cases of proctors and lawyers who were also indulged ...?

R. Oh yes, there were some, but in the cases I met, that I knew most about, it happened to be not so.

I. I see. Any headmen families, headmen or their relations indulged in this sort of thing?

R. I think so. Some headmen I knew had small plantations when they retired, 20 or 30 acres or 40 acres here and there.

I. This is Matara and Kurunegala?

R. No. This man I am thinking of had a plantation in Kegalle. But he was - had been a <u>mudaliyar</u> in some place in the south, partly in Anuradhapura and partly in Southern Province.

I. Weren't there also a class of people who could be defined as land brokers, who sort of specialised in this sort of thing?

R. I don't remember that.

I. Selling land which was not their's, often to planters, or acting as intermediary between ...?

R. I think there must have been such people, but I don't remember much about them. [I have] a vague recollection of one such man in Ratnapura.

I. Now did you consider that some of the politicians, some, participating in this attack on land policy and in the attack on the Land Settlement Department were also interested in land buying, and had ulterior motives?

R. Probably yes, but I can't think of any concrete cases.

I. You think there was some sort of motivation?

R. Yes.

I. For instance, can you remember the criticisma of the Kegalla Maha Jana Sabha or Maha Sabha and the Forest Committee, and the Land Commission, the ...?

R. No, I don't remember any of that.

I. Oh, I see. Do you know the content of their criticisms?

R. No.

I. Would you say that there was a peasant response to this criticism? Did the peasants agree with the politicians in the views they were putting?

R. I was not aware of that.

I. For instance, do you know C.E.V.S. Corea?

R. I know him well.

I. Did they have many lands?

R. There are two Coreas, Charles Corea and Victor Corea. Besides, there were others.

I. Chilaw area is it?

R. Both Chilaw. Brothers.

I. Did they have many lands?

R. They had lands fron the family, yes.

I. No, because you see, especially C.E. Corea I think[1], and maybe both of them, probably both of them, led this attack on the Government, and there is grave suspicion that they were doing some ....

R. C.E.Corea was an absolutely honourable man; leader of the Bar.

I. Yes, but I ....

R. Victor was a speculator in land.

I. Well, he was; Victor was.

R. Yes. He was the younger brother, and he bought a - from a woman - a large estate, ... er , one share, I suppose about one fourth, I think, from a woman we'll call X, who was the sister of Eserius. Eseris was from Ambalangoda. He went to the '70s to Chilaw, and with a partner named Ellias, got hold of some Crown Land, and planted it up. Became a wealthy man. Somewhere in the '90's a sister of his turned up living in - and lived with him, apparently on charity, ...

I. And then she sold ... ?

R. And then she sold - now, [there's] no suggestion that Eseris retained any title to the land, what land they had here, you know what I mean, so it was really - he was really squatting on Crown Land, and acquired title by prescription, and the sister had no title. Victor went and bought it.

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1. C.E.V.S. Corea, gnerally known as Victor Corea, is the man I am referring to. He was an Advocate in Chilaw and also had a residence "Palm Grove" in Colpetty, Colombo. Some of the articles attacking Government's waste lands policy which appeared in Ceylonese periodicals (like the "Ceylon National Monthly) are signed"C.E.V.S."; others, "C.E.". As his brother was (I think) C.E. Edirimanasuriya Corea, generally known as C.E. Corea, my confusion is not surprising. The latter was a Supreme Court proctor in Chilaw as well as President of the Chilaw Association, a body highly and openly critical of waste lands policy. He was later President of the Ceylon National Congress. The Green Book also refers to a C.V. Siddhartha Corea, a "Proprietary Planter" in Chilaw with a residence called "Palm Grove" in Colpetty. Presumably he was another brother.

I. Youssee this famous - this Annipoda case, I think a certain case on the Waste Land Ordanance. C.E. Corea, as a barrister in defending a European planter, or someone - This was a test case ....

R. Yes. "hat's the name of that case? I remember the case.

I. Annipoda case. A-N-N-I-P-O-D-A. I just heard of it once. Something like that.

R. I remember that name. Yes.

I. He brought forward this - as a barrister - this theory about the Sinhalese family, in ancient times, the Sinhalese King had never got ownership of the land, but the land belonged to the peasantry, and the King sort of participated as an individual among them and he bought land, you see, and he sort of transferred this to the 20th Century, and argued that the land belonged to the peasantry, and not to the Crown.

R. A most imaginative theory. I mean, half - most of the big cases - many of the big cases depended on a claim on a <u>sannas</u> from the King, so the King was the person ....

I. Yes. No, I'm not drawing attention to this theory, but the fact was he brought forward it in the law courts in defence of a European planter who had bought up land from someone - a Sinhalese from the village, and later on this same theory - in 1910 or 1912 - well even earlier I think - was broached by the Chilaw Association, in which he had a large hand, as part of a general critique of Government policy.

Interruption.

I. So as I said this same theory which he had brought in the law courts appeared as part of a political attack so there is suspicion that he was - had something to do with speculation.

R. No, no! C.E. had no speculation. It was only - he put that forward as a <u>balon de c'est</u> in the Court. You know what I mean, he was a man who would put a desperate plea - he rather liked a desperate plea. He was a very able brain. He had rather - pleasure in putting on a forlorn hope.

Third Interview, 27th December, 1965

I. Regarding agricultural indebtedness, what factors in your opinion contributed to this feature?

R. Scarcity of capital, and the abundance of people seeking loans, that's the main thing. Then it was mostly in the hands of Chetties or, in towns, Afghans, and they were accustomed in their own country to have usurious rates. They were not harpies who robbed the people at all. There was an outcry about the Afghans at one time saying that they recovered a lot more than they lent. That's only when a man made a default. If he paid up in time, then he recovered only what was lent, plus the interest agreed.

I. But weren't the interest rates rather high?

R. Oh, very high, terrifically high. Well, even a - the Ceylonese or Sinhalese moneylender would expect 20% on a mortgage, or 16%, even on a mortgage of a good solid property, which is absurdly high. In Batticaloa it was worse because they had to pay - I think they used to have to pay in seed paddy - and at a time when seed paddy was higher than usual.

I. But I thought that the moneylender, when it was the case of seed paddy, he sent seed paddy at a time when it was ....

R. Low.

I. No, when it was costing a lot?

R. No, at a time when it was low.

I. Oh, I see. I thought it was the other way round?

R. No, when it was low.

I. In your manuscript, you suggested the granting of land free to peasants as something which would have aided agricultural improvement, but then to whom? If you granted it to the peasants free, you would also have to give it to the European planters. [free].

R. Yes, yes, why not? Everybody. Like Canada did.

I. Yes, but Canada had vast extents of land.

R. Well so did Ceylon. Vast extents still uncultivated.

I. Yes, but then, if you are going to grant land free you would have to have an enormous survey department, because you can't grant a piece of land which ...?

R. Yes, you would have to have a big survey department.

I. Couldn't you have had some discriminatory system in which the capitalists had to pay and the peasants - the villager - could get some land virtually free?

R. You think that would have been a good thing?

I. Well, the villager had hardly any capital to develop his ....

R. No, quite true, I think it would have been wise to give him the land free, and the capitalist ... also free. Why should because - the two - each [would] succeed more properly - more surely of they were side by side. They found that clearly in Australia.

I. Yes, but it doesn't necessarily follow that it would work out in Ceylon. Austrailian conditions ....

R. If you think of the reasons for it, I think you will find it false. The reason is, that for each man, each peasant, there comes a bad year or two years when he is broke, then, if he has no second string to his bow, he has to give up. But if he can find a job, a temporary job, on a neighbouring estate, he can carry on, and tide over the bad period.

I. Well, similarly with chenaing - chenaing could help him to tide over the bad period.

R. Who could help him?

I. Chena. Chena land. Chena land you don 't need capital, you just need labour, and you don't need water.

R. Yes, but chena land is no permanent plantation.

I. No, but if you have lots of chena land you grow chena crops.

R. Yes, but the actual output - the product is worth little in point of money.

I. Yes, not for money, but all he wants is food.

R. Oh no, he wants more than food. Oh no, no, not all he wants is food at all, he wants money.

I. No, but the peasant's philosophy, you can say, is just a subsistence economy.

R. Um?

I. Subsistence.

R. What about it?

I. Well, his philosophy. If he can get 20 Rs by putting nothing into the land, he would rather do that than spend - get 40 rupees back by putting ....

R. I think that's - I don't believe there are any such men. I think they're just as anxious to make money as anybody else; if they can do it.

I. What about credit facilities? Don't you think that the government could have provided the peasant with better credit facilities?

R. Absolutely. They woke up to that somewhere in the 1920's ...

I. Yes, with Campbell.

R. ... when they asked ? to advise them about the bank and all sorts of things.

I. Who?

R. Parsee Banker, Pushtanda (?).

I. Oh, I see. Did you know Campbell, W.K.H. Campbell?

R. No, just seen him, I think.

I. Didn't A.G.A's press this idea on Government at an earlier date?

R. Of what?

I. Better credit facilities to the peasants.

R. I don't remember that they did.

I. Wasn't it rather obvious?

R. It wasn't obvious. There were very few countries doing it. France was doing it. Not many others.

I. And when they did begin it in the 1920's, have you any idea what their basic aims and principles were?

R. They opened that Ceylon bank to compete with the other banks and be ready to serve Ceylonese.

I. That was in Senanayake's time?

R. Yes.

I. And you feel that this sort of thing should have been done earlier?

R. Oh, much earlier. It had - as a matter of fact, by then, rates of interest had fallen. It wasn't still 20%, because these British and American insurance companies had come in, and those big firms in Colombo were lending at 8 or 9%.

I. Turning your mind back to the period when you were in the Field in Matara and Kurunegala, and Kegalla, perhaps ...?

R. No, I was never in Kegalle.

I. No? Can you remember whether there was much dry land, that is chena land, highland which you could cultivate without rainfall, available for the peasants? In Matara, for instance?

R. In Matara there was - yes, quite a fair amount of highland, and good rainfall. In Kernigalle [Kurunegala] the rainfall was much more sparse, and unpredictable.

I. Was this highland in Matara cultivated with chena crops, or was it a garden?

R. Chena crops or ?

I. Or was it more or less like a garden? Garden products. Permanent crops.

R. I think chena products.

INTERRUPTION

I. Towards the Kandy side of Kurunegala, did you feel that the peasantry there had inadequate land?

R. No. They had any amount of vacant land. But it was rather arid. Up there im Ambanpola and round there, it seemed to me rather arid.

