**VOICE FILE NAME: COHP (Lord Hurd)**

Key:
**SO: Sue Onslow (interviewer)**
DH: Lord Hurd of Westwell (respondent)

**SO: Lord Hurd, I wondered if you might begin, please, with your recollections of the Commonwealth during your time at the United Nations in 1956. This was of course the time of the Suez Crisis and I know that within the 'old Commonwealth', opinion towards British action in Suez was enormously divided.**

DH: Yes. At New York there were regular Commonwealth meetings; I think they were useful in the sense that people turned up, or sent somebody to represent them, but they weren't thought to be hugely decisive in character. And the big issue, the drama, in my first year or so, was of course Suez. On Suez. the Australians and the New Zealanders were prepared to support us - they were still firmly attached to the British tradition and they thought therefore that it was their national duty to support the British enterprise. I vividly remember that support and the rather impatient way in which it was delivered. I mean, they wanted us to get on with it. But the rest of the Commonwealth was either ambiguous, like Canada, or hostile like Krishna Menon of India. Some of the most savage attacks on us were delivered by Krishna because he knew the British system and he could always quote somebody against us; he had no compunction about doing that, and there was no sense of solidarity as far as I could see. I do remember that all quite vividly, not because the Commonwealth as such, played a big part, although Canada and Lester Pearson did actually play a large part in originating the idea of a supervised withdrawal, and that proved a crucial element in the outcome. So Canada was the most influential of the Commonwealth countries at that time in that issue, precisely because its attitude was somewhat ambiguous. It was acceptable to all sides as an intermediary and they did a good deal of it that way.

**SO: Sir, how far would you say that by the time you joined the Foreign Affairs Section of the Conservative Research Department in 1966 that Canada remained the leading voice within the Commonwealth?**

DH: I don't know really whether that is true. I think the speed with which that particular beast has now run down hill and fallen down hill is quite marked. Canadians now I don't think would claim any particular resonance in the

Commonwealth, but they certainly did all through the Lester Pearson years, and even with Diefenbaker and so on. They still had quite a strong voice.

**SO: And of course Arnold Smith, the first Secretary General, was himself a long-standing Canadian diplomat.**

DH: Yes, yes, yes.

**SO: The Commonwealth itself had gone through an extraordinary metamorphosis by 1966, with the emergence of the Afro-Asia contingent that joined the Commonwealth post-independence, and with the creation of the Secretariat, of course, in '65. How clear are your recollections of the crisis of Rhodesian UDI for the Commonwealth, and for Britain? Did that form a large part of your work at the CRD?**

DH: No, it didn't, it didn't – at that time it didn't, we are talking about the late 50s, I left New York in 1960, and Rhodesia was not really an issue. I mean, it hovered in the background but it wasn't a crucial issue which was debated in public.

**SO: But by 1966, when you had joined the Foreign Affairs Section at the CRD, had it become more important?**

DH: Yes, I don't think that we were particularly influential at that – I don't think they were seminal years in my life. But of course as advisor to Ted Heath, one got involved mainly in issues of how the Opposition should vote. And of course the Conservative Party split three ways in December 1965 in the famous vote. So it was very difficult for Ted as a newly arrived leader to navigate, to know quite how to do that. But I wasn't really involved in that.

**SO: Do you recall what Ted Heath's views were on the Commonwealth? He has been described very much as a 'Europe' man, leading Britain into the European Economic Community in 1973. Where do you feel the Commonwealth sat in his rank of priorities?**

DH: I think the answer is 'Not very high'. I went with him to the Singapore Heads of Government conference. Out of that came, if I am right in remembering, a statement in principle which was negotiated and in a way punctured the crisis which had arisen from the British commitment to sell arms to South Africa. But it was defused in the way these things sometimes happen - by the skilful drafting of the statement which was issued at the end of the conference. I describe in my book (Douglas Hurd: *Memoirs* Little, Brown 2003), the skilful way in which old hands set themselves to drafting that document.

