

INTRODUCTION

by Lloyd Searwar

Shridath Ramphal, a selection of whose commemorative addresses is here re-issued, has been Commonwealth Secretary-General since 1975. He was elected to a second term in 1980 and even more significantly to a third term in 1985. There is general agreement that his tenure as Secretary-General has been characterised by remarkable Commonwealth achievements in both the economic and political fields including the expansion of programmes of assistance, the concern with the problems of, and support for, small States, the resolution of conflict in Rhodesia leading to the emergence of the new State of Zimbabwe and the re-admission of Pakistan. His last months in office were to see the release of Nelson Mandela and the beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa, Namibia's independence and admission to the Commonwealth as its 50th member and, not least, the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat. He could hardly have asked for a more fulfilling finale. But while the Commonwealth Secretariat has provided him with an important platform from which he has sought to advance ideas towards the solution of rapidly evolving global problems, Ramphal has in his own right achieved an international stature as reflected in his membership of those major Commissions of Independent citizens which have been entrusted in recent years with the search for solutions to emerging planetary problems, including the Brandt Commission on International Development Issues, the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security, and the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development. More recently he has been invited by Julius Nyerere to serve on the South Commission.

He is today recognised as the English-speaking Caribbean's foremost public servant. But he is far more than just an effective international bureaucrat. He is a man of ideas whose vision has left its stamp on nearly all that he has touched including the Caribbean Regional Integration Movement; the Non-Aligned Movement; the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of Countries; and the Commonwealth.

The publication of these addresses thus provides another occasion for the study, however tentative, of his ideas and approaches to international politics. In this task we are already indebted to the earlier studies by Barbara Ward in 1979¹ and more recently by Ron Sanders in 1988.² Ward has provided a definitive analysis of the contemporary international economic order in which Ramphal has pleaded so eloquently for reform and for change. She has remarked on how his insights and approach to international change have been guided by his study of the realised history of the industrialised nation states:

The whole skewed, bleak, aggressive, cruel yet dynamic structure of early industrialism was changed over time by three main forces—the increasingly self-conscious struggle of the dispossessed majority, the gradual acceptance by the holders of power, in part through fear, in part through reason, of the need for change, together with their subsequent discovery of its advantages and, at all stages, by the insight, inventiveness and eloquence of individual men and women of vision....³

Barbara Ward is certain that Ramphal is, for our time, one of the men of vision.

Sanders, writing some nine years later, in his preface to a further selection of speeches, *Inseparable Humanity*, has shown how Ramphal's profound concern with human survival has been powerfully shaped by his nurture within a West Indian society which derives from slavery and indenture.

Sanders has chronicled Ramphal's widening concerns, as his career unfolds, from the regional integration movement in the Caribbean to the inter-regional negotiations leading to the foundation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of Countries and the conclusion of the first of the Lomé Treaties and beyond that to the global levels of the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations and the Commonwealth.

This introduction has more limited objectives than these earlier studies, namely to identify, within the context of the speeches herein reprinted, as far as possible, the elements of the vision and the methods of its translation into action as

factors which have contributed to Ramphal's effective leadership at the international level.

However, one is aware that leadership, especially within international organisations, is dependent not only on such "personality" factors but also on the interaction between the international system and the organisational context within which the vision is pursued.⁴ This study does not essay any exhaustive analysis of the systemic and organisational factors but, in passing, takes note of some of their relevant aspects. The first is that there has been significant change in the international system itself in the decade and a half during which Ramphal has been Secretary-General. Where the North, in the seventies, was characterised by expansion, outward-looking policies and some adherence to multilateralism, the eighties were marked by introversion and the collapse of multilateralism. Except for the Uruguay Round and a number of monetary and fiscal issues being negotiated within working groups in the context of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, North-South negotiations have been largely suspended. Moreover, certain developments in the global environment, namely emerging Super Power bilateralism, the development of major trading areas in the North, trends in technology which have lessened the dependence on the raw material of the South, the increasing control of the internal policy process of developing States through the assertion of conditionalities, the clear benefits which the North has derived from depressed commodity prices, all these have encouraged perceptions in the North that the future relationship with the South may require no more than "fire brigade" action to ensure that fires in the South do not cross over.