I. You stated that Government's anti-chenaing policy was rather too strict in a district like Hambantota. Do you feel that this was so in Kurunegala and Anuradhapura too?

R. I don't know about Anuradhapura.

I. But the Northern part [of Kurunegala]? Kernigalle: I think it was rather too strict there too. But in Matara the particular Government Agent was much more liberal in granting chena permits.

I. Who was that?

R. Murty.

I. And in Kegalle [sic] he was rather strict, was he? In granting permits - in Kernigalle?

R. He wasn't in Kernigalle

I. No, the other man.

R. I don't remember he was especially strict, but I think he was abiding by general government policy. There was not much liberality. But ... it would depend upon the Ratemahatmaya's recommendation.

I. Did you have good Ratemahatmayas in Kernigalle?

R. Yes.

I. What exactly were the motives behind this Government policy? Did they fear that it would become a dust bowl, or ...?

R. No, they didn't know much about dust bowls then.

I. What was the idea then?

R. The idea was that it was bad for the peasant to grow kurakkan which would ....

INTERRUPTION.

I. What was the idea?

R. The idea was that it is uneconomic, that they would fare better if they took to paddy.

I. Yes.

R. Or if they planted coconuts. There was a move in Matara, started by the agricultural - Director of Agriculture, to get people to grow ground nuts.

I. Yes, I see. Did he succeed?

R. No. It was a total failure. Like in Kenya; the reason in Ceylon being that the rats ate it.

I. Oh, I see. Did the individual G.A.s and the A.G.A's sometimes disregard government orders with regard to chena licensing?

R. Not categorically. In a mild way, a certain latitude was allowed.

I. Yes, I see. And do you know if anyone put pressure on the Government, that is any A.G.s., put pressure on Government to relax its regulations, official ...?

R. I don't know about that, but I have an idea that it's the sort of thing that both Murty and Bertram Hill would have done.

I. Well, I know that Woolf also wrote against it, and arising from that, some Government took it up - someone took it up in the Secretariat.

R. All I wrote to the Director of Agriculture said that if there was a man in the position of a villager, with his lack of knowledge and lack of capital, this chena system was the best way to manure the land, the cheapest way to manure the land.

I. Who was the Director?

R. I think it was Lloyd (?), but I'm not sure. It might have been somebody else.

I. Later on, H.R. Freeman charged government ....

R. Ah, he was a Government Agent who gave freely chena permits. But to a really reckless extent, I believe.

I. You didn't know him personally?

R. Oh yes, a most lovable man.

I. Well, he said that Government was unduly strict in its policy, and also charged the Land Settlement Department with miserliness in allocating chena reserves, but ....

R. He was a great philanthropist; he may have overdone that.

I. Would you say that he was impractical?

R. A little impractical.

I. Naive?

R. No, not naive at all.

I. Regarding the general policy, in what respects do you think land policy, such as it was, may have been better adapted to maintaining the peasant on his land?

R. I think if it had given - supplied capital - the bank gave people loans. Secondly, if they had learnt a few object lessons of good cultivation, here, there and everywhere. They did start some agricultural colonies, but most of them they failed to make pay. The other thing that they neglected was research in paddy cultivation on proper manuring. They've done ... I believe very little is known yet, about that.

I. Were the peasants very difficult to teach when it came to these improvements?

R. Oh yes. They still are. You cannot persuade the Matara cultivator, though he is quite an intelligent man, to transplant. Plenty of people have tried, I believe.

I. Yes, I see.

R. Well, of course, he has his reasons, he says it costs too much. Labour is always very expensive. I don't know whether he's right or wrong.

I. Did they every try to work through the headmen? If - I mean headment had lands.

R. Work what through headmen?

I. These improvements. Ask the headmen to do it on their own lands.

R. Oh yes, I think they did that. I remember the Director of Agriculture came round and offered free manure to persuade people to use manure, and he held a public meeting. The headmen were asked to come, and they came. And two or three tried

R. (cont.) out the manure. I asked one man - Vidane Aratchchi later on what happened. Why he didn't get it the second year - he would have to pay for it then. He said, "In the first place, manure was washed down into the next field and didn't benefit the crop. In the second place, if I - the benefit it did to the crop of my neighbour, it was not enough to pay the cost." He was no fool, he had watched the thing. But of course there are many who just stick to the old way.

I. Turning to some odds and ends, again in your memoirs you state that nine tenths of the petitions you dealt with were "stark futility".

R. Yes.

I. But even though futile, don't you think that they were a useful form of venting grievances?

R. Yes, that's why we had them. That's why even if some of the many futile ones were sent to the headmen to see if they could settle [them].

I. So you wouldn't have done away with ...?

R. No, no. You would have a register to see that none were lost.

I. And do you know anything about Le Mesurier's activities in Matara?

R. Yes, yes, I know something. He was buying up private claims to Government land, and we had to fight them. He had a tremendous claim for about one third of Nuwara Eliya district.

I. Not only Nuwara Eliya, in Matara did he - didn't he buy ...?

R. He did - something like that too, but I don't remember the details of it. But he wasn't ... . That was the reason he was got rid of, not his matrimonial ....

I. That was the reason.

R. Yes.

I. You mean he had bought land while he was in Government Service?

R. Yes, yes. A lot of G.A.'s had been doing that in previous years.

I. That was in the 1840's.

R. No, no. Eh!

I. When?

R. In the 19th century.

I. Yes, in the 1840's. But they were forbidden from after 1845.

R. Yes, he did it after the veto came in.

I. Oh, I see, so that was the reason why he was [dismissed].

R. Yes, I think he was allowed - he became a Mohammadan and married a second wife. I think that was not the reason for it.

I. In Matara itself, you didn't have to go into any of his activities, any repurcussions?

R. No, but I remember reading his diaries and I came to the conclusion that he was one of the most efficient men who was ever there.

I. Yes, I've heard this said of him too. Were those claims he bought up dubious claims, or ...?

R. Yes, dubious claims.

I. Have you any idea why he did so?

R. I think greed, I don't know.

I. No, I was wondering whether he felt that he ...?

R. He might have had sympathy with some of the people. He may have thought that some were being done out of it. That would depend on whether the <u>sannases</u> were genuine, or forged. On that I can't give an opinion.

I. Turning to another sphere, which is of considerable interest, and which you have a lot of experience in, the judicial system, as applied in the provinces rather than in the main towns. Don't you think it was rather too foreign, and too formalised for most of the peasantry?

R. I don't think too formalised. It was too expensive.

I. Expensive, therefore it favoured the richer.

R. Yes. It always does in any country.

I. Yes, I see. But I was wondering whether it was more pronounced in Ceylon, in the sense that the stamp fees were such that ...?

R. No, the stamp fees were pretty low. Relatively, I believe.

I. And did the proctors bring a good thing out of it?

R. Some of them did well, some of them did badly. I don't think many made big sums.

I. Well, there are all sorts of stories told. There is the incident of - a case of one proctor who had got all the claimants to one piece of land in Kurunegala, on the day the land was being sold, or something like that, and he turned up at the land sale.

R. He got all the claimants .... What's that?

I. He got all the claimants in town on some case, and left them there, and he turned up on the spot.

R. Well, who would believe that; would the claimants be so foolish!

I. Oh well, I heard this first hand from one of the L.S.O.'s.

R. I would take it with a grain of salt.

I. But apart from that ...

R. There was one thing that I did hear. One or two proctors used to buy a share of land and get one of the co-Reirs to bring a partition case, with a view to forcing co-owners to sell more to him.

I. Yes, I see.

R. How far was it [ulterior], or how far he was just exercising his natural legal right as a co-owner I don't know. He was a very estimable man, the man in question, but he became a millionaire, he was known as a millionaire. One of the few proctors who did become that.

I. Wasn't it also the practice of land speculators and proctors to get one co-owner, to sell the whole block of land.

R. Yes. Well, no, I think they more often got them to sell their share, or their alleged share. Sometimes. I suppose, the very dishonest one might have done that, what you have mentioned, but not very commonplace.

I. Regarding the judicial system. Do you think the procedure conduced to great delays in justice?

R. Of course it produced delays. With proxy (?) government it must take time.

I. Yes, it must take time, but also there is - perhaps because it was so formalised and in many ways so rigid there were quite often - at least quite often - one side or another or the proctors, could get postponements, and when you consider that some villagers had travelled 30 or 40 miles to come for the case....

R. Yes, that was a great curse. But you mustn't assume that it was so everywhere. There were frequently genuine reasons for the postponment.

I. Yes, it also ....

R. Also, there were plenty of magistrates who were very slow to grant those postponments. Some men were ready to grant them, you know, the weaker magistrate, and there were plenty who were not.

I. Yes, I can quite see that, but I was wondering whether they could have had some sort of system in which they reduced this ...?

R. I can't imagine any system to reduce that, unless they had limited the length of a cross examination.

I. What about itinerant courts?

R. Oh, the same thing happened there.

I. Yes, but at least, if you have ....

R. It didn't cost the people so much to come. That's true; oh, that's true. But I don't think the people liked that so much, you know, because ....

I. They missed their fun.

R. No, because the more able proctors wouldn't bother to go to the itinerant court of they could help it, so a person - a deserving person, would have to put up with a less able defender.

I. Yes. Also, what about a more informal system, something like the Gansabhas justice under the coconut tree, in small cases, on the spot, in the village. Informal proceedings.

R. I don't think there[would be] much difference between the results there and - except it would be a little cheaper. The other case is there were rather more dishonest presidents than there were dishonest magistrates and judges.

I. Yes, but if you could get the judges out there, rather than presidents of village tribunals?

R. Well, that would have cost a lot of money. Travel and things.

I. Well, didn't witnesses have to get <u>batta</u>?

R. Yes, yes, but that ....

I. So well, the witnesses would be there, they would be local people, so in that case ....

R. The <u>batta</u> .... Oh yes, that's true.

I. Well, you would increase certain costs, and reduce others.

R. But then the lawyers would charge more to go to ....

I. No, without lawyers.

R. Oh no, that is - without lawyers is all nonsense; absolute nonsense. The lawyers are a very essential thing.

I. Why?

R. Because he takes the trouble to study the case, and bring out the weak points in the other side. He'll do that with more ability than the outdoor proctor. Of course, all these villages <u>gansabhawa</u> people would go to an outdoor proctor.

