

Dudley Seers' Last Journey

Dramatis Personae

In Fiji

Manfred ('Fred') and Mary-Lou Beinefeld (IDS)
Chris Colclough (IDS)
Harold Brookfield (ANU)
Gerard Ward (ANU)
John Cameron (ODG)
Frank and Jane Ellis (ODG)
Barbara Naisovo
All with the Fiji Employment and Development
Mission

At IDS

Barbara Taylor (Dudley's secretary)
Tommy Gee (Administrative Secretary)
Bruce Claxton (Finance Officer)
Audrey Blin-Stoyle (Establishment Administrator)
Henry Lucas
Stephany Griffith-Jones
Charles Harvey
Carlos Fortin
Chris Stevens
Reg Green
Hans Singer
(Fellows)

In Washington

Jerry Meier
Syd Chernick

Elsewhere

Richard Jolly (UNICEF and IDS)
Frances Stewart (QEH)

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As Director, I was accused from time to time of not taking adequate care of one or other member of the Fellowship and my standard, inadequate response used to be 'We are not equipped to act *in statu parentis* even for . . . ' Brave Carleen O'Loughlin at Cambridge, learning she had cancer, decided that she wanted to undertake a last assignment in her beloved Caribbean even if it shortened her life, and we had a deuce of a time persuading authority that she should be allowed to do so. Dudley gave authority no such chance to object. We all thought that the cancer that had appeared after he broke his leg had been extinguished, but Dudley knew that it had left its calling card again,

and he determined to die active, sooner if need be rather than later, with his book finished and his boots on.

That is speculation after the event, but informed now as it was not then . . . which is not to say that Dudley expected to die on this particular journey — only that he knew that his time was limited and that there was a chance that he would. Should one have guessed at the time? And would it have made any difference if one had? Perhaps his departure from the Institute could have been a little less messy. When there was a lot to be prepared, Dudley would occasionally work through the night in his office and then, sometime the next day, wander down the residential wing looking for an unlocked door and, when he found one, just plonk himself down on the bed inside. On this last occasion he had the bad luck to be disturbed while asleep, and asked to leave to allow the room to be made up for the group of study fellows expected the next day. Dudley left behind a corruscating note and retired in a bad temper and a taxi to a bed and breakfast establishment in Hove. Barbara Taylor reminds me that I sent a good natured poem down after him, defending the domestic staff's action but pleading with him to come back, and Tommy and I discussed whether the time had not come to offer Dudley permanent use of one of the residential flats and, if so, on what terms (should we try charging him workpoints?) . . . And so to Gatwick.

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All members of the Fellowship are obliged to fill in Leave of Absence forms before departing on a trip and these, in those days, had to be OK-ed by the Finance Officer, the Administrative Secretary and the Director. Dudley's last Leave of Absence form is something of a classic.

There was to be five weeks in Fiji working with Fred Beinefeld on the EDF financed 'Employment and Development Mission', followed by two and a half weeks with the World Bank in Washington helping Jerry Meier edit the *Pioneers in Development* volume, then a trip to Trinidad to give a lecture commemorating the life of Eric Williams, followed by a conference in Shanghai on 'The International Economic Order'. On his way back from China, Dudley was contemplating calling in at 'Kuala Lumpur and other places' in

connection with the Imported Inflation project. In all, the journey was scheduled to last some 11 weeks, to span four continents, to involve about 40,000 miles of travel and to embrace five distinct assignments.

A bit exceptional that, even for Dudley . . . although I note that neither Bruce, nor Tommy, nor I saw reason to question the wisdom of it in the four days between the Leave of Absence form being lodged and Dudley's scheduled moment of departure.