Such fundamental change in the context of North-South relations has made it more difficult for the goals to which Ramphal is committed to prevail.

Turning to the organisational base, the Commonwealth exists as the product not of treaty but of shared history and commitment to similar ideals. Its Secretariat therefore cannot play the dominant role which international bureaucracy so often affects within a treaty-established intergovernmental organisation. On the other hand, Commonwealth arrangements do provide for biennial meetings of its forty-nine Heads of Gov-

ernment, several of whom exercise powerful catalytic and shaping influence within the international community. Such Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings give undertakings and make commitments of a level and importance not duplicated by any other Summit Meetings.

Within such systemic context and organisational arrangements, a Secretary-General's chief resource in propelling action must clearly lie in the capacity to communicate his vision to Governments of Member States and to the wider international community.

In identifying the elements of that vision from the close study of the text of the speeches which follow, the author of this introduction has been significantly assisted by the use of the "Operational Code" approach to the study of political leaders.⁵ This approach is founded on the assumption that political behaviour derives in large part from the way in which the leader perceives and interprets his environment. It aims to uncover:

- (i) his philosophical beliefs about the world;
- (ii) his instrumental beliefs or working assumptions.

It has been suggested by the architect of this approach, Alexander George, that the answers to a number of philosophical and instrumental questions encompass the essence of the leader's political beliefs. In the study which follows, a modified set of questions is utilised.

However in terms of preliminary considerations there are two questions to which attention must first be given, namely:

(i) whether the Operational Code approach could be utilised in the study of political leadership where action must in practice be indirect as distinct from the case of, say, a Foreign Minister who can bring to bear directly his beliefs in action through his Government;⁶

(ii) whether the speeches herein printed are appropriate for such a study.

Regarding the first question, while it is agreed that the "Operational Code" approach is more suited to the study of political leaders who exercise direct action through their Governments,

it is considered that this technique of analysis, applied in a more limited way, can nevertheless throw light on the sources from which effective leadership derives within the constraints of international organisation.

Second, while the speeches are avowedly commemorative of a number of dominant personalities—Nkrumah, Nehru and Norman Manley—it seems clear that Ramphal identifies for commendation those personal qualities of the leaders mentioned which strike him as significant precisely because these are salient elements in his own vision and approach to implementation. In any event, much of these speeches consist of personal analysis and comments.

In the analysis which follows, the author of this introduction draws not only on the speeches themselves but on his own knowledge of Ramphal's mode of operation in other areas of action before his assumption of the office of Secretary-General. Ramphal has himself noted the importance of such earlier experience. In his preface to the earlier collection of his speeches and writings, *One World to Share*, he wrote:

Each phase of work draws on the experience of past pursuits even as it shapes the character of future endeavours. The speeches and writings herein extracted were made and done in my first four years of office as Commonwealth Secretary-General. But, in part at least, they derived from much earlier intimations of our human condition. And they were intimations that came to me from many varied sources: a father's passionate belief in the basic goodness within all men; the multi-racial ambience of my own society and its compulsions of inter-racial tolerance and harmony; the lessons of unity which the fragmented conditions of an inseparable West Indian region impressed upon me; the manifest need for a practising internationalism as the shield of a small State entering the arena of world politics; work on behalf of Latin America, and later of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, confirming that the solidarity of the weak can attenuate imbalances of power and even alter the basic premises of relationships; the faith which the highest

(though much threatened) ideals of non-alignment nourished in a world freed of dominance and obsession with power; above all, the vision which a few great men and women of our time possessed and shared of that one world which our one earth enjoys.⁷

In keeping with the Operational Code approach a number of questions are proposed to elicit Ramphal's Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs. Wherever possible, the answers to the questions proposed are given in Ramphal's own words, as indicated.