I. Yes, I see. Yes, agreed that the lawyer was better than the proctor, but I was wondering whether in the smaller cases of land disputes you couldn't do without proctors and lawyers altogether.

R. Well, in the <u>gansabhawa</u> no proctor was allowed to appear, but the client - the claimant or the complainant would consult what's known as the outdoor proctor, and get him to coach his witnesses, so you don't really gain very much.

I. Yes, but take an L.S.O. in a village. Admittedly he's not a judicial man, but he could quite often, with the deeds and other things, and the villagers round him, unravel certain disputes.

R. You have no idea, with regard to the land claimants, what a lot of trouble there is in examining the deeds. You have no idea how often I have found one or two of the advocates, the barristers, appearing in my courts, who didn't know the contents of the deeds they were relying on. One of them was a most estimable man I knew; He would frequently be found telling you something incorrect about the contents of a deed. If that's going to be done by the villagers, and the presidents, each case would take an inordinate time.

I. Yes, but there might be some disadvantages, but there are also some advantages in the fact that these oral and informal proceedings are something which the ordinary villager can grasp, and secondly, you had the whole village round you, which makes it difficult to - well, in some cases I believe ....

R. Yes, I suppose it would make if difficult for a fellow to lie, that is true.

I. And also, generally it would tend to favour quicker decisions?

R. I suppose it would. It would certainly in small cases, but whether it would in a case about a long settled land [sic], I doubt it.

I. I'm taking the whole system into account. Would you say that in many of the big land cases, judges in the towns, more often than not reached a wrong decision?

R. No.

I. Let me put the case this way. I mean it was not a wrong decision on the evidence they saw but ....

R. There might have been some .... Well, I can't give an answer to that question.

I. You see, I met Mr. Leach, who was an L.S.O., and also Davidson, and Leach said that he knew the inside of several cases, as an L.S.O., and he found that the judges had given a wrong decision simply because they had only a couple of deeds before them, whereas as an L.S.O. on the spot, a) he had the advantage of being on the spot, and knowing the configuration of the land, which had a lot to do with it ...

R. That might well be.

I. I ... and b) he had every single deed, and every single land document of the village with him, and he could trace lineages and descendents ....

R. In my experience there were not many cases where the proctors were so negligent as not to get all the deeds, because you could go to the Land Registry, and pay a fee, and you would get all the deeds at once, on a long sheet. There was no reason ....

I. All the deeds of a village.

R. Not all the deeds of the village. All the deeds about that land. I'll tell you what might happen. What happened to me. I convicted a man of wounding a reckshaw coolie. Twenty odd wounds. Definite appempt to kill him. I sentenced him to four years rigorous imprisonment, something like that; then [in the] evening (?) something struck me and I sent for the information book. And I found a whole history of a false case which that rickshaw coolie had brought against that man. This was not brought forward by his proctor. It was no justification for it was a quite deliberate attempt to murder, but it was a good deal of extenuation, so I had to write and get the lashes - [to] the Governor and get him to remit the lashes. That is because the proctor didn't do his job properly, you see. That will happen sometimes, you see.

I. Yes. When you went out and were a Cadet were you put on the Bench immediately, or after a couple of years?

R. After two years' experience in the kachcheri.

I. Oh, you had two years's experience in the <u>kachcheri</u>?

R. During that two years, besides studying the law papers for exams, I would sit on the bench once in a while, along with another magistrate.

I. Oh, with another magistrate? Never alone?

R. No.

I. What sort of man was Sir Anton Bertram?

R. Oh, a scholar of the first quality.

I. As a man was he weak, I mean, as a ...?

R. I don't know much about it. I'd rather not say anything. I think he was timid, but I might be wrong.

I. Well, Bowes says he was weak, and I was trying to check on that.

R. I could tell you something, but I wouldn't like to put it on the ....

I. What about Renton?

R. Oh, a fine man. A man passionately keen on doing justice, but fed up with the way criminals got acquitted in Ceylon and the perjury in Ceylon.

I. I see. Were there a lot of loopholes?

R. Oh yes.

INTERRUPTION.

I. And who was the other chap, Lascelles ...?

R. He was a cousin of the Princess Consort's husband. Gable I think, and they had a plantation in Barbados.

I. Oh, did they? And did you know St. John Jackson at all?

R. No, hardly.

I. It would seem that the Controller of Revenue was a fairly important person?

R. He was second in command to the Colonial Secretary.

I. Oh, I see. How was Alexander as the Controller?

R. A lovable man.

I. Did he have much inagination?

R. Much?

I. Imagination.

R. No, I shouldn't think so,

I. And Woods?

R. Woods was an able man. But also a little bit rigid.

I. I ... that he and Turner never got on? L.J.B. Turner.

R. Which Turner?

I. A chap who was a bit of a historian. L.J.B.

R. I don't think it was L.J.B. It's another initial, isn't it? I'm not sure. I don't know about that.

I. And Bowes has a lot to say against Clementi. Did you know Clementi at all?

R. I knew him. He was on the Executive Council where I had to go and defend my scheme for one distillery, Government distillery, to make all the arrack for the island. He was broad-minded enough to vote for me and I was [defeated] by the Governor's casting vote.

I. Manning?

R. Manning. Manning was a very able man but he had the idea that it was a bit immoral to compete with private trade.

I. The distilleries were all private run, were they?

R. Yes, yes.

I. Why did you want a Government one?

R. Those distilleries, there were about 50 or 60 or more, 200 of them I think, small ones; you couldn't control it. You had ? ? illicit.

I. So you wanted to stop that and have one Government [one]?

R. Yes, they had passed a law that the distillation of those local stills - these were not patent stills - had to cease by 1923.

I. But they continued?

R. No. But before they did that the Government set up its own distillery to prove to them that they could make it at a patent still; they said that [arrack] couldn't be made at a patent still. It took four years or so to do it, to prove that. When it was proved we said now you can't distil any more, you quote a price at which you supply us the required 900,000 gallons. They refused to bid - they refused to tender and I prepared this scheme to have one distillery; buy up toddy and make it arrack - that having been lost we then called for tenders from India. And when they heard that Barry and Company, Madras, were going to tender, they all came and tendered and put up the present distilleries.

I. I see. Did you feel that there was a lot of corruption in the Excise Department?

R. What?

I. A lot of corruption in the Excise Department?

R. Yes, we found the names of all but two Excise officers stationed in Calturn District in the Arrack-renters' books as receiving money. Ditto most of the police in that district.

I. But weren't they in a rather difficult position? They couldn't resist - that is in the sense that if they moved strongly against these dealers they could be beaten up, murdered....

R. No, no, no. That isn't what was in their minds at all. Most of those entries, many of those entries were Christmas presents. Two of my best inspectors were there and got a Christmas present and they afterwards told me that the money was put on their table and left there. Another one was a lie, that is to say the inspector was entered, had his name in the book as receiving 100 rupees every month, but we were certain that after a certain amount those entries were false, because in the previous month he got the manager convicted.

I. Oh, I see.

R. Do you follow? That manager must have been taking the money and putting this man down as receiving it.

I. Oh, I see. I suppose Bowes calls Clementi a freak and he says that Clementi ....

R. Freak! He was a most handsome man.

I. Well, you know, in his attitudes. And he says he was very impractical.

R. Well, I thought he was rather practical when I [received his support], ha ha.

I. When he had gone up to Nuwara Eliya, as soon as he arrived and I telephoned P.W.D. and ordered another trace ....

R. What?

I. Another trace for a road from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya ....

R. Another road?

I. Yes, on the other side of the valley through the tea estates. But that's by the by.

R. No, but I think that road has come, hasn't it?

I. No, no.

R. Yes, there is another road through ....

I. Ratnapura?

R. No, through .... What's that place where Lincoln was a postmaster?

I. I don't know.

R. Ragala. No, its not Ragala. Another place on the other side of Nuwara Eliya.

I. Regarding these 1915 riots, you said that Malcolm gave the order, 'Take no prisoners'.

R. Yes.

I. When exactly did he do so?

R. I think that - I'm not sure. It might have been the fourth or fifth day of the riots.

I. Oh, I see. And these orders were conveyed to the patrols?

R. Yes, I think it was ....

I. A general order?

R. Yes.

I. No, because Newnham does recall an incident when much later on they had this house to house search of the Pettah.

R. Yes. That was also about eight or nine days after.

I. Yes. Not quite at the height of the riots and when he conveyed the orders - well, something to the effect of taking hostages, no not taking hostages, but shooting people if they saw anyone running away, you see, and rather silly orders. I was wondering whether its the same order you are referring to ?

R. Well, it's just possible that. But what the R.S.M. told me was that their searching the Pettah was to get people to resist and shoot a few.

I. Oh, I see.

R. Of course they said they were searching for arms. But they were hoping for a little resistance.

I. This is a sort of military attitude. They wanted some sort of scrap, did they?

R. They wanted some sort of ?

I. Scrap.

R. No, no, no. The people had got out of hand - they were right. There had to be some shooting.

I. Yes, but you can't just shoot anyone.

R. No, no. If you find some fellows who resist, that's the chance to do some shooting, isn't it?

I. Who resists, but really, I mean people running away from the searchers is not really resistance.

R. That's so.

I. And I have an idea that Malcolm was treating this something like a Boer War almost, you know.

R. Well, the general idea was, he was off his head a little. That's what the military people told me.

I. What about the - since you were right in the centre of the riots in Colombo, did you feel that the instructions given to these platoon leaders and patrol leaders were clear?

R. I didn't see those instructions. It was only rumour. I don't know.

I. Weren't you there when some orders were given to ...?

R. There was a circular sent round saying 'this is serious; you must deal firmly with it'. Something like that, nothing wrong with it. A little bit too peremptory, because something had to be left to the discretion of magistrates. It had to be within the Code.

I. Yes.

R. A little bit too peremptory, but nothing like shooting everybody or taking prisoners.

I. No, well, the question also of not - are you to shoot - were you ordered to shoot below the knees for instance?

R. No, there was no such order as far as I remember.

I. Because there ....

R. It's such a long time ago I can't be sure.

I. Yes, I know. When one examines it the riots , a lot seems to depend on the clarity of these instructions and certainly these Kegalla cases the instructions don't seem to have been explicit enough and the chaps seem to have interupted them in their own way. And in fact, in one case, Sudlow's case, the instructions were verbal instructions which he had conveyed to another and ....

R. Whose case?

I. A Captain Sudlow wrong pronunciation here..

R. Sudlow. Sudlow. He was a harmless fellow[1] in Colombo. Merchant.

---

1. !!!

