

Comments on Interview with Mr. F.G.Stevens, 13.12.1965

Mr. Stevens was in the P.W.D. I was largely interested in his experience during the 1915 riots and the rest of this short interview was padding: but not altogether useless ballast.

Mr. Stevens is 80 years old; hence his memory was hazy on points. Naturally, he was slightly guarded because of the recorder but being old enough and remote from most of the personalities involved, his opinions, in my view, were frank - very much more so than, say, in Rennie's case. Rather unexpectedly, I found his appraisal of some men quite good; e.g. though he liked Stanley, he agreed that Stanley lacked drive.

M.W.Roberts

16.12.65

INTERVIEW WITH MR. F.G. STEVENS, 13th DECEMBER 1965

F.G.Stevens.

b. 31st October, 1885.

P.W.D., 1911 - 1945.

I. Just for the record may I ask when you went to Ceylon and when you retired?

S. I went to Ceylon in 1911 and I retired in 1945.

I. 45. 33 years?

S. Yes.

I. And working in the Public Works Department, did you find that the Civil Servants proper and rather snobbish and tended to stand on their dignity?

S. Well, no, I don't think so; no standing on dignity and I think that

I. I was wondering about the liaison in the field between the P.W.D. men and the G.A.'s and A.G.A.'s.

S. Oh, there was always - that was always quite friendly. Oh yes.

I. For instance, if - who was it who initiated a suggestion for a new bridge or for the repair of an old bridge? Was it the P.W.D. man or the Government Agent?

S. Oh, it was the P.W.D. Anything to do with the Public Works originated with them.

I. Couldn't the Government Agent bring forward a need for a road or for a bridge?

S. Oh, yes; Oh yes, he could bring that forward and often, of course, if they found the need they let the Government know and it was passed on to P.W.D. and we reported on the proposal and the Government decided what was to be done.

I. You reported to the D.P.W. or to the Colonial Secretary?

S. Oh, we reported to the D.P.W. Anything we do was through the D.P.W. We acted on his instructions and reported to him and he reported to, well, probably the Colonial Secretary, and he put it, of course, before the Government.

I. Do you feel that this sort of - this process rather tended to delay matters?

S. Well, of course, there was bound to be a certain amount of delay. Government routine is always inclined to

I. Yes. No. I was wondering if in certain emergencies there was an immediate need and the Government Agent had the money and it was just a small, a trifling expense, whether he could ask you to do it immediately?

S. Oh, if he had the funds available, he could inform the D.P.W. and the D.P.W. could put it in hand straight away.

I. Yes, I see.

S. There's always the question of the funds being available. Soon as funds were made available either by the Government Agent or the Government or the Colonial Secretary, we could get on with the job.

I. What were the districts you served in most?

S. Oh, I served all over the Island practically.

I. Did you feel that - I know the road system was quite good, but in the outlying areas did you feel that more minor roads would have helped the peasants in bringing things to market and so on and so forth?

S. Yes, I should certainly think it would have helped matters; as a matter of fact, the District Road Committees, they did remarkably well the minor roads of course, a bigger development would have helped matters.

I. Yes, would you comment on the working of these District Road Committees. What were their shortcomings?

S. Well ... hard to say of course, but they were largely limited by funds and of course they didn't work to the same standards as they did in the P.W.D.

I. Yes.

S. They merely did their best with limited funds to keep the existing roads going. They didn't do very much in the way of constructing new roads and the minor roads were, always, not up to same standards as the public roads, Public Works' Roads.

I. In the non-planting areas, who were the people who were on these committees?

S. In the non-planting areas? Well, it was the just the local people. Whoever was

I. Headmen?

S. Er ... no, there weren't It was generally some, mostly officials of some sort.

I. Yes, I see. And did you use village labour at all, did the District Roads Committees use village labour?

S. Oh, yes, oh yes, we used village labour quite a lot but, of course, the main work was done by the Tamils, the

I. Coolies?

S. ... the Coolies from South India. We always found that they were more suited for our work than whereas (?) the local labour.

I. More suited in what way?

S. Well, they were more on the job. You see, the local people, they'd come when they felt like it and they wouldn't ..., but if you had your regular gangs of coolies, Tamil coolies, they ... they were on the job all the time.