Looking at that form again after six years, equally striking and nostalgic is Dudley's listing of the 'Professional Work' that he was involved in, and who would be looking after it in his absence. Seven items were listed. There was the Life Profiles study that would be taken care of by Henry Lucas and which resulted in a small book published by the OECD Development Centre. There was the Imported Inflation project (being financed by the Kuwait Fund) which would be looked after by Stephany Griffith-Jones, and which also resulted in a book co-edited by Stephany and Charles Harvey. There was the early planning for a conference on World Crises, which was abandoned when outside funding could not be organised (it was the sort of thing that Dudley was able to enthuse funding organisations about, while the rest of us were not). There was his continuing work for Amnesty International and the British Refugee Council, particularly on behalf of scholar refugees, that Carlos Fortin would look after. There was an idea for a project that would 'measure human rights' and a project on 'the functioning of the EEC' which were both in a very early stage of formulation, and which effectively died with Dudley except in so far as Chris Stevens' work has explored many aspects of the impact of the EEC's functioning on less developed countries. Finally there was a UNICEF project on the impact of the recession, especially on the world's children, which under Richard Jolly's guidance and helped by Hans Singer, Reg Green, Frances Stewart and others, has blossomed into one of the UN's most influential series of studies.

It is also a requirement of Fellows who travel that they should file 'Journey Reports' on their return. Dudley's were informative, philosophical, full of *obiter dicta*, inclined to be sexist and abusive of the tribe of bureaucrats, occasionally outrageous but invariably lively. Dudley's JRs were also distinctive in that he wrote them as a sort of weekly letter to Barbara, who would type them up and send them to Tommy for restricted circulation.

Thus we received four of them in the early part of March, covering the whole of Dudley's stay in Fiji, a place that he knew and loved with the added advantage of possessing a Central Planning Office that was headed by a former IDS Study Fellow. The passages which follow are lightly edited from those journey reports.

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'I will not discuss the substantive side of our work: that is for Fred, as Chief of Mission. It might be worthwhile, however, to give some casual impressions.

'One Sunday (virtually our only day off!) Chris, Frank, Jane and I, with Harold Brookfield and Gerard Ward, went up to the village of Nakorosule, (pop. c.250). This meant travelling 1½ hours by car to a landing stage, then 1 hour up-river by canoe with outboard motor.

'The day was altogether charming. We sat around for traditional Yagona ceremony (having of course brought our own gifts of Yagona and cloth). Even with the help of Harold and Gerard we must have made several social blunders, such as pointing our feet in the wrong direction — though we knew enough to drink down the whole bowl each time (like Russian vodka!), and to clap after each person had drunk. The order of drinking was decided by the hosts.

'I felt more strongly than when I have been in Fiji in the past how much the cultural patterns are like the Japanese; and like the Japanese they understandably look down on the rest of the world. But also like the Japanese they tolerate our boorish customs. For example, Jane was allowed to drink with us — even to drink before the last man was offered the bowl — which would certainly not be permitted of any Fijian women!

'After a couple of hours drinking yagona, with increasingly informal chat, we had a lunch composed entirely (apart from a tin of sardines) of village products — prawns, beef, yams, bananas, cassava, etc. Quantities lavish. Also learned about the village. At first sight its 'exports' of bananas and yagona would hardly suffice for its cash needs for kerosene, petrol, T-shirts, etc., but the difference appears to be made up by remittances. After lunch we went round the village. The temperature was a good 100°F in the shade, and the humidity well over 95 per cent. The others climbed up a hill to see the village as a whole ('mad dogs and Englishmen . . .'). I lay down in the hut for guests, with a trio of pretty young unmarried girls smiling and waving large fans to keep me cool (such a contrast to a siesta at IDS!)

'The Chief himself was a retired carpenter of the PWD. Very courteous — when I took my shirt off, he did the same. However, he told me he had to plant food — in the old days, the young would have provided a chief with food.

'Returning home — the outboard ran out of petrol (as must have been expected, because a chap with a pole was sent with us — indeed it was possibly an economy measure). Fortunately we were going downstream but a real tropical downpour started, and we made a fine sight: half-a-dozen bedraggled Europeans clutching

each other under umbrellas. Fortunately I had a flask of whisky!