**SO: Yes, indeed. Did Alec Douglas-Home accompany Ted Heath on that particular trip? I know it was for heads of government and so foreign secretaries wouldn't necessarily have gone along at that particular point.**

DH: I don't know the answer to that. Home was certainly very active, but whether he was active from afar? I don't think he was there. I am thinking of the Commonwealth dinner party on board the Destroyer, which Ted hosted. In theory, it celebrated the new South East Asia Security Arrangement which

had been negotiated, but I don't think Sir Alex was there. I don't think he was there, I think that I would remember it if he was actually there. I think he was minding the shop, as far as I remember.

**SO: How important would you say is this question of hospitality around the edges of summits? Do you think in fact it is a necessary distraction from the intensity of debate or disagreement?**

DH: No, I don't think it is that. My general feeling about the Commonwealth is that it is a great big meeting place. It is a sort of fair: a medieval fair, and you wander round and you visit one booth and then another, and all the time you are actually meeting, you are learning, you are absorbing other people's ideas, but you are not in a forum where you immediately have to respond. The Commonwealth, like the UN, but in a more intimate and jokey way, provides such a useful forum.

**SO: Coming on to the modern Commonwealth, are there now too many summits? After all, Britain belongs to a considerable number of summit-holding clubs?**

DH: Yes, I think in general there are too many summits, but I wouldn't think the Commonwealth summit was the worst offender, what is the villain of chalk ups? I don't think every two years is excessive. I think the usefulness of the Commonwealth CHOGM as a forum where people get to know each other, get to understand each other is, if anything, somewhat increased with the years. To go back: I think the concept of the Commonwealth which you still come across is this concept in people's speeches as a force for united good in the world. It's not. I think that hope was destroyed between the Wars really, when Australia and Canada in particular made clear that they were involved in their own policy making and that it wasn't to be assumed that they would automatically follow us. They did follow us in the Second World War, but that, in a way, is rather a remarkable fact and in South Africa followed us in the War.

**SO: But only after a great deal of debate?**

DH: After a great deal of debate, which just shows that this was no longer a given, no longer an assumed fact; it was something that was pushed through. But anyway, the point I am making there was that scene at Chanak in 1922, when Lloyd-George wanted to support the Greeks and to use the Commonwealth; he was checked in his efforts to mobilize the Commonwealth, in an anti-Turkish action on the side of the Greeks. The Commonwealth just signalled that it wasn't available to be the Lieutenant for British foreign policy. And I think, at that time there died the idea which had ran through Joe Chamberlain's thinking and so on, that the Commonwealth was going to be a united force in support of whatever happened to be the British policy of the day. One still comes across that idea, but it is more or less dead. And the Commonwealth has developed uncertainly and not in a clear and positive direction; but it has developed its own ideas and its own thinking.

**SO: Very much so. You attended the Harare CHOGM, in 1991, with Prime Minister John Major.**

DH: Yes, yes.

**SO: So the Commonwealth was obviously, to use your wording, a "very different beast" from the old Commonwealth, the original old Dominions small club.**

DH: Absolutely, absolutely. Yes. And to answer your question about Ted, I think he was as it were, un-amused by that. His experience of the Commonwealth when he was negotiating on Europe was when he, or rather ministers other than himself, did a great tour of the Commonwealth and reported to the Cabinet on Commonwealth views and those views were, on the whole reasonably favourable for British entry. They said they understood the political arguments; they each had their own economic interests to protect but as long as Ted Heath did a good job, as far as their economic interests were concerned, they were not going to raise a general cry against British entry into the EEC. And they didn't. I mean there was no sustained argument across the Commonwealth, and the ministers reporting to the Cabinet on that tour that they had made, reported that the mood was one of sadness but accepting that life had moved on; and that the arguments that the British were putting were quite strong. But of course we had New Zealand butter and we had the other issues, we had Caribbean sugar; these specific, national interests which we wanted to see protected.