I. Where did they live when they were working on these roads? I mean this was not

S. Oh, we had 'lines' for them.

I. Did you have to see to the sanitary conditions of the 'lines', too?

S. Oh yes, we did our best to see that the lines were always kept in a decent state. They were

I. Was that rather difficult?

S. Well, it was to a certain extent but on the whole I think they did very well, kept them tidy, as long as the overseer in charge of them was a man who looked after them and

I. Did you feel that the overseers had a bit too much power over their men?

S. Well, yes. Well, I don't know whether they had too much power, I think they just, they ... Of course, they engaged their crews and they were dependant on them, so they, a man who wanted to be successful in his work, he had to keep his labour force contented.

I. No, I was wondering whether like the Rangany on estates invariably the gang were in debt to this overseer?

S. Oh yes.

I. They were?

S. Oh yes. Yes, as a rule they were indebted to the

I. How was it, how was it they got into debt in this manner?

S. Oh, I don't know, just ... I don't say that they were seriously in debt. When he took over a gang of coolies he probably had to pay, wherever he got the gang from he probably had to pay; how they incurred the debt originally, I don't know but it sort of passed on really I think, as far as I remember.

I. I see. If I may sort of jump to the political sphere. Where were you when these 1915 riots broke out?

S. The 1915 riots? I was in Colombo.

I. Oh, I see. Were you called on to help in suppressing them?

S. Yes, I was in the Planters Rifle Corps, you see and, well, I was called out then. As a matter of fact, I didn't have to do any

I. Shooting?

S. ... suppressing really. I did more in the way of assessing the damage after the riots. I didn't have to do much where I was. Where I was sent to was all quiet. It wasn't really necessary

I. Where was that?

S. After the riots were over, I was called on to go round with the- I don't know who it was - the Government Agent or somebody or other to assess the damage.

I. Where was it that you were sent on patrol? In Colombo itself?

S. Yes, round the Colombo neighbourhood in the outskirts.

I. Was there much confusion and rumour at that time? In your circle?

S. Yes, I suppose so. They were all - the local population, the Sinhalese, they were all rather scared, of course, and when the other people got scared ... Yes, they were, they certainly were rather in a confused state and

I. What about the Rifle Corps that you joined? Did they, did most of the people there believe that this was not merely religious but also anti-Government?

S. Oh, I don't think so. I don't think they had any idea that it was anti-Government. I think it was just they - they, the Sinhalese blamed the Moslems; the Moslems were at the bottom of it ¹. weren 't they, as far as I can remember, and They sort of blamed each other; I don't think there was any feeling against the Government.

I. Oh, I see. Now I was wondering what the European community thought it was. Didn't some planters fear that it was - that they would be attacked?

S. No, I don't think there was any fear among the planters.

I. You see I have been doing a little work on this and I know the Governor Chalmers, in his first despatch, said that it was non-political and not anti-Government, but then later a chap from the Military Headquarters, Captain or Colonel Northcote, said that it was a preconceived plan and had anti-Government implications; and later on it was the general theory among, at least, some officials and some unofficials that it was a pre-meditated rebellion and organised conspiracy?

1. I think he has got the roles reversed.

- S. I don't think so. It wasn't my impression at the time at all.
- I. Yes, I
- S. I think it was just antagonism between the two races really.
- I. Well, I've heard Freddy Bowes - he refers to it as an organised rebellion and he takes the circumstantial fact that it broke out fair ... well almost simultaneously as proof of some preconceived plan.
- S. Oh, I think it was a preconceived plan, but I don't think it was against the Government or the Europeans.
- I. Why do you think it was a preconceived plan?
- S. Well, because I would say it happened so generally all over the
- I. But couldn't - that's just circumstantial evidence.
- S. Umm?
- I. The rumour alone could have had that influence.
- S. Yes. I suppose it could. It happened so, all at the same time, I don't know whether
- I. Well, within a week, not on the same day or exactly the same
- S. No, not exactly. I suppose that I forget where exactly it started?
- I. Kandy.
- S. Kandy was it.
- I. And then it spread down the railway line a bit and around Kandy to Colombo and from there it went all over.
- S. Yes, I forget where it started, but it certainly spread very quickly. It seemed to be so quick and to be taken up as if it seemed to be organised in some way; but it may not have been, it may just have been a rumour.
- I. Did you feel that if they had been more severe at the start and quashed it at the outset by shooting in Colombo, that it would not have spread?
- S. Oh ... no, I don't think so. I think it - they seemed to be - I think it would have spread in any case.