I. Yes, but he is the chap who shot several people.

R. Yes, yes, yes.

I. This point about Ceylonese and coloured personnel and not being made G.A.'s. Was this a definite tendency in the early part of the century not to make them G.A.'s.

R. Not 'tendency', it was a ....

I. Policy?

R. Policy. Both Arunachalam and Paul Pieris were much more - were able men, estimable men, more able than some of their contempories who did become G.A.'s. .

I. But I thought you said Paul Pieris sometimes - at least was not a very good judge.

R. Quite so, but he was a very estimable man. He would have made a very good G.A.

I. What about C.L.Wickremesinghe?

R. He became a G.A., didn't he?

I. But he took some time. He joined in 1909 and he was not an A.G.A. until 1923.

R. Yes, yes. He was a good fellow. I don't think he was of the calibre of Arunachalam or Pieris. Don't put that down.

I. No, the point is, I was wondering whether it was a policy or not, but there is another point of view that ... someone said that the first few Ceylonese well, were not as capable as the Ceylonese who came later on and it is simply a case of these firsr few not being considered able enough to be G.A.'s.

R. That's not true. People disliked Arunachalam.

I. Why?

R. Oh, he was the ... he wouldn't drink, he wouldn't eat meat.

I. Oh, I see, that's rather absurd.

R. He was a little too prim. And they say that he staffed the Registrar's Department with Tamils. Ha ha ha.

I. Ha ha. Quite possible that.

R. Then I think he ploughed me unjustly in Tamil.

I. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha.

R. But he was an able man; nonsense. And I believe a perfectly honourable man. Turn that off while I tell you a joke about ....

INTERRUPTION.

I. Did you know the Van Cuylenburgs? Hector and ...?

R. Yes, I knew them.

I. I'm not sure which was the more prominent one?

R. Well, the father, both were Hectors.

I. Both were Hector. Who was the one who was in the Council in 1915?

R. The father.

I. The father. He died shortly afterwards?

R. Yes, he died not long afterwards.

I. Mm. Because ....

R. They call the second one H.R.H. He was H.R.H.

I. There is some evidence to show that his stories [1] had a lot to do with Government action in 1915.

R. Very probably.

I. And, do you know W.A.De Silva who was arrested?

R. Yes.

I. What sort of man was he?

R. Oh, meek and mild old fellow.

I. Mm.

R. Who made a lot of money and then bought a rubber estate at an absurdly high price and ended rather broke.

I. Yes, I see.

R. But he was a leading Buddhist.

I. Yes, he was a sincere Buddhist. Was he a sort of ...?

R. I should say so, I think he was a genuine teatotaller.

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1. I am referring to Hector the Elder.

I. Mm. K. Balasingham?

R. He was a harmless good fellow.

I. Tambimuttu?

R. Oh, he was a most lovable person, but he would take fees to get people jobs. K(?) said to me openly .... Because he had appeared before me in Court in Batticaloa I knew him well, personally.

I. I see.

R. He would come and say: 'I want a job for this man, please, he is a good man and so on. Give him ...' I said, 'Well, lets see his certificates'. And if possible I would give it. Because he would know the man and he was a pretty clear headed chap.

I. Tambimuttu?

R. Mm. Very able man.

I. What about Batuwantudawe?

R. He was a lovable gentleman.

I. Lazy?

R. Mm?

I. Was he lazy?

R. Oh, yes, definitely lazy.

I. What I notice among the top brass in the British Civil Service is that they, well, seem to consider some of thse politicians as'agitators' and 'agitator' was a bad word ....

R. Yes.

I. And ... it would seem that while the politicians were quite touchy on some things at the same time many of these Civil Servants didn't unbend enough. Would you say that was correct?

R. I think some so, yes. But then in later years I think some were bending too low.

I. Mm. In what sense?

R. Giving in too much to them.

I. Yes, I see. Yes, I know that Murchison Fletcher was unpopular because he listened to the pressure of some of the politicians I think.

R. I won't tell you what I think of Murchison.

I. Well, no-one liked him, and ....

R. No, I rather liked him; he was a very plausible fellow, very good speaker, a good manager in many ways, but there was something about him I found rather suspicious but which I won't mention.

I. Mm. What about the Obeyesekeres, they seemed to have a fair amount of influence with the government and with Fletcher especially?

R. Which one?

I. Forrester.

R. Forrester? He was a good fellow. But a little bit - but highly eccentric.

I. And the other one is Christopher?

R. That's his father. I don't know him but he was supposed to be an honest old man.

I. What about ...?

R. He was the man who described the politicians as 'nobodies'.

I. I see.

R. I think he really meant the Senanayake's which was rather absurd.

I. That means he was rather snobbish.

R. Yes.

I. What about old Banda's father?

R. Oh, he was a dear old thing. He had no politics.

I. Was he a bit of a time-server?

R. No, no, he was just a sportsman who liked his game, he liked his punch, and he liked the British. Quite a genuine liking. And he didn't believe much in the local statesmen, I don't think, but I don't know. I don't think that its fair to call the leaders of that movement 'agitators'. F.R. Senanayake was a man who gave away - was giving away half his money to people ....

I. Yes, I see.

R. ... to Buddhist and what not. E.W. Perera was definitely a decent man. So was H.J.C. Periera. So was Allan Drieberg; he was one of the agitators. So I think, so was Henry De Mel; there's nothing wrong about him; at least he was a little bit of a ....

I. Lad?

R. A wily man ... You know, a little bit ....

I. What about the De Zoysas?

R. De Zoysa?

I. I don't know - I don't know their initials.

R. There was another - oh, Francis De Zoysa.

I. Yes, I think so.

R. Oh, he was an honourable enough man.

I. I was wondering whether sometimes they were a bit snobbish towards some of the other castes, the other politicians.

R. Francis De Zoysa was Salagama.[1]

I. Oh, I see, yes. (Pause) Another thing that strikes me is that the Civil Service, speaking very generally, the European Civil Service was somewhat segregated from the Ceylonese middle class.

R. Yes, I think that is largely true.

I. And Stace in his memoirs goes so far as to say that one of the faults of the British community at large was arrogance.

R. Yes, I suppose there's something in that. I don't know they displayed individual arrogance but they were aloof. The aloofness might be considered arrogant. I mean the matter of clubs and so on.

I. Well ... yes. But I know of several cases of individual arrogance, but I have heard of them only through the Civil Servants themselves who have mentioned several cases. I know one in which Forrest was involved when he chucked a Buddhist priest out of a first class compartment.

R. No, that was not Forrest. I think it was Furse Roberts.

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1. One of the lower castes and hence not able to put on airs on this basis,

I. Oh, was it?

R. Well, he was supposed to have kicked the Buddhist priest, but I don't know whether that's true ; he denied it firmly.

I. This is one in which Armand de Sousa was tried for libel, I think?

R. He denied it. I don't know the truth of that. Forrest was a chap - I don't think he was exactly a - he was rather, perhaps a little arrogant in his manner, rather impatient sort of chap, and also liked his booze so if he did anything like that he probably was drunk.

I. Mm. Oh, yes. Furse Roberts seems to have been very racially minded.

R. Oh, he was the one they say - he was - he wouldn't give judgment against an Englishman.

I. Mm. Of course it was not very wise for those who were arrogant to be arrogant because, simply because, whether they liked it or not, or whether they thought of themselves as a ruling class or not, they were in effect ruling Ceylon.

R. Yes. (Pause)

I. What sort of calibre were Young, Tyrrell and Wedderburn?

R. Young was a very tip-top, able man. I don't know much about Wedderburn; nothing against him. Tyrrell was a very nice person but I don't think he was very able.

I. Not imaginative?

R. Mm.

I. He was not very imaginative.

R. I don't think he was anti-nature, no.

I. Not 'anti-nature', did he have any imagination?

R. No, no, I don't think he had much imagination.

I. And someone said that somehow how his manners were the sort which would have put the ministers off, either reserved or he tended to be puffing at a cigar at these ministerial meetings you know, and ..

R. And why souldn't he puff at a cigar ...?

I. Well, I suppose its the attitude.

R. I'm told that some of the judges on the Privy Council smoke when they hear cases, I don't know if its true. I used to smoke when I heard a case sometimes. I thought Tyrrell was a most gentlemanly person; he had rather a reserved manner; quite a good looking man.

I. What about Reid?

R. He was pretty able.

I. Because I heard a rather strange story that the Donoughmore Commission wanted him to be Colonial Secretary, the Chief Secretary, and ....

R. Very probable.

I. ... but Mrs Tyrrell got it for Tyrrell.

R. Who?

I. Mrs Tyrrell. Went and saw Graeme Thomson. And, well, I don't know how far this is correct, and eventually Reid resigned because of that or something.

R. Might be, I don't know.

I. But I know Reid was a Labour man, or later on he was ....

R. You mean he stood for election in England?

I. Yes.

R. As a Labour candidate?

I. Yes.

R. Perhaps so, I don't know. He was an Irishman. An Ulsterman, I think.

Mr. T.W. Roberts' Answers to Questions forwarded by M.W. Roberts, October 1966.

1. (a) Did many of the British Civil Servants possess a sense of mission and a belief in the "white man's burden"? or was it just another job which most of them did conscientiously and with a sense of responsibility? (b) How about the Ceylonese?

   Answer:
   (a) Yes.
   (b) Yes.

2. In the 1910's and especially after reforms in the Legislative Council in Manning's time in the early 1920's, did the Civil Servants realise that complete self-government was on its way and would occur during their lifetime?

   Answer:
   On its way, but not expected to come in our time.

3. Did you feel that most of the Civil Servants of the 1900's - 1920's had an inadequate grasp of local tenurial conditions[a] as well as [b]agricultural matters?

   Answer:
   a. No.
   b. Yes. Few people understood what was good manure for each product. The early manures recommended by experts for coconuts were later on proved bad, except one mixture.

4. Didn't Government as a whole lay insufficient emphasis on agricultural and technological matters? ... as reflected in the numbers, the pay and the status accorded to such departments as Irrigation and Agriculture?

   Answer:
   No. Government spent freely on the Agricultural Department, but not very wisely. Their experts often gave stupid advice e.g. groundnuts.