**SO: Moving on again 20 years, Sir, then to your time as Foreign Secretary: what were the attitudes towards the Commonwealth within the broader Conservative Party at that particular time?**

DH: I think there was a group within the Party which was resolutely pro-Commonwealth, but it was quite a small group. What has happened now is that group has expanded and we hear much more about the Commonwealth than we did. My own view is that this is not a permanent shift, and it will be a mistake to build too much in to it. Because the old arguments about Europe have not died, they are just dormant, going through their normal phase of mixed enthusiasm and disdain. I think one sees this quite clearly now. There is a temporary revived enthusiasm for the Commonwealth, simply because it is not Europe; but I don't, myself, think over 20 or 30 years that is a sustainable feature.

**SO: If that was the attitude within the broader Conservative Party in the 1990s and early, 2000s, at the time how far did you see a purpose and utility of the Commonwealth for British foreign policy? Or were you just simply bombarded by 'Events, dear boy. Events' in the '90s, so the Commonwealth had to be lower down the list of priorities?**

DH: I think to some extent the second thing is true. I don't think the years that I was at Number 10 were in any sense "Commonwealth Years". We had to navigate through the row in '71, but it was not –

**SO: Well of course there was the issue of South Africa for British politics, and Mrs Thatcher's particular presentation of British policy in the 1980s. But by the time you came to be Foreign Secretary and John Major, of course, was the new Conservative Prime Minister, was the**

**Commonwealth of lesser importance? Simply because it was changing yet again?**

DH: It was always there, and every now and then it came to life; under successive Secretaries General, it twitched, as it were.

**SO: I was just thinking of popular British attitudes towards the Church of England: "it's always there!"**

DH: Yes, well and it is as it were, a comforting thought. I mean, it is an institution which has just survived. "What did you do during the French Revolution?" "J'ai vecu!" "I survived!" And that is what is true of the Commonwealth. It is still alive and twitching. Twitching occasionally – well, twitching is too funereal a word. It is there, and every now and then British ministers use it as we did when we were joining Europe, we used the Commonwealth as an instrument of diplomacy, as a method of diplomacy. We needed to know what the attitudes were; we had our view, we put our view, and broadly speaking the Commonwealth went along with that. So whereas we might have expected a great sort of commotion from people like Bob Menzies and so on, in fact that didn't happen. So that was an example of the British using the Commonwealth, perfectly legitimately, as a vehicle for their own ideas.

**SO: Were you also using it as a particular vehicle for your own ideas towards South Africa and Mozambique in the early '90's. I know that you didn't go to the retreat at the 1991 Harare CHOGM because you made a trip to Mozambique and there was a discussion about Commonwealth membership and whether Mozambique should come in. Journalists were reporting at the time that Britain wasn't ultra-keen on including Mozambique.**

DH: Well, I can imagine there was a sort of feeling, "what the hell is this about?" There was no particular link with Britain; one of the tests of the Commonwealth is really in practice that there has been a link, that there is a past link with Britain. You could stretch a point as regards to Cameroon because they had been party to a British Mandate –

**SO: But only 20% of the population of modern Cameroon speak English?**

DH: Yes, well that… No, I don't remember that. I don't remember honestly a Mozambique question, but I am perfectly prepared to agree with whatever the papers say.

**SO: Perhaps it was more contentious for Mozambique than it was for Britain within the Commonwealth?**

DH: Yes.

**SO: I was struck by John Major's reflections in his autobiography that "Crisis and ruptures and arguments at CHOGMs seem to require a lot of hot air and most of the discussion is really for domestic consumption". Yet once you have had the big bust up at CHOGM, everything settles down again.**

DH: Yes, yes, I think that is true.