I. You see, there was a lot - I think there were some incidents and a lot really hinged on the instructions these patrols got. Were the instructions clear?

S. Oh, I er ... the instructions were, simply, 'Put a stop to the rioting.' That was all?

I. That was all?

S. That was all. I don't think there was much else in the way of instructions; it was just, 'put a stop to the rioting and see that it didn't break out again'.

I. I see. Were you in charge of any patrols or were you under someone?

S. No, I was just an ordinary rifleman. I was under the Non-Commissioned Officer or an Officer of the party. And of course when we went round assessing afterwards, I was just the , really the technical man

I. Yes, I see.

S. ... to do the assessing on

I. The houses?

S. Whoever was in charge of the party who went around assessing - the Government Agent or Assistant Government Agent or District Judge, whoever it was - one was just there to advise and help him.

I. According to Bowes' account, he said quite often that the patrols arrived at the tail end of , you know, of a bit of rioting

S. Yes.

I. ... and couldn't do much; while they were in one spot it was breaking out somewhere else. And when they got back to headquarters, the people gingered them up and said, 'For God's sake to do something', you see, to try and stop it. Was that happening? In a sense did you feel frustrated sometimes? At not arriving at the right spot at the right time?

S. Well, I suppose there was that difficulty; that one would stop the trouble at one place and then it would break out somewhere else. I quite admit it. Well, it all happened so quickly, one couldn't be everywhere.

I. Given the orders, would you say that really, discretion rested on the N.C.O. as to whether to shoot or not?

S. Oh yes, it was - whoever was in charge of the party, it was entirely his discretion. I don't know what orders were issued with regard to that at all. I should think that it was that they were orders to fire only in case of necessity.

I. Did you go out with any Punjabis, or were you in a different group?

S. Oh, we were by ourselves. I think we had a couple of Punjabis with us when we went round assessing, just as a sort of guard for the officer in charge of the party.

I. Did you feel that - I think that Martial law was necessary myself - did you feel that it was necessary to have it for so long, three months?

S. Oh yes, I think so. We (?) never quite knew when - you see, I suppose it was the Moslems that did most of the damage ¹. and there was always a fear that the other people might retaliate. As far as I remember, I'm very hazy about it; as to what exactly did happen then.

I. Can you remember this despatch sent by Governor Anderson; on this question; he criticised some people severely, later on.

S. No, I don't.

I. This was with regard to some shootings and drum-head court-martial held in Kegalle.

S. No, I don't remember anything about it, I'm afraid.

I. Hmm. What about damage itself, when you went round assessing? Did you find many Moslem mosque's burnt?

S. Oh, yes.

I. A lot?

S. Oh, yes. There was quite a lot (?) of damage done.

I. This question of having fines on the leading Sinhalese and on the Sinhalese community, it was unpopular? Do you think it was a wise move?

1. Incorrect. It was the Sinhalese.

S. What was a wise move?

I. They had an indemnity and they fined the Sinhalese?

S. I don't - I couldn't say. My recollection of that time is too vague to express an opinion on that. I don't really remember.

I. Well, turning to another sphere, later on in the 1920's and 1930's did you find that these politicians personally criticised you - criticised you personally in Council or in the newspapers?

S. No, no, no. I never found anything of that sort all the time I was out there.

I. There was no interference with your work? Trying to

S. No, I never found any trouble at all of that sort.

I. Can you remember these - for instance the Donoughmore Commission and the changes they made?

S. No, I don't remember very much about that I'm afraid.

I. You didn't feel this change at all? The switch over from - well, you were under the British Government, more or less - the D.P.W.

[Director of Public Works] and the Colonial Secretary - but after 1931 the D.P.W. was under a Ceylonese Minister.