5. Around 1909 there was an important Executive Council discussion on the question of restricting chena cultivation and in 1904-05 as well as 1909-10 equally important discussions on the subject of Sales of Land by Villagers. I have an idea that the principles of policy and even the decisions reached were not conveyed[a] to the majority of G.A's and A.G.A's. To take another example: can you recall Sir Hugh Clifford's paper on land[b]

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matters[b] (in 1927)? Was it brought to the notice of officials and discussed? (c) Would it not be correct to say that in the twentieth century there was an almost complete lack of liaison between the Secretariat and the field officers? I am aware that you were mostly in judicial posts but I hope your early years as O.A. and snippets gathered in conversation will help you to comment on this question.

Answer:

a. Probably they were conveyed at the meeting of H.E. with G.A. G.A.A.

b. No.

(c) Nonsense. G.A's had frequent conferences with the Secretariat and once a year with H.E. The Governor.

6. Did A.G.A's and G.A's try to dissuade <u>nindagama</u> owners from selling land (on which there were tenants) to planters etc.? Did they try to prevent speculators from buying up peasant land by judicious sales of Crown land in the locality, thus feeding the capitalists' land hunger?

Answer:

Yes.

7. (a) Would you say that policy and practice in land matters was very much laissez-faire in the 1900's to 1920's? (b) Was there any policy of trying to preserve the peasantry in their small-holdings, or indeed of encouraging the proliferation of numerous peasant holdings (as far as rice culture went)? I know that the Land Settlement Dept. was orientated towards assisting the peasant but did G.A's and A.G.A's have any instructions or policies in this regard? (c) Was there anything positive towards saving the peasants from their own improvidence in selling land or borrowing on the land?

Answer:

(a) No.

(b) Land sales had that object as well as getting money.

(c) No. The great need was cheap capital to tide over bad years, which were 2 in 5. Government did nothing till later to promote cheap loans.

8. Regarding chenas in Kandyan districts: in pre British times there were some private[a] chenas (i.e. <u>paraveni</u> chenas) in the Kandyan Provinces though the more usual thing was an usufructuary right to chenas. In the mid-nineteenth (as in the twentieth)

the administration was faced with extensive and spurious claims and encroachments as well. But they did recognise the peasants' right to <u>ownership of a reasonable amount</u> of appurtenant chenas,[b] without ever transferring this recognition into paper, sketch, survey and deed. Where the claims were on a village basis[c] rather than an individualistic basis, as in many parts of the N.W.P., they recognised the right of the village to have three times[d] more chena land than their paddy land. (e) In the face of this, the twentieth century policy and the application of the Waste Lands Ordinance would appear to be overstrict. It opened the way for individuals to lose the ill-defined <u>paraveni</u> chenas of old. It opened the way for an individual to lose a plot of chena which a previous nineteenth century administrator had recognised as his <u>de facto</u>. I admit that many claims were fictitious; but some weren't.

Answer:

a. ?

b. Yes; an acre of two, near the field.

c. I do not know if there were such.

d. Hardly so much.

(e) There were many claims to chenas far away from the fields. Those were mostly humbug; Forged sannases.

9. Can you recall the Land Commission which sat from 1927 to 1929, reporting finally in 1929. (It included Elphinstone, Brayne, Archibald etc. but had a majority of unofficials). What was your personal opinion, and that of unofficials, on their recommendations?

Answer:

I do not know what they recommended.

10. A point that has forcibly struck me about the period of British rule,even in the twentieth century, is the paucity, the inadequacy and the unreliability of the statistics on numerous agrarian matters. No one seems to have directed attention to a statistical study of rural indebtedness, the extent of land alienation by peasants and the causes thereto, the extent of undivided proprietorship, of <u>ande</u>, etc. One would have expected this by the 1920's at least, surely. It is only when one knows the size of a problem that one can tackle it.

Answer:

Statistics were rare, but the G.A.A's diaries are full of talk and regret over village debts. The final effort came

with the Banking Commission.

12. (a) How far did headmen influence elections in the Galle District in 1931, 1936, and 1947-48? (b) Could they show favouratism in the registration of votes? (c) Could a candidate 'bribe' the electorate by winning over the headmen and thus securing block votes?

Answer:
(a) Little, probably.
(b) They could not.
(c) No. But many spent vast sums through all sorts of agents. 5000/- at one Galle election which the winner would have won without spending anything.

13. Have you any idea what representations were made by the C.C.S. delegation, led by Newnham, before the Donoughmore Commission? Were you consulted? If not, why not? Who decided on the points they should raise before the Donoughmore Commission?

Answer:
No [i.e. not consulted]. Don't know. I had left it.[1]

14. (a) Did you feel that Fletcher, Elphinstone and, later, Stanley were playing the political game and trying to work the Constitution by giving in to the politicians? (b) Were they seeking popularity? (c) If so, did they secure it; i.e. win the favourable opinion of politicians and people? (d) How did Fletcher go down with our leading politicians?

Answer:
(a) Yes.
(b) Yes.
(c) Yes.
(d) Very popular.

15. (a) When hearing many land cases on the Bench did you feel that much was obscure and that many of your decisions were a shot in the dark, so to speak? (b) Without seeing the configuration of the land and without an intimate knowledge of rivalries and relationships in the village concerned was it possible to see

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1. By'it', I think he means the Ceylon Civil Service; in which case he is mistaken because he retired in 1935 and the Donoughmore Commission was in the late 1920's.

one's way to a clear decision?

Answer:

(a) No.

(b) Yes. The surveyor called for each side, put up plans which clearly depicted the facts. Once in a hundred times, a plan might deceive.

16. Is it correct to say that although proctors and lawyers were debarred from Village Tribunal cases, the parties concerned consulted local proctors and witnesses, etc. were coached up?

Answer:

Yes.

17. I would appreciate a thumb-nail sketch of those in the following list whom you knew well enough to comment on, with particular reference to (a) their sympathy towards the Ceylonese aspirations, political and social (where relevant) (b) ability and (c) willingness to act on unorthodox lines.

Answer:

I knew 50 of them. [My father had marked the 50 names he knew out of a list of 150 submitted.] All were devoted to their job, but 60% had little sympathy with nationalism or with any democracy. Most were orthodox.

1. Of all the men, who were my bosses, the only one who gave me a jar was Cookson. All were just. Most were very kind to me. Cookson was like a poker. Tall. Nervous. Didactic. A prig. Not unkind. Effeminate. But in the small pox epidemic, (so I learnt later) he shed his nerves and effeminacy. (Although nerves drove him to be re-vaccinated thrice or more.) When local labour refused to move the dead, he handled the corpses himself. True pluck in the midst of fear.

2. In K'gala, a few British planters regularly blackballed Ceylonese applicants for membership of the tennis club. Bertram Hill and Thorpe (G.A., W.P.[Western Province]) retaliated by blackballing all new Britishers. That ended apartheid in that club.

3. Most Civil Servants avoided local society, because they feared suspicion of favouritism and of graft. One Ceylonese D.J. [District Judge] made a close friendship with a Tangalle proctor X, and X often came from Tangalle to Matara to defend men charged before that judge. In the upshot, Matara proctors used to snigger and say "X has come for this case. It will end in acquittal". Justly or unjustly, they suspected the D.J. of taking bribes.

The big fault of the service chaps was that they doubted whether any but the British would bear the burden of good and honest government.

4. Can't remember many ? observations or intriguing comments by Civil Servants. But herewith one or two jests.

Ashmore's comment on suggestion for suppressing crime was, "Exterminate the Sinhalese". He had plenty of punch as well as much good will to the Ceylonese.

Ellis gave one bit of advice to the young in office, "If it makes no difference to your pay or pension, don't worry about it".

Murty had his village girl living in the Residency and that evoked a petition to the Secretary of State. He was, I believe, admonished but not forbidden to have her there.

Clifford was supposed to be a rake: and there was some scandal and talk of a divorce of a Mrs. Dunbar, wife of a Major, whom Clifford took to Nuwara Eliya in Governor McCallum's Railway Coach, and thereby earned a sharp rebuke from McCallum, who disliked Clifford and once asked me if we ever saw Clifford eat a durian when, "he looked like a wild beast". Clifford had something of the look of a gorilla anyhow.

. but he had much good in him.

[My father answered these questions very briefly on the questionnaire itself, sometimes marking a section a or b and then writing short notes on the section. The sub-division of questions, therefore, was not an original one but has been followed in this version in accordance with the replies. The sub-division is done either at the beginning of a sentence or by a citation mark beside a particular point.]

T.W. ROBERTS MEMOIRS

On my request my father wrote these notes - a better term perhaps than memoirs in that they are, characteristically, terse and concentrate on major branches of administration rather than autobiographical anecdotes - sometime in 1963. The original manuscript is in my hands and I can vouch for the accuracy of this typescript. Signed typescripts of the memoirs are also available at the Royal Commonwealth Institute, Russell Square, London and Rhodes House Library, Oxford - typed at single spacing and in elite type and numbering only 8 pages.

My father served in the Ceylon Civil Service from 1902 to 1935, eventually settling down in Galle (his last station) on his retirement. He became a citizen of Ceylon in 1951. He liked Galle very much and his intention was to live there permanently but disillusionment with political trends in Ceylon, among other factors, led him to cut his roots and emigrate to Britain in 1962.

M W Roberts 25 Jan 1968 Michael W. Roberts

In spite of having some distinction in a Greats degree and at cricket, I failed in my efforts to find employment as a school master in the U.K., probably because of a colour bar in the teaching ranks of public schools.

I nurse no grudge as I found room in the colonial service. So, in November 1902 (at the age of 21) I reached Ceylon. At the Secretariat, I was told I was likely to be posted to Kandy, the second best station. Next day, that was altered to Matara. Ceylon folk informed me that the Colonial Secretary made that change because he found my complexion to be brown and because it was settled practice to give the better stations to civil servants of pure English descent, but I have not discovered if that was true. During the whole of my 30 years' service I met with a fair deal from the Government and a kindly friendship from almost all my British fellow officers, with one qualification; to wit, civil servants of brown complexion were not appointed to substantive administrative posts: Government cherished a belief that pure Britishers had more talent in that sphere. In respect of judicial jobs, there was a fair field and no favour.

As office assistant at Matara, my day's work was as follows:

The first half an hour or one hour was spent opening and answering correspondence, mostly detail on facts, about thirty letters a day, mostly answerable at once, but a few demanding reports on complaints and one or two on policy in its local

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application: when a report was needed one had to consult files and gather the history of each matter and collect new information from Chief Headmen that involved further letter writing and took another half an hour or two. The second half an hour or hour went to checking accounts and classification of the previous day's payments and receipts of public money and private deposits for some public service. The next task was reading petitions presented in person, some forty a day. These concerned a countless number of personal problems - some about errant wives and children, some about misdeeds by headmen and land encroachments by neighbours. Two-thirds of these concerned conflicts which could only be settled in Court; they were efforts to get a settlement cheap through the influence of village headmen.