RAMPHAL'S PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS

1. What is the essential nature of the emerging world reality?

While many factors will shape the world of the 80s, none, perhaps, will play a greater formative role than the reality that we have actually begun to move from a world of dominance and power to one of growing interdependence and shared responsibility; one, therefore, in which, increasingly, global affairs will have to be decided by consensus and governed by contract. I feel that, quintessentially, the last two decades before the 21st century will confirm important limits to the power that so much of the 20th century was concerned with accumulating: limits that are already emerging. Cuba-Suez-Vietnam—were all testimony to those limitations on the ability of crude military power to determine events; and, even now, the same message echoes from the roof-top of the world in Afghanistan.

And limits to crude power are also appearing in economic relations. Mutual dependencies arising, for example, from the need for unimpeded expansion of world trade, from the prospect of mineral shortages and, more specifically, of oil depletion, are now imposing compulsion for global consensus on fundamentally new arrangements and relationships.

(‘Nkrumah and the Eighties’, *The Political Domain*, p. 120).

Our closely-knit, interlinked human society is a contemporary reality, however much the instincts of yesterday recall us to old nationalisms and summon up the adversary habits of crude sovereignty and separateness. What interdependence means in the global context is that we all need each other, in some measure: for prosperity,

for subsistence, for survival even. Our shrinking world holds no human sanctuaries. There are no shelters that insulate anyone, anywhere, from disease, from poverty, from nuclear holocaust, from environmental collapse. The rich might be able to prosper in a world from which the poor had vanished; the poor might be less poor in a world without the very rich; the West might be able to dwell in harmony if from the East there came neither torment nor threat; the East, the centrally-planned economies, might be able to accept a procrustean bed if capitalism were not there to provoke envy. The simple truth is, however, that these are wholly irrelevant scenarios; for neither rich nor poor, West nor East, have the option to go it alone—as all are finding. For better or worse, all of us must share this planet, acknowledging our mutual needs, and acknowledging too that in their fulfilment lies a mutual interest.

(‘The Black must be discharged’, p. 274)

2. *Is the Political Universe essentially one of Harmony or Conflict?*

...the truth is that this issue of sharing—sharing of power, of management, of responsibility—lies at the heart of the present stalemate between North and South. No good purpose is served by calling it other names or pretending that the contention is about other issues. Nor should we be surprised that the sharing of power, the relinquishing of privilege should occasion difficulty. Has it not always in human history? Yet the overcoming of such reluctance and resistance is the story of the enlargement of economic, social and political justice within national societies everywhere. But to understand the selfishness and even the contradictions of human nature is one thing; to acquiesce in their supremacy is quite another. We must therefore convert governments and people everywhere, but especially in the rich industrial societies, to the urgency of the need for change responsive to change itself.

(‘Nkrumah and the Eighties’, *The Economic Domain*, p. 150).

Man has stood on the moon and looked on the earth's oneness; yet centuries of preoccupation with ourselves—in family, then tribe, then nation state—still stand in the way of those holistic global perceptions and solutions that are essential to human survival.

(‘Endangered Earth’, p. 287)

3. *What is the Fundamental Character of one's political opponents?*

Let me give you just a small example of what I mean; an example of how the shadow of habitual thinking, outmoded thinking can fall between contemporary perception and action—how old attitudes despite enlightenment can frustrate progress. In 1974, the West, at the height of what it called “energy crisis”, turned down OPEC’s offer of a price regime for oil based on indexation, rejected it as rhetoric and condemned it as heresy. The ‘Chicago School’ actually predicted that the price of oil would be back to \$3.00 per barrel within the year. In effect, it was rejection of an offer of contract in this critical area of energy, a rejection that relied on old-fashioned notions of power—economic, political and military—while ignoring the reality that its dispersal had already occurred. Today the reality is not the avoidance of indexation—for it is applied unilaterally, if convulsively, by OPEC; what was missed was the chance to apply it in a consensual and well-ordered manner. Behind the lost chance was a failure of political perception....