S. Yes. It didn't make any difference.

I. It didn't?

S. No, no difference at all.

I. Who was the Minister the State Council, in the 1930's?

S. Kotelawala.

I. Kotelawala. Did you know him?

S. Oh yes, yes.

I. And did you know if he was able to control his Committees, His ...?

S. Oh yes, he had quite a good control over his Committee I think.

He was quite a capable man. The work in our department went on quite well under him, I think. I don't remember having any difficulty at all in dealing with him. It wasn't - latterly during the war, in addition to the P.W.D. I also was doing work on salvage and that sort of thing and then I came under Bandaranaike's Ministry and he - ha, ha ...

I. Oh yes. How did you find ...?

S. ... he was much more difficult.

I. Difficult in what way?

S. Well, in finding

I. Finding fault?

S. ... criticisms of what one did. He had his own ideas and anything you may have done that didn't suit him, well he was very critical. He was much more critical than Kotelawala.

I. Sharp tongue did he?

S. Yes.

I. Did you feel that he was very rigid and dogmatic?

S. Yes, on the whole, I should say he was.

I. I think it was Mr. Davidson who felt that he had a chip on his shoulder. Did you think so?

S. Yes, I should say rather, very I don't know he struck one as a person who sort of was fighting to keep his end up, you know.

I. Was he pompous?

S. He sort of had an idea, I think, that the Europeans were down on him that sort of thing ...;

I. Oh, I see, so

S. ... that was my idea.

I. It is quite possible because he was the leader of what they called the Sinhala Maha Sabha, which was a communal body. And what about the European - I mean, the Colonial Secretary's attitude? What do you think of Sir Graeme Tyrrell?

S. Oh, he was quite a sound man, I think. I didn't have a great deal to do with him. I did meet him - I was with him for a short time in one district and I there thought he was quite a capable man.

I. Wedderburn.

S. Wedderburn; I didn't see very much of him.

I. Well, they seem to have been fairly popular with the Civil Service but I notice that Fletcher and Drayton were not very popular?

S. No. They, I don't know why, but they - I don't know. I don't think they had the strength of character of

I. of the others.

S. I don't (?) think (?) they were.

I. I thought Drayton was - well, he was Legal Secretary ... he may have had a very legalistic mind.

S. Yes, yes, he was certainly I should say; strongly (?) legalistic. I don't think he went down very well. Fletcher, just thinking back I really don't remember very much about him, but my impression was that he was rather weak.

I. Yes. Of course, after 1931 the Chief Secretaries were in a rather awkward position because they didn't have the power they had before.

S. No.

I. And I think of course. Can you remember the Bracegirdle affair?

S. Ha, ha. Only by name. I'm afraid I don't remember much about it.

I. Because Wedderburn had a clash with the Ministers on that issue you see?

S. Yes.

I. And there was friction there.

S. Yes, yes, I know there was, but I'm afraid I don't remember what happened then. Too hazy.

I. What about the Governors themselves? What did you think of Stanley and Stubbs, for instance?

S. Ah ... Stanley. Stanley, I thought, was quite a good man

I. Good in what way?

S. Well, I suppose, I think he got more down to the level of the Ceylonese (?) natives,...

I. He was sympathetic?

S. More sympathetic, that's it.

I. Why, were the others rather diehard, Clifford and Thomson and ...

S. Yes. They were rather standing on their dignity more

I. Thomson?

S. Oh, Thomson, Thomson was a good man; he was quite a sound man all round I think. I certainly liked him personally and I think he was generally quite a good Governor.

I. He was an able man of course.

S. Hmm, yes.

I. The impression I get with Stubbs is that he was rather the 'old school'.

S. Yes; oh yes, he was. He was rather cold and standoffish

I. Reticent?

S. Yes, yes reticent; and hesitant too.

I. Hesitant? Oh!

S. I think so as far as I remember.

I. I know that Governor Chalmers didn't think highly of him.

S. No.

I. He called him, 'A perfect clerk'.

S. Ha, ha. Yes, I have a suspicion he didn't get on with the politicians, and if he was rather cold that would have contributed

S. Yes.

I. Not that the politicians were easy to get on with!

S. No.

I. Caldecott managed with them, I think, more or less.

S. Pardon?

I. Caldecott.

S. Oh yes, Caldecott was alright. He got on quite well with people, I think, generally.

I. But was he trusted by the Civil Servants?

S. Well, that I couldn't say ... I couldn't say. I'd be a bit doubtful about that.

I. Well, he was in a rather awkward position in 1941 when Layton came. I suppose - well, he seemed to co-operate quite well with Layton.