'A few reflections on the extraordinary lack of anti-colonial feeling here — a flag with a Union Jack, official envelopes printed OHMS, indeed the Queen as the Queen (i.e. Paramount Chief). Complete lack of hostility, apart from a few totally isolated, USP intellectuals.'

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'Fred did a masterly job explaining the results of the first stage of the mission's work to the Prime Minister. He had just thought out (the night before) the story, which happens to be a good one and attractive to the PM — it provided him with a basic justification for not letting the villages be swamped by commercialisation: indeed it gave a coherent ideology. Fred also effectively destroyed the idea that Fiji is being overwhelmed by long-term upward trends in unemployment, urbanisation, crime, squatting, etc., and held out some hope for the 1980s.

'The PM's endorsement of the mission's work makes it hard for other Ministers to object to it, and clears the way for official backing during the final stages, especially since he said he wanted to be there when the Cabinet discussed it. The PM is impressively knowledgeable and concerned (rather like an 18th century Whig peer).

'It was pleasant that the meeting, which was quite informal, began and ended with a bowl of yagona —very civilised.'

Part 2 — Received 4 March

'Life is pretty easy for us here — apart from work (which is continuous!). The Grand Pacific Hotel is only about three minutes from the office where we work, so one can wander back and forth, no bothering about coats or ties. The heat is pretty considerable, but one can take a dip in the hotel pool at any hour — and then sit beside it on the lawn having breakfast, a curry or a gin-and-tonic. The hotel dining room is full of colonial ghosts — quiet, Fijian waiters in their kilts, a discreet sound of '30s music.

'The office is equipped with three ICL word processors — a rather interesting device, especially when a draft has to be amended. Fun to play with.'

Part 3 — Received 8 March

'As I have said previously, it is not for me to comment on substantive work, especially since Chris will be able to give an up-to-date oral report on the process of work and on certain problems in the Mission. I would only stress that it must be seen as, in general, a successful and thoroughly worthwhile exercise, not

least for what it teaches us about development options. The next hurdle, which we face with confidence, is a cabinet meeting on 9 March.

'However, there is one point I would like to make about organisation — not, I think, for the first time. An essential requirement for a mission is firm provision for administrative and secretarial support, including equipment, *under its own control*. In the last month, we have gone through two to three drafts of an interim report of close to 10,000 words and some 30 tables, with only one secretary plus at times a second of our own, reinforced by the loan of one, at times two from the CPO. The result has been that we have all spent a large part of our time typing, especially Frank and John, who have been working all day and late into the night on the CPO's word processors and printers (naturally at the cost of some tensions with CPO staff). They are now looking after standardisation of alignment, numbering, uniformity and headings, etc., and collation. Fred is often to be seen walking around with batches of paper for typing or xeroxing. Naturally nobody is quite sure who has read which draft. Morale is good and people are (mostly) reasonable, but tempers are not helped. It is frankly a nonsense to spend a couple of hundred pounds a day (including travel and subsistence) on someone typing his own drafts, when a local typist could be hired at less than 10 per cent of that.

'A team of seven preparing a report in a hurry needs a senior secretary-administrator to control the flow of paper, see that priorities and deadlines are honoured, remind people of meetings, make appointments with outsiders (there is nobody to do this), etc., etc., handle accounts, and four to five copy typists, with corresponding machinery (of course fewer are needed for the smaller long-term team). This is a *first charge* on a mission budget, not an optional extra, nor should one accept promises of government help.

'Space is also a consideration — all seven of us, plus a secretary and Barbara Naisoro (working as a research assistant), have been in a room about half the size of, say, room 120 at IDS, which makes discussions, receiving visitors, etc. pretty difficult. It is slightly embarrassing to discuss, for example, what to call the Indians (a politically very sensitive question) in front of the secretary who is an Indian.'