**SO: As far as Britain's policy towards South Africa was concerned, in the 90s: Mandela was released in February 1990, but the path between the release of Mandela and the process of transition with the National Party and negotiations with De Klerk was by no means a done deal. Those were four very, very fraught years.**

DH: Absolutely. I don't really remember how many times I went to South Africa quite quietly. I remember once Simon Jenkins, when he was the editor of the Times, rebuked me in one of his leaders for 'messing about in South Africa,' and I rang him up and said "look, we have been asked. The parties to these discussions are keen that we should get involved", and this was both true of Mandela and of De Klerk, "and so I am going simply in order to facilitate the process; and if you are in favour of the process, you can't really be against my facilitating it." And he accepted that with a grumble or two, but that was the position. I literally can't remember how many times I went there, but I was facilitating because several times the discussions between these two, De Klerk and Mandela, hovered on the brink of collapse, as you say, and we had a role. It wasn't an open role and it was partly a matter of who you could get under a British roof in Pretoria or Cape Town. They would come to an invitation from the British High Commissioner. They wouldn't have come if he hadn't had that unique position. Both Tony Reeve and Robin Renwick had a listening role but a listening role which sometimes resulted in, it might be a message from the Prime Minister, or it might be a visit from me; we were active. I was conscious all the time that we were getting stick in the Commonwealth because of our attitude and the sanctions, but I knew also what they didn't know that actually Margaret was really strongly against Apartheid and thought it was doomed; she was therefore urging that Mandela should be released, although very much against sanctions and the idea of South Africa being coerced. She was in effect saying to PW Botha, "Look, you are on to a loser".

**SO: I've seen her bombardment of letters to PW Botha on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website: Pik Botha told me that he drafted replies for PW Botha, as his English wasn't good enough. It comes through very powerfully in her correspondence - her loathing of Apartheid but constant urging for reform**.

DH: Yes, well if you could bring that out a little bit in these interviews. I mean it is simply not understood.

**SO: When I talked to him, Pik Botha was quite emphatic that if it hadn't been for Margaret Thatcher, the Eminent Persons Group in 86 'would not have got through the door'; that consistently he was arguing with PW, "We must not humiliate this lady; we have got to give her something".**

DH: Really, is that right?

**SO: Yes. His line was, 'She is a true friend of South Africa. She is an opponent of Apartheid, but she is a friend of South Africa.'**

DH: That is exactly what I am saying, and I knew that. I mean, as her Foreign Secretary, I knew that, and it was continued under John Major, but of course the world didn't understand that. They thought she was simply an ally of South Africa, and in a way that gave her a sort of standing which she wouldn't otherwise have had; she was the only person in the world really who was on friendly terms with De Klerk, and she could use that. But on the whole, she was using it all the time to say, "Look you have got to move. You have got to. This idea is not a good idea, you must let this man out."

**SO: As far as the Commonwealth is concerned, though, do you think on the South Africa issue that, as Percy Cradock put it, "she assumed the role of the villain with relish, perhaps too much relish"?**

DH: Yes, well exactly! I think that is absolutely true. She did. She didn't mind being, as it were, attacked by people who in her eyes were not qualified to attack her. She wasn't like John Major who was always leaping to get the first edition of every newspaper. She wasn't press conscious and, if people thought about that they wouldn't like that, but she didn't have to take any notice. She had a quite a robust attitude. I think Cranley [Onslow] probably supported her in that, I think he had rather similar views himself.

**SO: Yes, he did. I remember him taking me aside once, when he was Minister of State at the Foreign Office in 1982-83, and saying "Sue, Winnie Mandela is not a nice lady". That was in the early 80s when, of course, Winnie Mandela was the icon of the liberation struggle to the outside world. I'm not in any way minimising how appalling it was for her to be constantly harassed by the South African authorities when her husband was in jail, nor how lonely it was bringing up her children entirely by herself. But that quiet word from Dad was very powerful, implying he had read very different reports of the brutality around her 'football team' in Soweto.**

DH: When I and Prince Philip and the Archbishop of Canterbury - not necessarily in that order! - went to the Transfer of Power, it was really one of the most satisfactory moments of my career. It really was. We had an amazing time, and spent a good deal of time drinking, what's that South African beer? [Castle Beer?] I remember the beer. The Duke of Edinburgh wanted beer, and there was a particular kind of beer, and I was sent to go and get it, or one of my private secretaries was sent to go and get it. There was a marvellous picture taken, I don't think it survived, of the Archbishop and the Duke and whoever the High Commissioner was, all swigging beer behind this soft curtain; it was a thirsty day! But it was very, very moving when the fighter jets came overhead and Mandela said, "Now you cheer, these are your fighters now". ''These are our planes, fighter planes'', and then he made them sing both national anthems. It was an extraordinary episode.