S. Oh yes, I think they worked quite well together.

I. What sort of man was Layton ?

S. Oh well, of course, he was a military man, very much a military officer. I don't think he was really suitable as a governor.

I. He was rather blunt, wasn't he?

S. Yes, my impression of him, as far as I recollect

I. Well, some people say that he was the man for the hour but I suppose any military man could have done something in that period.

S. Yes.

I. And what did you think of the Public Works Department itself?

S. Well, I think it was generally quite well run but

I. Were there many Ceylonese on your staff? There was this problem arising from the 1910's, I think, or 1920's, the question of Ceylonisation?

S. Oh yes, they were steadily taking on Ceylonese

I. Did you feel that their training was adequate?

S. Ah ... well, their knowledge was adequate, but whether the training for responsibility was adequate I question. They were often found wanting in ability to take control by themselves.

I. They lacked assurance, did they?

S. They lacked assurance. The ones I had to deal with, one sort of had to keep an eye on them; you couldn't - in early days when the first ones took over one, couldn't rely on them. Their capabilities were quite good and as long as somebody was there to tell them what to do they were quite alright, but they hadn't the ability to take control really on their own.

I. Was there a tendency on their part to try and shelve responsibility?

S. Oh yes; oh yes, they avoided it if possible; absolutely. That I think has been their great difficulty in the Ceylonisation is [sic] the ability to take responsibility.

I. If I may put it another way, I am not contesting the fact but the fact [that] in other Departments too the fact that some of the

Europeans at the top - and especially the old school - rather doubted their ability to take responsibility and tended to keep an eye on things, couldn't that snowball; in a sense, react and cause this very failing which they were watching?

S. Yes. I suppose that it possibly could; they were afraid to rely on them.

I. Yes.

S. It is possible but my own experience with them was that they did their job quite well and had - I found they were rather inclined to let matters slide you know; unless they - if they were in difficulty, of course, they had to get help from somebody or other; in an emergency they wouldn't know what to do really.

I. They were not cool-headed?

S. No, well not exactly cool-headed but they were afraid to take action.

I. Hmm. That's very interesting. What did you think, personally, of the grant of universal franchise?

S. Well, my impression of that was they put too much in the hands of the agitators. The people - the Government really had got into the hands of the people who could work the villagers and those sort of people up you know. It was really - my feelings at the time were [that] the party who won were those who did the most agitating and stirred up [the people]. They [the people] weren't thinking or deciding for themselves. They just followed whoever got hold of them.

I. But as an argument for wouldn't you say that it made the Government as a whole more responsive to wider needs?

S. More responsive to what?

I. To wider - the needs of a wider public rather for a - for the middle class.

S. Yes, yes, perhaps so.

I. More social legislation?

S. Yes; yes, I dare say it had a tendency that way.

I. Besides, given the education system [existing], it has taken a very long time to educate the people in the way desired, and one can argue that the only way to teach them to swim was to push them into the water.

S. Yes. Yes, I suppose you might say that really.

I. And I certainly - now in recent years for instance [they] swung left and then swung right again. That shows some discretion.

S. Yes, that may be [sic] a certain amount of discretion but as they became more educated and they knew more about what was going on then, they could more decide for themselves but - because to start with, they [supported] anybody who caught their fancy.

I. Did you know any of the politicians apart from Sir John and Bandaranaike?

S. Oh yes, I met quite a lot of them; I can't remember them by name now

I. Did you feel that some of them were suffering from a sort of inferiority complex which made them aggressive?

S. Yes, I should say that there was quite a lot of it.

I. Did Bandaranaike have that?

S. Yes, I think he had. I think he felt he must assert himself and in doing so, of course, he was rather a difficult person to deal with.