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'The hurricane briefly absorbed all our attention. I have never been so close to one before: the centre passed about 25 miles south of Suva, and we had winds of 100 knots or so, which are a bit scary. Fred had a tree fall onto (but not through) his house — and because of problems with electricity, telephone, etc. he moved temporarily into the Grand Pacific Hotel. With the help of a spot of whisky, I slept through the earliest

part (the sound is rather like that of a 747 flying over at a height of a couple of hundred feet). My room is on the seafront and I woke to find that water had seeped in over the floor. (Fortunately my drafts for Barbara were high above this!) Again no great damage (we work in our hotel rooms a lot) but the costs and risks are *much* too high.

'Of course in various parts of Viti Levu (and some small islands) many people have been affected much more seriously. Many squatters' shacks were completely destroyed and the rain (some 10 inches in 24 hours) has caused big floods. The main visual evidence is trees and lamp-posts down, occasionally embedded in car roofs, though it is amazing how the palms stand wind of that force. The agricultural impact will be clearer in a few days.'

Part 4 — Received 14 March

'The superficial damage caused by the hurricane has been cleared up. Main roads are open; in most towns electricity and telephones are functioning. Blockage of sewage disposal by bracken causes a somewhat unpleasant smell to hang around — perhaps health risks too. Paradoxically the first economic effect is beneficial. Hundreds of unemployed have to be hired, especially to rebuild hotels, just what we were proposing anyway, though the work may not appeal to secondary school leavers. But since the basic constraint is foreign exchange, the loss of part of the sugar crop and the forced departure of thousands of tourists (whose hotels had been destroyed or damaged) is serious, and must outweigh any relief funds and insurance payments from abroad. For a while, tourists may not be too keen to come to Fiji. Amazingly they kept arriving all week with 'package deals' at hotels that no longer existed — the Travel Agents hadn't wanted to lose their commissions. There may have been some destruction in the plantations too. And there are heavy needs for imports of equipment and furniture.

'Audrey must have been the first person in Europe to know that this coast was in the path of the hurricane. (I must have sounded insufficiently interested in her question whether we do some wangle with the East European scholarships, but I was watching the roof to see if it was going to hold.)

'Incidentally, other agencies with teams in the field rang up immediately after the hurricane had passed on, to see whether all was well and whether any special supplies were needed (they also reassured relatives). In the case of IDS it seems to be a case of 'out of sight, out of mind' (as it is over whether the facilities are adequate — I don't think any agency could defend the practice of charging a high fee for administering a project and dumping responsibility for staff, equipment, space, etc. on the Chief of Mission).'

'I begin to wonder if I'm a bird of ill omen. Anyone who lives an active life in this century must expect to encounter a number of natural and political events but the coincidence begins to look strange. I was in Bogota when Rojas Pinilla was overthrown, in Santiago during the 1962 earthquake (and in lesser ones in Lisbon and Rome), in Colombo during the insurrection (also in Malaysia and Burma during theirs), in Cairo a few hours before the six-day's war broke out, in Riyadh when the King was assassinated, in Kampala when Lule was overthrown, in an earlier hurricane in the Caribbean, not to speak of being in an aircraft that caught fire, one with its undercarriage jammed, one in which the pilot sank into a drunken stupor, and one that almost dived into the sea. What is implied for my coming visit to the West Bank? (Perhaps I should station myself at Number 10 — actually I was in Downing Street when a bomb was thrown in 1939).'

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'I took a day off and went by bus through the countryside (breeze conditioned rather than air conditioned) and a launch to Levuka, the old capital. At the 'Old Capital Inn', a single room and a cooked breakfast cost £3.50: pretty competitive with the IDS hotel, especially since the proprietor makes every effort to make people feel welcome, even treating guests to free beer. In a small place like that, the good manners and easy relations between the races are especially conspicuous. I did notice, however, that when I went up the mountain and swam in the marvellous pool there, under the waterfall, the natives slipped out one after another — a relic perhaps of the time when it was reserved for the settlers? In general the cordiality reminds me of the war, when friendship and helpfulness spread across class boundaries, despite (or because of?) material deprivation. (Welfare is almost certainly inversely related to income!')