**SO: How far, in addition to your facilitating role, had Britain also given assistance with training of the police, helped with the transition of defence forces, drawing on the British experience in Zimbabwe?**

DH: Well, quite a big contribution. I can't remember the details at all, but I do remember this was quite an important issue. I think we played quite a substantial part. But I can't remember the details.

**SO: By 1994, with South Africa's transition to black majority rule, you were emphasising very much the bi-lateral relationship of Britain/South Africa, and rather than Britain within the Commonwealth**?

DH: Yes, I guess so.

**SO: So, was the Commonwealth, in your view, sliding down the list of British priorities? After all, this is also the time of the debate about winding up funding for the Commonwealth Institute in London, the discussion about funding toward the Commonwealth Secretariat, and its developmental fund. Was there a fundamental adjustment of priorities, in terms of the Commonwealth?**

DH: Well, it's a good point, I think, the Commonwealth was institutionally expanding. But I think that is a different point from its real influence. I think it is perfectly possible to expand institutionally - I mean, we see this with the EU now. You take in new members, and you think that is fine; but actually all the time your real influence is declining. And I think probably you multiply the institutions and you produce new declarations and so on and so on, but these are not really a sign of vitality. You can be having a withering away process at the same time.

**SO: So people could be bound up in process, driven by a liberal internationalist agenda, but this was dramatically different to realist pragmatic politics that addresses results?**

DH: Yes, there is a gap. Yes, absolutely.

**SO: I appreciate how busy you were as Foreign Secretary in the 1990s with the Reunification of Germany, the First Gulf War, the war in former Yugoslavia. Did you have active contact as Foreign Secretary with the Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka Anyaoku, or was that something that operated lower down within the Foreign Office?**

DH: I had a relationship [with Chief Emeka]. I saw him, but quite often I saw him socially because he was a sociable sort of person. It wouldn't have occurred to me in, let's say, the correspondence of the Government of South Africa to use him as the channel. He wasn't the channel. I was in direct touch, I was in touch directly with Pik Botha and so I didn't need the Commonwealth to act as an intermediary. Was it actually active during that time?

**SO: Well, the Secretariat likes to think so!**

DH: Yes, well exactly.

**SO: As far as Chief Emeka is concerned, that decade was part of his re-organisation and regeneration of the Commonwealth, to emphasise its role as a values organisation with the Harare Declaration of 1991, underpinning democracy and human rights. When I made reference, before I started recording, to your speech at the English Speaking Union, you had spelled out your attitude of the Commonwealth playing an inter-governmental supporting role to the necessary business of**

**foreign policy of governments, whereas Emeka seemed to have an idea of its global humanitarian agenda, supporting election monitoring, emphasising increasing debt forgiveness, and environmental issues.**

DH: Yes. Well, it is a difference of viewpoint. I mean, it depends upon the angle from which you are speaking; if you are speaking as the Chief of the organisation, obviously you try and exhort its importance and there is nothing wrong with that; but you are actually only one, and not necessarily the most important, of a series of players. Sonny Ramphal, I think it was before my time, but he boasted too much.

**SO: He was in his last year as Secretary General, when you became Foreign Secretary. Chief Emeka became Secretary General in 1990…**

DH: But Ramphal was what I would call, in the nicest possible way, 'a loud mouth'. He talked a lot. He blew his own trumpet anywhere he could and in a way I think that reduced the total of good that he did. But he was succeeded by people who were not loud mouths and they were people who you could take aside and talk to with confidence and so on, and they would respect that. A lot depended on the identity of the Secretary General.