One tended to be impatient with this last type of petition and to decline to interfere; this as a lesson to the petitioner in self reliance. But sometimes inaction bred rows and bloodshed, and many of us referred such applications to headmen with a faint hope that his influence might forestall bloodshed. Almost always, such petitions came back undetermined. Nine-tenths of this part of our work was stark futility but one-tenth revealed some folly or wrong for a good aministrator to put right. For the rest of the day (9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.), one had to deal with matters of discipline since the A.G.A. was the head of a number of public departments functioning in that district of 400,000 people. Police - Local Board - Forests - Prisons - Road Committee, in charge of minor roads - Municipal affairs - Registration of births and deaths, and so on.

General problems of policy

(1) Epidemics and general health. Parangi and malaria were a permanent problem, smallpox a not infrequent event. The death rate (now 15) was then 35 per thousand per year.

Matara had its smallpox outbreak in 1903 or 1904 while I was for a year stationed in Kurunegala, and Cookson, the A.G.A. in 1903 or 1904, had vast trouble in getting the bodies of the dead removed. His labour forces firmly declined, and I learn he shamed them into doing it by lifting some with his own hands. That would have taken pluck in any one: in his case, it needed a double dose because he was constitutionally diffident and timid. A later outbreak in another of my districts, Chilaw, occurred before I went there and revealed a similar problem. There a more seasoned administrator solved it by distributing liberal doses of arrack to his underlings.

But smallpox involved even deeper difficulty: that was to

organise a rounding up of contacts, and sometimes months of effort were needed to trace and isolate them in the teeth of fear and the obstructions of purdah.

Government agents used to expect their subordinate headmen to trace all sorts of absconding offenders. Some administrators overdid that part of their job. I call to mind one village headman whom my first chief suspended from office for over two years on a threat to dismiss him if he failed to catch two absconders who, in fact, had migrated to a hill station a hundred and fifty miles distant, where that poor headman had no authority. You may hasten to write that chief of mine off as a wanton bully: but you would be wrong. He was stark stubborn but also a good-hearted Irishman. Somehow, he had persuaded himself that this village headman had had a bribe to let them escape. His inklings along that line not infrequently proved to be sound. He caught one in the end.

(2) Appointments and dismissals and control of minor headmen, along with recommendations about appointments of chief headmen, were the most vital part of an administrator's work.

The village headman was the centre of villagers' lives at all points of the compass. If a man was the victim of a crime, he must get the headman at once (i) to arrest the criminal if it was a cognizable offence, and (ii) to examine the witnesses, record their statements and issue a report to Court. Practically no one went to Court without getting such a report, and few got such reports without paying a fee. Even the good headman expected a fee since it involved him in labour and sometimes in danger. A complainant who rushed off to Court without a report would find difficulty in getting his witnesses to give evidence, or even to go to Court. Going to Court would involve several days' long and costly journeys, days without pay at costs which most villagers could not afford to meet. Paupers could seldom maintain their complaints. Complainants had to be ready to meet the costs of journeys, not only their own but all their witnesses'.

The headman was also a _sine qua non_ in most branches of agriculture. Paddy cannot be grown unless the fields are first fenced to keep cattle out. No one fences his own field only. They have to avoid that expense by fencing the whole tract, often fifty or two hundred acres in extent. To fence one section is pointless. All the owners must be got together and fences raised in synchrony. That was arranged by the headmen.

The good headman did all this cheap, in return for simple gifts. The bad headman would insist on black market exactions first - e.g. for granting a report: if his demand was rejected, he would issue a report discrediting the complaint.

To control them was the first job of every administrator. Hence arose the flood of petitions. The hallmark of the good administrator was the ability quickly to sort out the false from the true petition: I read lots of their diaries, going 50 years back The most interesting was that of Davidson, who afterwards became Governor of a Colony. A brilliant writer, but I believe he had little insight in control of the headmen. The master in that respect was Le Mesurier who made it a habit to choose out the one true petition in a hundred and hasten off that week without notice to the spot, investigate in person, and fine the headman if he found a fault. Presumably small fines, since headmen got no salary. Chief Headmen or Mudaliyars or Ratemahatmayas were appointed by the Colonial Secretary, usually on the recommendation of the Government Agent of the Province: but sometimes smart men or favoured men from other provinces got these posts. Most chief headmen began official life as clerks in the Kachcheri. They had to know English and Sinhalese up to the level of the Senior Cambridge examination, but personal vigour and capacity were equally necessary. So, according to policy, was ownership of a fair amount of landed property in the district where he was to function. A man without such property would seldom command respect. Social influence was the second basic qualification. Similarly, for a minor headmanship ownership of land was one of the requirements, but here too the policy proposed was not always the policy followed. Government Agents and sometimes the Colonial Secretary might have their pets and push them on.

In many areas, it was also an almost necessary qualification to be of the Goigama caste. In Matara in 1903 4 out of 5 Mudaliyars were Goigama. Exceptions were sometimes made for parts (?) where some other caste made up the bulk of the population. Balapitiya, for example, had a population most of it Salagama by caste; and many of the Rajapakses and the Zoysas held office there. At no period in those years did I encounter a Mudaliyar or Ratemahatmaya of the dhobi caste.

There was up to 1907 no police force stationed outside the capital town in each district, and in each such capital the total number of policemen seldom exceeded 50.

Therefore nine-tenths of police work fell on the shoulders of the unpaid village headmen, directed by the grossly underpaid Mudaliyars whose salary was 80 rupees a month and whose duties included lots of travelling that forced each to keep a horse and trap.

The Mudaliyar could never make ends meet save by taking gifts. No one ever dreamt of approaching a Mudaliyar without a gift. The good Mudaliyar was content to act on the strength of a modest

gift which the petitioner could afford. The bad Mudaliyar was the man who declined to act until he received an exorbitant pourboire.

Some write off the Mudaliyar regime as a crushing burden on the people. Some Mudaliyars were that. I had one friend, a Magistrate who in youth had been a Mudaliyar. As Magistrate, his pay was about 600/- a month, and he frankly told me that he was better off financially when he was Mudaliyar on 80/-. But that was because his costs of rent in town, of high school for his four children, of lunches and dinners and clubs to keep up his status as Magistrate had raised his cost of living five times and more. I doubt whether the exactions of an average Mudaliyar exceeded Rs. 20 per month, which was surely not an overpayment for the work they had to do.

Some doubtless grew to be very rich, but that was usually by dint of lucky investment or planting rubber: most of them, whom I have known in their retirement, have accumulated no more than 50 or 100 acres of planted land.

In spite of their being an unpaid job, village headmanships were in great demand; applicants were many, and many were eager to pay 100/- to 500/- as a bribe to secure the job - 100/- for the small divisions, 500/- for the very big. Occasionally, my chief in Matara, being known as a rake, used to have an applicant offer his daughter for a concubine. People believed the Government Agent to be guided by his Kachcheri Mudaliyar, and freely paid their bribes to this Mudaliyar. In later years, Government has begun to pay headmen a salary, but one is not sure that this has made them honest. The habits of a few hundred years seem to have become second nature.

(3) The second big task in administrative life was concerned with land that belonged to the Crown. All forest and uncultivated land was presumed, under the Statute Law, to belong to the Crown unless a claimant could prove title from a sannas or by thirty years' prescriptive possession.

Such land fell into one of two classes: (i) It might be land useful, or capable of becoming useful, as forest - i.e. to supply timber, the basic half of house building and of railroad lines. (ii) The timber might be so scattered or the soil so swampy or arid as to be useless as forest. For afforestation, large blocks are essential. Scattered acres will not serve.

So, the policy of Government was to protect class (i) from encroachment. This involved a stream of prosecutions or of small fines giving immunity from prosecution.

Many critics considered this to be oppression. Some described

it as robbery of private titles. This last description is a libel, and in later years I have had this driven home to my mind by close acquaintance with the early origin of titles to many plantations which came before me as subjects of litigation. Excepting properties in and near the bigger towns, few of the present possessors of these plantations were able to prove possession earlier than twenty or thirty years ago: but, if those lands had been the property of private persons, and possessed by them sixty or seventy years ago, there would surely be some documents, a sale of a share or a lease or a mortgage, proving possession. Since there were no such documents, it is a reasonable conclusion that these were then jungle possessed by no one, owned by the Crown, and in later years gradually encroached on and appropriated.

In 1904, in Kurunegala, I had to inspect a typical encroachment of that sort. The Chief Headman reported that Mr. Jacob De Mel of Moratuwa, a wealthy capitalist, had planted a few acres of jungle, believed to be Crown land, and was claiming title to 120 acres surrounding that plantation.

I travelled there, some 50 miles by bullock cart, and found about twenty acres planted with coconut trees about two years old, in the middle of a hundred odd acres of jungle. Mr. De Mel's agent produced a few deeds by which the Bowatte Arachchi and some others had sold him some thirty acres of land of the same name, for Rs. 1/50 per acres. The Bowatte Arachchi told me that he had received 25/- consideration plus a promise to rebuild his house, which had been burnt down. There were no earlier documents. The other vendors were not to be found. Plainly, the claim of title was hollow. But it seemed better for Mr. De Mel to carry on his plantation and give employment to the ill-nourished villagers whom I met there, and I suggested settling the claim by selling it to Mr. De Mel. He readily paid Government 20/- an acre for that block, and also for another block of a hundred odd acres which I unearthed (similarly for the most part unplanted) which the Chief Headman had not reported.

It is just that type of fictitious claim of ownership which the Government has been abused for failing to admit.

Re the different type of land, the scattered small blocks on which humble villagers squatted, the Government stood firm. Some squatters were allowed to continue occupation on payment of a rupee or half a rupee rent per year, but most were prosecuted. The idea was that their plantations were only catch crops, which did them little or no good and diverted their labour from growing paddy, their best food. The land must be kept for buyers ready to plant it with coconut or paddy.

That was a blunder. Many of those villagers had no money and

could not undertake the hard and expensive business of asweddumization or coconut plantation. Therefore, they could not grow coconuts or paddy. Therefore, it would have been better for them to grow kurakkan, or Indian corn, or cassava than grow nothing.