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'One morning coming out of the government buildings at 5 am (we mostly work nights and weekends to get clear use of CPO equipment), I was invited by the watchmen to take a bowl of yagona with them. Fiji can truly claim that 'this is as the world ought to be'. Apparently ethnic differences (in this case between Fijians and Indians) can be overcome. But how permanently? Each community basically resents the other. As more than one farmer said to me, we sell our bananas (etc.) at \$5 a stem to the Indian trader, but if we buy it from him, we have to pay \$10. On the other hand, the Indians resent the fact that the colonial government reserved nearly all the land to the Fijians. I hear now of Fijian capitalists (brought in through government banks and agencies), very reminiscent of

Malaysia 15 years ago. As Fred said, 'with each glass of beer, another layer of liberalism peels off'. What gives the IDS mission some relevance is that if unemployment continues to grow, the surface cordiality could rapidly crumble.'

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'Fred did an excellent job presenting the Mission's findings to two groups of officials, very key figures of the local establishment. He has a good story to tell and tells it well. These meetings will greatly help clear the path for future work. He also did well before the Cabinet — but they had already been meeting for three hours and he'd have done even better if he'd spoken for 15 minutes rather than an hour and three quarters (which made them late for lunch and ruled out any possibility of discussion). Still, all-in-all, Fred is turning out a very powerful operator indeed — with the rare power to move easily between theoretical questions and policy issues. Mary-Lou is a great bulwark of support — indeed, to the whole mission.

'Barbara Naisoro (nee Stein) who worked as our Research Assistant, sends greetings to many. She seems to have settled in very well, though finds it embarrassing that, as senior daughter-in-law, she is not allowed to do any housework, even to cook.

'Chris (who has himself played an important part not only professionally but also in helping maintain intra-group peace) will give a full report, including the prospective shape of the last phases of the project.'

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Dudley and Chris flew out of Nadi Airport, Fiji together early in the morning of Sunday, 18 March and arrived in Los Angeles late the previous day. Chris reports that Dudley was obviously tired by the long flight, wanted to keep his troublesome leg stretched out straight, but was otherwise in good spirits and looking forward to working with Jerry on 'The Pioneers'.

When the end came, it was not — at least not directly

— the cancer that struck. The first sign of trouble occurred on the flight from Los Angeles to Washington DC, a back-ache which Dudley told Barbara he thought had been caused by a particularly violent sneeze. When he got to Concordia apartments in Washington he had difficulty in sleeping and — extraordinarily for Dudley — found difficulty in a telephone conversation with Barbara in organising his thoughts coherently. When, on the Wednesday, Dudley missed an appointment, Syd Chernick, already concerned, went to his apartment and found him confused and very ill. On being transferred to George Washington University Hospital, Dudley relapsed into a coma, the diagnosis was a kidney malfunction and his state was said to be 'very grave'. Philip Seers, Dudley's son, flew over to Washington on the Thursday, and at the Institute we started posting daily bulletins in the entrance hall. He was by now on a kidney support machine.

The notes that I spoke from at the Institute's memorial meeting summarise the progress of the last few days.

Friday: stabilised
Saturday: modest improvement
Sunday: same, but general anaesthetic
Monday: still improving
 anaesthetic withdrawn
 'did not surface'

It is sad to think that, as succeeding years go by, a smaller and smaller proportion of the Fellowship and of our study fellows will have experienced the unique vitality and turbulence that Dudley brought to life at the Institute. His long-standing colleague in arms, Hans Singer, has captured the spirit of these qualities in the tribute that he wrote for the 1984 *Annual Report*:

Somehow, one always knew when he was around; the pulse of the place seemed to beat faster. When he was away, one held one's breath in anticipation of the new ideas, new plans, new projects with which he would come back . . . Wherever he went, with whatever he wrote, in whatever setting he argued, he created an aura of excitement, of stirring things up. Never a dull moment . . .

In all their poignancy, these words seem a fitting way to end an account of Dudley's last journey.