**SO: The last Commonwealth crisis, during your time as Foreign Secretary, in the build-up to the Auckland CHOGM in 1995 was of course Nigeria, and the arrest of and approaching execution of Ken Sara Wiwa, and the eight members of MOSOP of the Ogoni People. There was also the issue of France's nuclear testing in the Pacific which Australia and New Zealand were taking such exception to, because they wanted to see a nuclear free Pacific. I appreciate that you had stepped down as Foreign Secretary by the time of the Auckland meeting, but do you have any recollection of how important these Commonwealth tensions were, again, in the list of priorities?**

DH: I don't really; it doesn't swim into the middle of my consciousness really. I was aware of the issues, but I don't think I really regarded them as central. They were irritants, they were problems that needed to be solved, or at least smoothed over. Rather than actually being decisive.

**SO: Thank you, Sir, your pause there just underlines that perspective is everything. So that to the British High Commissioner down in Australia it may have seemed a huge thing because there was a bust up between Paul Keating and John Major in the approach to the Auckland CHOGM; but from your standpoint in King Charles Street, actually there were other things that were preoccupying you.**

DH: Absolutely, absolutely.

**SO: Sir, just in conclusion: is it fair to say that John Major was, when Prime Minister, 'a man of the Commonwealth'? That he emphasised the Commonwealth much more, to differentiate himself from Mrs Thatcher**?

DH: I don't think it was a deliberate differentiation. You know, he is by nature a more congenial fellow. He goes into a room and his instinct is to go round and shake everybody warmly by the hand and say he is very glad to see them.

**SO: A consummate politician!**

DH: Well exactly, but he regards that as a crucial part of politics and he is right. Whereas she waited, and she was always looking for something to disagree with, who knows! And she usually found it.

**SO: Is that perhaps why she was brusque with her relations with Geoffrey Howe - because he wouldn't disagree with her, because he was innately too courteous and polite?**

DH: Exactly, it was greatly mishandled on both sides. But that is right. It is partly a matter of characteristics. John Major is a man who is searching for the best, whoever he is dealing with. Searching for points of agreement. And that was not her style. She wanted to identify and deal with the points of disagreement.

**SO: So, for instance, John Major's announcement at Harare that Britain was prepared unilaterally to reschedule debt; his emphasis on money laundering and the need to address that - these were, in part, the reflection of John Major the politician, emphasising points of consensus?**

DH: Yes, exactly, I think that is exactly right.

**SO: Just in conclusion, how and why do you think the Commonwealth survived?**

DH: I think it is probably past the danger point. I think it is settling into the international world as a useful, but not essential component, and every now and then it can be useful. It is not going to be a threat to anybody I don't think, now. The idea of the Commonwealth as a threat which came in the days of the rows over South Africa? No one is going to say that now, and I think that, I don't think it will be exalted into being an essential component, an essential instrument, in making British foreign policy. But I think it is there, it is useful, it is a tool, it is worth keeping it, and keeping it in reasonably good shape. Keeping it serviced, as it were.

**SO: How much do you think that the particular persona and authority of office of the Queen has been an integral part of the survival of the Commonwealth?**

DH: Well, every now and then, if you are travelling with the Queen, you are brought up against the somewhat surprising fact that she is the Queen of several other realms and they are very much in her mind. And therefore in the minds of the courtiers, or the court, and this always comes as a surprise. You find yourself discussing, or somebody is discussing the constitution of Fiji, and you suddenly realise that you are in the presence of the monarch, and she is very well aware of that. So her personal influence has been substantial; this is partly a matter of hospitality, and partly a matter of her general reputation as having made in Pretoria, on her 21st birthday, that broadcast dedicating herself to the welfare of the Commonwealth. So that is a partly personal thing which won't necessarily be inherited, but the Prince of Wales, I think, equally, though in a different term of office, is equally enthusiastic. So the Queen's

presence is an important part of the Commonwealth, an important part of the Commonwealth's appeal, particularly now when the Queen as it were, rides very high, and for the fact that she is devoted to the Commonwealth and spends a lot of time on Commonwealth matters and visits; she carries people with her. There must be something in this Commonwealth because the Queen is so keen on it, and I think at the moment that is quite a factor.

**SO: Sir, thank you very much indeed.**

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