In those same years, Canada was advertising offers of 150 acres of land free to any settler.

It is a pity that the Canadian outlook had not reached Ceylon. But even if it had, one doubts whether many would have made much of it in the way of permanent plantation: few Ceylonese villagers had savings enough.

For those, who had a little put by, the Government kept a pathway open. Any one disposed to exploit a plot of Crown land could deposit asmall fee of 1/50 or 2/50 for a survey and ask the Kachcheri to put up the desired block for sale. The Kachcheris readily acceded to such applications and used to hold sales of land almost every month. Buyers would have to face competition at such sales, but prices never went high.

At another point, however, the Government policy fell far short. They proclaimed vast areas of forest as reserve, but failed to build roads through them. The rich timber in those reserves often remained unexploited. In other areas, the good timber was felled and removed but no re-afforestation followed because Government would not vote the money. It had no money to spare, and deficit financing was then considered to be a cardinal sin.

(4) Another branch of public administration was education; that was controlled by the Education Department. It continually pressed for more schools, and more schools came up, but slowly.

In the matter of one aspect of education, Matara district happened to be a pioneer. Some enterprising A.G.A. had had a Village Tribunal rule passed, among other rules, which made it an offence for a parent to fail to send his children to school if he lived within two miles of a school. I remember an occasional flock of prosecutions under that rule, ending in fines of 1/-.

(5) With religion, the public services had little or nothing to do. Their attitude was one of earnest neutrality. Nearly half the civil servants of my acquaintance were either agnostic or anyhow non church-goers, and certainly the Government made it a point and a boast to keep things even. Doubtless there were a few exceptions. One Government Agent at Kurunegala, Sharp, was a notable proselytizer, who was believed to give Christians a preference when he made an appointment. There resulted in that town a bevy of converts, regularly known as Sharp Christians.

But I have heard no whisper of another such.

What one had to do about religion was to take precautions to avoid breaches of the peace, where licenses were issued for processions and for beating of tom-toms in such. If these were beaten in proximity to a church or temple at the time of service, blows and riots might follow.

(6) Irrigation. This was one of the main planks in Government policy. (7) The other was road and railroad and bridge building. No bridges seem to have existed in Ceylon before the British. New roads to open up new plantations and give employment was one of the things most prized and pushed by administrators. Here, too, shortage of money blocked and delayed progress. It is these roads and bridges which have helped capital to expand plantations and feed Ceylon by giving wide employment. But Government was more ready to vote money for irrigation than for most things: that was felt to be the best way to help the poor. A great many schemes were planned. Some went through. Some, after going through, failed to have much effect, because few carried through and kept up the spade work of having the channels open.

I had (as Office Assistant, Kurunegala) to deal with the tail end of a brilliant and ambitious scheme of irrigation for Kurunegala district, planned by Fisher, a former Government Agent, brother of Admiral Jackie Fisher. He had a rule incorporated in the Village Tribunal regulations of that district, by which every inhabitant was made liable to do two days' work on irrigation per year or pay fifty cents, i.e. half a rupee, as tax. With the money and labour so made available, he set out to construct nearly a thousand small tanks to store water and protect crops against drought. Many of these had been built. A few were being built when I was there. But to be a final success and serve two crops a year, these would, many of them, have to connect with the main channels of the big Deduru Oya scheme, then under construction by the Irrigation Department. I remember much friction between the Kachcheri and that department, but regret I do not know the later history of the scheme. Partly, I think it failed.

Critics blame the Colonial Government for the failure of economic and cultural growth in Ceylon. Certainly, much was left undone. Partly, there was little money to spare. Later years brought a rubber and a coconut boom which have enabled recent cabinets to raise loans fifty times larger than was possible in the Crown Colony times. Partly, it was due to the then current obsession that new financial moves should and must be left to private enterprise.

Those two factors made progress slow. But there was progess.

Government year by year built more schools. Many of these were provided with School gardens to give the young a start towards aptitude for _la petite culture_. Money was voted for research on tea and paddy and coconut. A few scholarships were organized to elevate some of the brighter boys and girls from vernacular to higher education. Increasingly, more Crown land was surveyed and thrown open to buyers to develop. More and better roads and bridges were built.

There remained a sad absence of activity in other fields, in which since independence Ceylon has gone faster ahead.

One blank was in the matter of Poor Law. Government voted annual sums for each province, which Government Agents distributed in pensions of 10/- or 5/- a month to paupers. But the total vote for this was almost shamefully small. This had extenuation, which some considered justification, in two facts:

(i) In the East, there are hordes of professional beggars. It would be folly to multiply these.

(ii) Family feeling is strong in Ceylon. Nine paupers out of ten find shelter and food from kinsmen, and many own a share in the family house and gardens.

Another such is cheapening of finance. Crown Colony Government took no direct action to provide agriculture and industry with cheap money. France and Barbados had done that sixty years ago.

True, the entry of British capital into Ceylon made finance thrice easier for industry than before, since foreign banks and insurance companies freely lent money at 6 to 10 per cent interest, when Eastern capital would have insisted on 16 to 25 per cent. But that grew of itself - Government did nothing to promote it. Recent Governments have done much. On the other hand, Crown Colony Government did excellent work in Ceylon to promote public health. They set to function and kept in function a network of hospitals along the coast and in the more populous areas inside, so that all needy folk had free hospital treatment available within twenty miles of their homes. That is something which few other countries had and which many countries still do not enjoy.

The old Government also initiated steps to wipe out malaria, which have slowly grown to be effective as world knowledge of the habits of the anopheles mosquito grew. The elimination of that pest is the main cause of the recent acceleration in the growth of the population and of unemployment.

People lay the blame for the present incapacity to solve unemployment on the old Government, but the cause lies deeper. That Government faced no such problem because from 1908 to the

'thirties and 'forties the expansion of tea, coconuts and especially rubber absorbed the growing numbers of work people.

What the Government omitted, and may rightly be blamed for, is a thing which, till 1960, the cabinets after independence also omitted. They had only one Training College to give would-be workers a start and a chance of acquiring aptitude in handicrafts and mechanics. No country can employ all its population in agriculture.

One illustration occurs to me. I have asked British engineers in Ceylon why almost all the bridges are built and are being built of steel, when stone is available and comparatively cheap and would last longer, perhaps twice as long. They replied that masons are hard to find. Certainly, I have had difficulty in finding a good carpenter in my own provincial capital.

Perhaps the best thing done by the Colonial Government in Ceylon, next to their roads, bridges and schools and system of law, is the heavy blow which it dealt out to caste. That is not dead, but it is no longer the master idea.

Before the impact of the West, the mind of the East was ruled by superstition and prejudice. It placed and judged a man not by his personal quality, but by his caste or his race or his class, that set up a multitude of bars - a colossal apartheid. Those bars are not dead but they have lost half their vicious vitality. That is the work of British influence. Neither the Government nor its servants paid any decisive heed to those bars.

Justice and Judicial Life

After two years' tutelage in administration, I had passed the Service examination in law and became a Magistrate and subsequently a District Judge, and sat on the bench till 1916.

You will wish to know whether the British achieved justice. Certainly, they brought to Ceylon something it had never before known and something which it could not then have established for itself.

It made men equal before the law. It protected them against arbitrary arrest. But were the resultant verdicts just?

Doubtless, raw magistrates often botched procedure and were sometimes deceived by lies. They have now been replaced by men recruited from the practising bar. I have been surprised to discover that the new lawyers on the bench are not considered better than the former judges: and that is the view of most lawyers in present practice.

I feel about both sets of judges that mistakes occur. Probably one verdict in ten is wrong. I have had inside knowledge of three

or four cases in which my colleagues gave a wrong verdict. But some blunders are inevitable. Mendacity abounds. Cross-examination cannot always unearth the truth. Verdicts are based on a calculation of what is probable, but the probable and the true sometimes do not coincide. Oriental witnesses seldom distinguish between what they saw happen and what they think must have happened. So, they sometimes deceive both themselves and the Court. Sometimes, village witnesses are so seriously confused by quick questions and long examinations that they mix fiction with fact. Here and there, miscarriage of justice will naturally result. There is nothing better to put in place of the present law of evidence.

But I feel that more guilty folk get acquitted than need be: if admissions to Police Officers of commissioned rank were made legal evidence, many a rogue who now escapes would find himself in goal. That would stimulate more confidence about the Courts in the public mind.

There are few countries endowed with natural gifts in the measure with which Ceylon is endowed. Minerals. Soil. Rainfall. A populace with clear and quick perceptions. They have the chance to make Ceylon a great country and to do that quickly.

What obstructs their progress is lack of the will to give value for value. They need to be more honest. In the last resort, that depends on their religion. In their present religion, among the Sinhalese at least, there is a lack of backbone. There are signs of there coming to be an awakening in that field. Let us not despair.

There is a further obstacle in the blind lead of their politicians, which holds out to them a hope of happiness in stealing the handiwork of foreigners and in pushing foreigners out and keeping them out. They have nationalised mission schools without compensation. They have taken over bus transport and port haulage with long delayed and half-hearted compensation, and are doing the same to half the equipment of oil companies.

But those schools and lighters and pumps will not function of themselves. They need brain and brawn to give them continued life and efficiency.

Half the plantations owned by Ceylonese owners are slipping slowly down to decay. Its last Premier left an almost bankrupt estate of some thousands of acres in extent - gone almost bankrupt for lack of care and cultivation.

It will depend on young Ceylon to grow more tough and true than old Ceylon.

Unrecorded Information provided by T.F.C. Roberts, 23 January, 1966.

Referring to elections in the 1930's and 1940's, he said that they were "75% corruption". I said, "How? You can't bribe the whole electorate". He stated that you could bribe the big bugs and influential vote-winners. George E. De Silva's election in Kandy in 1947 (?) had been particularly corrupt and he was unseated on this point.

I inquired whether the Bus Companies had a disproportionate influence in some elections. He seemed to think that they did have a great influence in some places. In 1947-48 the U.N.P. relied a great deal on the bus mudalalis. "In the 1930's?" I asked. In Panadure in 1936 (?) Leo Fernando supported one candidate but the Munamadu (?) Co. supported the other side.

He had a great respect for E.W. Perera, D.S. Senanayake and W.A. De Silva. Considered E.W. "thoroughly honest" and a good fellow. Possibly his honesty lost him the Panadure election in 1936. Mr. T.F.C. Roberts and others had warned him of the possibility but E.W. had been rather complacent. He was also getting on in age.