(‘Nkrumah and the Eighties’ *The Economic Domain*, p. 149).

...race is at heart ‘otherness’—by which I mean a view of another individual which wrongly sees him or her as ‘the other’, alienated from the observer by perceived or imagined differences, without shared human qualities, and so not only unequal but also, at the worst extreme, less than human. And when the question of colour is introduced, it merely becomes a new and potent factor in distinguishing between groups of people, in identifying the types of behaviour expected of them, and in influencing perceptions.

(‘The Black must be discharged’, pp. 263-264)

4. *What are the prospects for the eventual realisation of one’s fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score?*

...global realities must in the end change our narrow national perceptions. Already it is becoming clear that the world’s major problems must be confronted in holistic rather than in narrow national terms. Few of those problems on our agenda of anxiety fit neatly within national frontiers.

(‘One World to Share’, p. 244).

We proclaim our world to be a society of free nations yet we use sovereignty as a sword not as a shield. We have a long way to go in translating our perception of the world as a global village and its people as our neighbours into moral and, above all, legal obligations

to other States and other people. Indeed, if anything, the trends are the other way. We are in danger of moving towards a more authoritarian world; one less constrained by principles and rules, one more prone to uncertainty and arbitrariness; a human society not governed by world order but ordered by the strong.

(‘Rekindling Nehru’s Internationalism’, p. 168).

We are clearly in transition from a world in which the ‘few are more than the many’ to a world that is less elitist and autocratic in its global structures; from a world governed by a small directorate of the strong to one whose future must be determined by negotiation and by consensus with the many who are weak; from a world in which we misused sovereignty as a sword to one in which we must increasingly fashion it only as a shield. We must make the transition in all these areas with swiftness because as the old premises of our global order fall away we court the danger of instability, disintegration and chaos unless we erect the new order in time. It is, alas, a danger that is upon us. The old order is passing and the new one is not yet here.

(‘Nkrumah and the Eighties’, *The Economic Domain*, pp. 150-151).

5. *What is one’s role in “moving” and “shaping” history in the desired direction?*

The moving finger of history, having written, does move on. But conjunctures of this kind help to remind us that every piece of history our actions inscribe today helps to determine the nature of tomorrow’s entry and, in so doing, to bind the present to the future and the future to the past.

(‘A Heritage of Oneness’, p. 34)

... human history is not predetermined. It is for us constantly to strive to move the course of events in desirable directions. We shall have to do so in the 80s; certainly the Third World must do so; but so also must all those of the other worlds in this one who share their hopes and see in their fulfilment implications their own future.

(‘Nkrumah and the Eighties’ *The Political Domain*, p. 119)

RAMPHAL'S INSTRUMENTAL BELIEFS

6. How much control can one have over historical development?

Ramphal's writings and his approach to action show that he profoundly believes in the role of ideas as a shaping factor in history. As he writes finely of Nkrumah, one must be "restless to invent the future". While it is not possible to identify in these speeches a single paragraph which adequately describes the role which he assigns to ideas, it is seen in his admiration for Nkrumah as "a man of ideas who believed that ideas should find physical institutional expression". It is seen also in the words which he quotes with approval from a biographer of Nehru (and which could be applied to himself):

... throughout his life [Nehru] lived and worked in the realm of ideas. Filled as he was with the qualities of imagination, perception and intuition, he used them to identify norms and trends which were taking shape in every field of human progress.

(Quoted from B.N. Panday, *Nehru* (Macmillan, London 1976), p. 438; *infra* p. 164).