I. What about Baron Jayatilaka?

S. I didn't - no, I don't remember anything about him.

I. N.M. Perera?

S. Well, of course, he was - he was more the agitator type.

I. Hmm. Was he difficult to get on with?

S. I never had much to do with him, but I don't think he was difficult to get on with. It was just his policy that one didn't like and I felt against the man because of that. He was definitely an agitator. A capable man no doubt. I never had much to do with him. I don't really like to express an opinion on him.

I. Who were the others; Kannangara?

S. Kannangara? No

I. Corea?

S. Corea. Corea always struck me as quite a sound man.

I. This is the chap who was Minister of Labour, etc.?

S. Hmm?

I. Was he a Minister?

S. He was a Minister. I forget what he was, but I did have something to do with him. My recollections are very vague....

I. Did you feel that some of these Ministries were working at cross-purposes? You see they didn't have a Cabinet and so there was no collective responsibility.

S. No. No, of course they - I suppose there was a certain amount of working against each other. I don't know if there was much of it. On the whole, I think they did their job very well in the various Committees.

I. How would you assess Wodeman and Collins? They were also in the Secretariat, weren't they?

S. Wodeman was very capable. He was rather unapproachable, rather unsociable, standing on his dignity, but he was quite a capable man and quite a sound man. I think he was quite good. He didn't get on with people, I think, just because of his manner. He had rather an unfortunate manner which made him seem rather standoffish but I saw quite a lot of Wodeman when I - Personally I liked him very much. There were lots of people who didn't.

I. Collins, I know was a prodigious worker.

S. Oh, yes, he was a great worker but he was more - just an office man.

I. You don't think he had the personality to be Chief Secretary or Governor?

S. No, no, I don't think he really had the personality.

I. Certainly his book is very pedestrian.

S. Hmm?

I. He has written a book which is just, you know, a pedestrian book.

S. Oh, I don't know. I haven't seen it.

I. Did you feel yourself in 1945[that] Ceylon was ready for independence?

S. Ah ... no - I think - I hardly thought they were. I think they were - they'd had quite a lot of experience but - I don't know whether it would have improved matters if it had been put off. I suppose they really ought to have been able to carry on quite well, but - of course, the whole idea when they got Independence was that everything was going to be wonderful.

I. Yes, well. I think that was so in the 1930's too. Didn't you feel that many of the Ministries were rushing into this and that and having rather sanguine expectations?

S. Yes, oh yes, that was very much inevitable and it was necessary very often to try and curb them if they - they'd always an inclination to rush off on fanciful ideas and not realise all it implied.

I. Going back a bit in time, did you know Freddy Bowes?

S. I did meet him once or twice but I didn't really know him.

I. And Clifford. What did you think of Clifford?

S. Clifford

I. I know he was a bit - he had intermittent insanity when he was Governor, but the normal Clifford?

S. I really don't remember much about Clifford. No, I don't - I couldn't really say anything about Clifford. I don't remember him very much.

I. You see, he was rather unpopular with the politicians and with the middle-class, and I was wondering if he and some of these other officials and I think - certainly some of the planters - were they were rather arrogant in their manner? Because this would have $\frac{1}{2}$... [contributed to their unpopularity].

S. Yes, I daresay that might - it might be said of that time. There was a tendency for that.

I. In the 1920's or earlier?

S. No, not earlier; - 1920's. 1920's, 1929, 1930 - no, I dare say ... - things worked remarkably smoothly I think.

I. Hmm. No, I was just thinking that from the political point of view it was not a very wise thing; because they were rubbing shoulders with the middle class and if some of the officials and unofficials were rather arrogant, it was not really wise because they were cutting the ground from under their own feet. Because you brought up people like Bandaranaike with a chip on their shoulder.

S. Yes, but I don't think there was a great deal in that way. I think a lot of them on the whole it seemed to me they got on very well with the middle class people. I don't say they were really arrogant or - there were some I suppose - some of the Civil Servants were rather inclined to be that way but on the whole as far as I remember they got on quite well with the leading Ceylonese.

I. Yes. It is not so much, the feeling I get is not so much the officials but some of the officials; some of the planters for instance used to turn people out of First Class carriages and that sort of thing rankled.