He considered Ratnayake and Nugawela not very able. Nugawela "had the knack" of getting on with people, Ratnayake less so.

He thought very poorly of Periya Sundaram.

C.W.W. Kennangara was a very hard worker but could not control his Committee.

On my query he agreed that Batuwantudawe was lazy.

He considered A.C.B. Wijeyekoon "a gentleman" indeed "too much of a gentleman".

George E. De Silva had "hundreds of ideas" - a few of which were good.

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M.W. Roberts
23.1.66

Mr. T.F.C. Roberts' Answers to Questions forwarded by M.W. Roberts,

6 September 1966.

Unfortunately my step-brother did not follow my instructions and return the airmail letter in which I sent my queries. I have therefore had to recall the gist of the questions from memory.[1]

1. I think I inquired whether D.S. Senanayake considered E.W. Perera a possible threat to his own ambition of becoming Ceylon's first Prime Minister and, therefore, (aided by John Kotelawala) put up and/or encouraged A.P. Jayasuriya to contest E.W. Perera on an anti-Christian ticket?

   Answer:

   It is possible A.P. Jayasuriya was passively supported by D.S. & J.K. but I certainly don't think D.S. was afraid of E.W. Perera.

2. I am rather at a loss here. It is possible that I inquired whether E.W. Perera was a kind of Gladstonian Liberal who scorned the idea of canvassing votes and preferred to rest on his laurels, particularly the agitation he had undertaken after the 1915 riots - work which a new generation were hardly aware of.

   Answer:

   It is true E.W. Perera's defeat was partly due to his refusal to canvas votes (a rather silly and unpractical idea but then, although E.W.P. was a doughty fighter for self Government by the Ceylonese, he really did not give much thought to people as individuals, quite unlike D.S. who, apart from being a political animal, cared about the villager and the poor workers). I think in any event E.W. Perera would have lost as A.P. Jayasooriya[sic] was a Buddhist and the constituency a Buddhist one. E.W. Perera was a spent force from the time Ceylon got partial self Government under the Donoughmore Scheme. He had done his bit in the old council and was incapable of moving with the times and, although one of the band of fighters for self government, he was an obstinate old fashioned chap just like his brother Arthur Perera advocate of Kandy.

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1. Mr. Roberts' comments were sans commas and I have taken the liberty of inserting them.

3. I inquired whether European officials showed bias in decisions involving cases between Europeans and Ceylonese, drawing a distinction between administrative and judicial bias (i.e. cases which arose before them as administrative officials as distinct from those arising while they were on the bench).

Answer:

I don't quite follow what you mean about Administrative & Judicial bias. Certainly there was, in the old days, bias in favour of European Administrators for the Europeans thought they were superior to the Ceylonese and as a general rule they were not far wrong although the Burgher Civil Servants and many of the Singhalese Civil Servants were just as capable as the Europeans. People like C.L. Wickremesinghe were just as capable as the Europeans. Judicially I don't think there was any bias. Even in the twenties there were Ceylonese Judges who were probably more capable and superior to the average European Judges and I feel quite sure the Europeans knew this, and certainly the Judges, even in the twenties, did not think they were superior. Mind you, as between Europeans and Ceylonese it was obvious that the former were more truthful, and certainly I, and I think most Ceylonese Judges, would have accepted the evidence of Europeans. This does not mean that certain of the educated Europeans[sic] were not truthful and honest. I remember D.S. appearing as a witness before me and I would not hear of any suggestion that D.S. would have spoken anything but the truth. After all he was Prime Minister and in fact the lawyers appearing for the other side accepted my view of D.S. but I can think of many other Ministers whose evidence could not have been accepted without question. You would have read about the Bracegirdle case. Ask the old boy[1] what he thought of it. There was, no doubt, colour prejudice and some bias in favour of Europeans but much of the prejudice on the part of the old Ceylonese Civil Servants was no doubt imaginary like many of the coloured Civil Servants over here in the minor positions who think there is differentiation, when in fact there is no

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1. T.W. Roberts.

discrimination.[1]

4. The question was almost certainly as follows: 'Would you know if any of the following were land speculators and land grabbers: Vanderpooten, Charles Batuwantudawe, E.A.P. Wijeyeratne, A.A. Wickremasinghe, Meedeniya Adigar?'

Answer:

Batuwantudawa was hard up until he got into power and E.A.P. Wijeyeratne was a fly boy so it was quite possible they were speculators in land. I did not know Vanderpooten but one heard it said he speculated in land. I cannot really with any certainty [tell you] whether the people you mention were speculators in land. Certainly there was a lot of land speculators and one knows certain people took advantage of inside knowledge to buy land. A.A. Wickremasinghe was a rich man and obviously got rich because of land investment. I found him most upright as a lawyer and the others in the profession, i.e. local proctors, looked up to him. One must remember that anyone who bought land in the early days would have become rich and there was nothing to prevent people like A.A. Wickremasinghe and Vanderpooten buying, or rather, investing in land out of their earnings in court.

5. I would like your appraisal of any Civil Servants you knew with particular reference to (a) their sympathy to local aspirations (b) ability and (c) willingness to act on unorthodox lines?

Answer:

I find it difficult to answer your questions about the Civil Servants you mention because I did not know most of the European Civil Servants well and I did not come across several of the Ceylonese Civil Servants. However, I can answer in a general way some of your questions. Until the late nineteen forties I was rather anti European apart from the fellow club members of the Sports Club who were for the most part managers of business firms. I did not approve of the arrogance of the European in the Mercantile and Civil Service. Of the people you mention Dad[T.W. Roberts] and I are agreed that apart from one chap, Furse Roberts, they were

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1. My brother works in the British Inland Revenue Department.

decent chaps. On the other hand Paul Peries was just as Anti-European as Furse Roberts was anti the other way. In the thirties, and certainly by the forties, the Europeans were sympathetic towards local aspirations. With regard to the others - R.Y. Daniel was rather haw-haw and liked to be noticed by the Europeans (a failing of Burghers in early days). R.Y. Daniel was not able. Balfour was quite able as were P. Sara [P. Saravanamuttu], T.D. Perera, C.L. Wickremesinghe, Poulier and V. Coomaraswamy, E. Rodrigo, but like most of the other Civil Servants, including the Europeans, inclined to be orthodox. Bickmore, if I remember aright, was very much Pro-Ceylonese. Wadia was a very capable man and quite receptive to new ideas and I think people like W.H. Moore, Rogerson, Luddington and Kaufman would have been receptive to new ideas. Prasad was a good kind man, as was Hunter, but they kept to themselves. Baruscha was inclined to be lazy and greedy and therefore would not have bothered much of anything much outside doing his work in office. Tenison was capable but inclined to take short cuts on the Bench which meant he would not have taken much trouble outside his immediate job. W.H. Moore was not very well known to me but I met him occasionally and he struck me as very conscientious. Lanktree was quite a good chap and he thought I was a donkey to retire as he felt Ceylon was nice and comfortable. Lanktree rather blotted his copy book at Trinco for he along with the other Ceylonese Civil Servants including a Singhalese D.J., used to push off after work each day to some places about 15 to 20 miles outside Trinco to avoid possible Air Raids. As a result Rennison was transferred there as A.G.A. and I was asked to go as D.J. and take charge of the Warden Service as well. (This latter as voluntary unlike chaps in Colombo who got perks and good pay for A.R.P. jobs.) Pinto, Janss and Gunewardene [D.C.R.] were not particularly bright. S.P. Wickramasinghe was bright but was too concerned with things not appertaining to the Civil Service. A.G. Ranasinghe was a good chap but quiet. The man who cared about the common man was Aluwihare who did very good work for the villager in Kegalle in carrying out D.S.'s rural schemes. One must remember that those early days were days where people did not appreciate the welfare of the common man. Even in England, although there was a dole and a 10/- a week pension for old people and of course the unions fighting for bigger pay etc., it really was not until the war years when people really began to think of a

welfare state and hence the Beveridge Report which was by a Liberal and set on foot by a Coalition Government mainly Conservative. In Ceylon, of course, there was the fight for self Government but it was the educated and upper classes who wanted this. (The village and poor folk couldn't care less at that stage.) The educated Ceylon folk wanted the plum jobs from the Europeans and did not think too much of the under-privileged. I was stationed mostly in out stations where, apart from doctors and engineers, I did not come across other Civil Servants. In Panadura I was President of the Mothers and Babies clinic as the two castes fought over the job. The M.O.H. and some fine Singhalese ladies plus the odd Singhalese man did some fine work at the clinic. I had to force the Chairman etc. of the local U.D.C. [Urban District Council] to take an interest. In fact, about the year 1936, at a general meeting I had to warn them that one day the common man would force them to do things for him if they did not pull up their socks. I ran a carnival and gave half the money to the U.D.C. to start a modern clinic centre. I got the local people interested and started an old peoples' house. While this was going on I never saw any Civil Servants showing any interest although I must admit they were stationed in Kalutara. Ossie Abeysinghe did some wonderful work for the poor mothers and babies. I used to go round with him on talks about malaria and we even spent our own money to experiment with a pregnant mother who had lost eight children at birth. (His treatment was successful and didn't the villagers talk about it.) At Kalutara, where I was stationed for a short time, the senior members of the Public Services (not the A.G.A.) had their own club and thought they were too good for the town folk.
W. Sansoni and I therefore gave a lot of support to the Town Club to set an example to the Senior Civil Servants. At Trinco I did not find the A.G.A. (European) and Senior members of the Civil Servants taking any interest in the local people. Rajasingham[1] and I had to insist on getting an adequate stock of food in reserve in case we were cut off from Colombo. We ran cooperative stores and some of us subscribed and ran these(?) clubs to stop profiteering. In fact, in the end we did most of the sale of rice (the A.G.A. got us to do this but he did not take much interest in the people). In Negombo I was President of a number of Associations and we helped the poor and collected money for an area destroyed by fire. I

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1. Could be 'Rajasinghe'.

did not notice any Civil Servants about at the time apart from one minor one. True there was no A.G.A. at Negombo but one would have thought more interest would have been taken. Certainly at a place like Trinco interest should have been taken but I had to go to Colombo and get condensed milk for the mothers of Trinco. (This I did through Oliver G. but surely this was the responsibility of the Civil Service). E. Rodrigo did some good work for, or rather with, D.S.

I am sorry I could not help you more. I did not know most of the Civil Servants you mention very well and apart from some of the Ceylonese my knowledge is a bit scanty.