Nowhere is this belief in the catalytic role of ideas more clearly seen than in the initiatives which he has taken as Commonwealth Secretary-General to appoint Groups of Experts whose main task in the various fields in which they worked was to formulate programmes of ideas. Such idea groups have advised, *inter alia*, on the implementation of the New International Economic Order and some of its main elements, North-South Negotiations, Protectionism, the World Economic Crisis, the need for a new Bretton Woods, and Ocean Management. Of particular importance were the findings and recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group on Southern Africa which commanded attention throughout the international community.

The Expert Groups can be viewed as the deliberate utilisation by Ramphal of a technique to accelerate the shaping role of ideas in at least the following ways:

(i) by formulating ideas which act as a catalyst in promoting

- consensus and policy co-ordination in the loosely knit organisation which is the Commonwealth;
- (ii) by mobilising or focussing international public opinion;
 - (iii) by supporting existing international norms or assisting in the creation of new norms.

This concern with the role of ideas as an instrument of change has given a distinctive mark to Ramphal's leadership as Secretary-General. For Ramphal, El Dorado is "always a city of the mind".

7. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?

Ramphal, despite current setbacks to multilateralism, is convinced of—

... the need in the 80s for human society to proceed on the assumption that we have entered the era that Alistair Buchan foresaw as the "era of negotiations"—an era in which the old premises of power will no longer suffice as the touchstone of human destiny. At the heart of those negotiations, whatever their form and content, will be the issue of sharing—sharing of power and responsibilities; and the question for us all in the 80s should really not be 'whether' but 'how' that sharing is to take place.

(*'Nkrumah and the Eighties'*, *The Political Domain*, pp. 120-121)

However the Third World, always his major concern, will need to put its house in order.

The Third World will need to harness all its strength for this new era; and the effort must begin at home.

Democracy, ... needs no more justification than the manifest right of all human beings to be treated as equals. It is, therefore, as imperative in the Third World as it is elsewhere. But the Third World's search for equity in global relationships imposes a further obligation on it. Third World credibility on the world stage is too often eroded by domestic imperfections. Its case for global redress is weakened when it fails to promote social justice at home and denies democracy within its national societies.

(*'Nkrumah and the Eighties'*, *The Political Domain*, p. 121).

But always there is an overarching concern with institution-building or renovation as a vehicle for the incarnation of ideas,

or as a forum within which to seek consensus or to promote the dynamic for change. Of Nehru, he writes:

It was not enough, however, to dream dreams about the future without the instruments to shape it. Nehru's institution-building within India was, of course, a monumental achievement, but it was mirrored by a comparable endeavour at the international level: without Nehru the future of the United Nations could well have been jeopardised; the Commonwealth could hardly have existed; and the Non-Aligned Movement might also not have been born.

(*'Rekindling Nehru's Internationalism'*, p. 170).

Of Nkrumah, he had earlier noted that as—

A man of ideas who believed that ideas should find physical, institutional expression, he contributed creatively to the modern Commonwealth, was a founding father of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), a vigorous champion of the United Nations and a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*'Nkrumah and the Eighties'*, *The Political Domain*, p. 112).

Speaking of Nkrumah but clearly also expressing his own belief, Ramphal asserts:

... the belief, the assurance, that organisations, and where necessary institutions, are critical to the political process whether within nations or between them for the Third World in the era of negotiations, effective unity is the mandate of the world's poor. But without organisation, real unity will be forever a mirage. Certainly, without it, that strength that is supposed to be unity itself will be forever elusive. It is time that the domestic lessons of organisation were applied by the developing countries to their global objectives.

(*'Nkrumah and the Eighties'*, *The Political Domain*, p. 122).

There is also the perception that the institution, once established, can develop a dynamic of its own, deepening consensus and widening the areas of agreement in its environment. Thus he expresses his conviction that, had the ill-fated West Indies Federation been maintained,

... the tenuous Lancaster House patchwork would have held, that the Federation would have grown stronger and faith in it firmer; that, ultimately, Manley's early vision of a strong West Indian nation would have been fulfilled

(*The Norman Manley Memorial Lecture*, p. 96).