S. Oh, I don't really know. I didn't have very much to do with the planters really. I don't know very much about them. They were inclined to I suppose to think themselves

I. The High and the Mighty?

S. ... a race apart. Very much on their own. Once they got together you sort of felt you were rather out of it.

18 May 1966.

1. Would you say that the scheme of tenure worked out by Brayne and enforced by the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, however good-intentioned, was impracticable:-
 - (a) in that it required a closer vigilance than an A.G.A. or G.A. could normally give?
 - (b) in that it required more staff-officers than Government could afford?
 - (c) and, consequently, that it was very difficult to prevent default of conditions?

Answer:

This is probably true.

2. How could you, in enforcing this tenure, perceive tacit leasehold agreements and tacit (i.e. verbal) share-cropping of the lots by the owners (contrary to the conditions)? Could you rely on petitions to bring these to light?

Answer:

I do not remember any such cases.

3. Wasn't this new form of tenure very foreign to the people? Prior to this, freehold rights existed within the web of reciprocal obligations which existed in each village but the concept of individual units which the 1935 Ordinance brought into being would appear to go against traditional notions? Was the new tenure, in fact, understood?

Answer:

It certainly was. I doubt if it was understood.

4. Was it accepted? or was it unpopular? If unpopular, was it because they could not borrow money on the security of the land (as the architects deliberately intended)? But didn't unpopularity also stem from the fact that this new scheme had no roots in custom?

Answer:

I think it was accepted and was not unpopular because hardly anyone understood the conditions. I think it was generally welcomed simply as an opportunity to cultivate jungle land.

5. Was there much Crown land left for sale in Kandy and Matale Districts in the 1920's and 1930's?

Answer: Probably not.

6. Did you feel that the people of Kegalle, Kandy, etc. were better off than those (i.e. the peasantry in particular) of the Southern Province?

Answer:

No.

7. How is it that planters bought lands held on dubious title from so many local people? Did they not care to make certain of security of title?

Answer:

Very few planters and hardly any of their employers i.e. the company directors, understood the complexity of Ceylon land laws, particularly in the Kandyan Provinces.

8. Did G.A's and A.G.A's try to prevent nindagama owners from selling their land to planters etc.?

Answer:

Not to my knowledge.

9. Would you say that policy and practice in land matters was very much laissez-faire in the 1910's and 1920's? Was there any policy of trying to preserve the peasantry in their small-holdings or indeed of encouraging the proliferation of numerous peasant holdings? I know that the L.S.D. was orientated towards assisting the peasant but did G.A's and A.G.A's have instructions or policies in this regard? Was there anything positive towards saving the people from their own improvidence?

Answer:

I think the general policy in land matters was one of laissez-faire in the 1910's and 1920's, but I did not become an A.G.A. until 1928.

11. From the interview I gathered that in strict theory people were not allowed to claim chena. Now in pre British times there were some private chenas in the Kandyan Provinces though the more usual thing was usufructuary right to chenas. In the mid-nineteenth century Government recognised their right to ownership of a reasonable amount of appurtenant chena. In the face of this the twentieth century standpoint seems overstrict. I gathered that where there were claims to chena the peasants were given portions on secure title and the rest held back. But what if a chap needed the whole of his claim?

Answer:

I believe the Land Settlement Dept. often effected settlements on these lines to avoid a reference case to the District Court. But I do not remember making any such settlements as A.G.A.

12. You allude to the lack of room for village expansion in Kegalle, Kandy, etc. resulting from sales of land by nindagama owners but didn't sales of Crown land also contribute to this feature?

Answer:

They probably did, but as far as I remember no sales of Crown land took place in the Kegalle District from 1928 when I went there as A.G.A. But the Forest Dept. disposed of considerable areas under the Chena Reforestation Scheme under which planters were allowed to clear the forest, plant papaw on the land and take the profits of selling the papaw, on condition that they handed the land back to the Forest Dept. after a few years planted in jak. I don't think they paid any rent to the Forest Dept.

13. When deciding on many land cases on the Bench did you feel that you were working in the dark and that your decisions were a shot in the dark, so to speak? 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 one's way to a clear decision?

Answer:

As Commissioner of Requests I only dealt with minor land cases. I sometimes inspected the land in dispute but this was rarely of much help. As you suggest, my decisions were more or less a shot in the dark. I usually felt that the witnesses on both sides were probably lying.