Institution-building or renovation, never a headline-catching achievement, has loomed large in Ramphal's career. In the Caribbean, as Foreign Minister of Guyana, he had been instrumental in designing and making operational the Institutions of the fledgling Caribbean Community. At a time when the Non-Aligned Movement was in disarray, the occasion of Guyana's hosting, in 1972, of the Conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries provided Ramphal with the opportunity to carry out an overhaul of the Non-Aligned Movement's organisation, clarifying its membership and working procedures including the definition within it of the meaning of consensus as its method of decision-making. It was Ramphal who conceived the idea and took the initiative leading to the establishment of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of Countries, arguably the most effectively organised grouping of Third World countries. In keeping with this belief in the role of effective institutions, Ramphal has, in recent years, argued tirelessly the case for a Third World Secretariat.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE VISION AND THE APPROACH

What then are the elements of Ramphal's vision of world reality and his approach to effecting change within it? One can in the light of the foregoing tentative analysis identify the following elements and approaches:

- (i) there is the overarching belief that somewhat similar processes as those which led to the integration of tribe and village into a national society and to the adoption of an ethic and techniques of national solidarity are now operating at the global level;
- (ii) it is a world in which the limits of crude power are increasingly apparent. In the same way in which the crudities and power relationships of early industrial societies were transformed through wider perceptions of justice, so affairs at the global level will have to be decided increasingly by consensus and governed by contract;

- (iii) the reluctance of those who hold power to share derives not from evil nature or doctrine but from outmoded thinking and narrow perceptions. Hence, there is room for persuasion, for converting governments and people everywhere;
- (iv) however, while the emerging global reality must in the end change outmoded attitudes and ways of thinking leading to a world determined by negotiation and consensus, there is in this period of transition the danger of instability and disintegration;
- (v) to take advantage of change the Third World must put its house in order. Unity must be translated into organisation. It must promote justice at home as the failure to do this weakens its credibility;
- (vi) human history is not pre-determined;
- (vii) well-conceived ideas can play a decisive shaping role in history;
- (viii) however, to effect change, ideas must be translated into effective institutions. Institutions, once established, can develop their own dynamic;
- (ix) in effecting change, one must be ready to accept partial beginnings as these can be deepened and universalised.

It is considered that those are the central beliefs which have enabled Ramphal to exercise, in the course of his remarkable career, a shaping influence on change whether it be at regional, interregional or global levels, despite the onset of forces, especially in the eighties which have tended to reinforce inward-looking tendencies in the industrialised countries and to promote division and conflict at regional levels.

This tentative study of one aspect of Ramphal's work and personality is put forward in the hope that it may provide a pointer to deeper and more comprehensive studies by other hands.

Notes and References

1. Shridath Ramphal, *One World to Share: Selected speeches of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, 1975-9*, with an introduction by Barbara Ward (Hutchinson Benham, London, 1979).
2. Ron Sanders, *Inseparable Humanity: An Anthology of Reflections of Shridath Ramphal* (London, Hansib, 1988).
3. *One World to Share*, p. xxi
4. See J.D.B. Miller, 'Leadership in the international system of the 1980s', in (1982) 37 No. 4 *International Journal*, pp. 507-516, and 'Leadership in international organisations: systemic, organisational and personality factors' in (1987) 13 *Review of International Studies*, pp. 197-220.
5. Alexander L. George, 'The Operational Code: A neglected approach to the study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making' in (1969) 13 *International Studies Quarterly*, pp. 190-222.
6. See Ole Holsti, 'The "Operational Code" Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs' in (1970) 3 *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, pp 123-157; and David S. McLellan, 'The "Operational Code" Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: Dean Acheson's Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs' in (1971) 4 *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, pp. 52-75
7. *One World to Share*, p. xxix.