



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of  
the National Academy of Public Administration,  
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs  
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,  
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series:

Policing

Interview no.:

S7

Interviewee: Mike McCormack

Interviewer: Daniel Scher

Date of Interview: 8 May 2009

Location: GHRA Offices  
Georgetown  
Guyana

Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice  
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA  
[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

SCHER: My name is Daniel Scher, and I'm the Associate Director of the *Innovations for Successful Societies* project, and I'm here with Mr. Mike McCormack of the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) in Georgetown, Guyana. Mr. McCormack, thanks very much for taking time out to meet with us today. Before we begin, I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about your own background and your career history and what you're doing here at GHRA.

MCCORMACK: *Okay, I came originally to Guyana in 1966 to do research for an economics degree that I was completing. I was not originally born in Guyana; I was born in the UK. After completing the work, I returned, I worked briefly here in a small research center, and from 1973 to 1976, I was Oxfam's director in the Andean region for six years based in Lima, in Peru. Towards the end of that period, I became very much involved with the human rights issues that had arisen in Chile under Augusto Pinochet from '73 on and then Argentina with the colonels and generally had become much more interested in human rights than Oxfam was at that time. So we returned to Guyana in '76 and lived here ever since and became involved with human rights, worked on a full-time basis in about 1982. I taught at the university for a while, but was fired by the then dictator, a gentleman by the name of Forbes Burnham, who defined Guyana politically and economically in a way from which we're still trying to recover.*

*But in 1979 the Guyana Human Rights Association was legally established, and I've been associated with it ever since. The association has really run the gamut of human rights activities. We did a lot of individual case-based work. The period from '64 to '92 in Guyana was politically very repressive, so for the first decade or so of our existence we functioned as a typical human rights organization in terms of individual violations related to the courts, the judicial system, freedom of expression. The press was restricted. The elections were systematically rigged, and we addressed those largely in coalition with church groups, some trade unions. They were the more vocal voices at the time.*

*From '92 onwards, when there was sign democratic improvement, it provided us with an opportunity, but also an obligation to start to address the broader issues of social and economic injustice. We did that by focusing on nondiscrimination and equality issues we devised a methodology for dealing with those issues in a way that wasn't possible for things like the right to food, or the right to health, or the right to education. Whereas focusing on equality and nondiscrimination allowed us to utilize the conventions on children, on women, on indigenous people, the UN standards on people with disabilities.*

*The methodology was really to focus on trying to create laws and policies that were more inclusive, so that these groups were less vulnerable to discriminatory influences. For a decade, we developed those policies with these sectors. The major difference that pluralism made to human rights was that it allowed domestic human rights activity to occur in a way which pre-'92 hadn't been possible. So with the domestic space you could have a dialogue with the government on issues like rights of children, rights of women and so on. So that our energies were directed towards trying to make rights-based approaches a more accepted issue. Human rights still made people nervous for quite a long time after '92. So we spent a lot of time trying to get over the image of human rights as confrontational and so on.*

*For the period of the '90s, that worked in a way. One could point to a number of issues, successes in this area. But by the end of the '90s, the racial dilemmas of*

---

*Guyana's history reasserted themselves. Politics had always been driven by race. In fact, between '92 and '97, that was about the only period when race was not being a major factor in political life and that because the then minority party, the PNC (People's National Congress) had come out of office. It had collapsed mainly under its own corruption and inefficiency rather than that it was driven from office by reinvigorating momentum from the opposition. But the opposition simply took over, an Indian-based party.*

*By '97, the Afro community reasserted itself, and this led to a number of important political developments which influenced our own position in terms of constitutional reform. They tried to address some of the anomalies. Unfortunately, some of the major issues like the constitutional commissions on rights of women and children have not been implemented. In fact, today, coincidentally, as we're doing this discussion, the first of these commissions is finally to be sworn in. But it has taken from 2001 until now to get one of them.*

*What we have found in the last decade is that we are, as a human rights organization, returning more to the kind of focus and priorities that we started with, individual case-based problems, problems of the press, problems of the courts. One constant in all of this has been police problems, brutality, extra-judicial killings. So that the changes I described in the way the human rights association has evolved, the one constant in all of that has been the problems generated by police behavior. At the same time, our relationship with the Guyana Police Force now is different. It is more constructive than it was for the first decade or more of our existence. In fact, I think from about 2003 or 2004, we have been working with the training department of the police force and we make human rights contributions to the training program.*

*We in fact made significant contributions strengthening that program in 2005 due largely to the efforts of the then commissioner of police who had a short reign in office. "Unfortunately," he was a change-oriented person, he was a human rights promoter, had a vision for the police force which did not fit with the political priorities or even the institutional problems of the police force. He didn't last. But in that short window of opportunity we did manage to produce, for incorporation with the police training department funded by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) a very substantial training program, a complete training program along with materials. We did this with the former director of the South African Police Services who had produced a similar training program for the police training services after the changes in South Africa. So that was notable.*

*We since have maintained a good relationship with the police training unit but the relationship is strained because we are having to be more vocally critical of the police behavior on the street and maintaining that requires higher levels of diplomacy than we are normally prone to exercise. That's the potted history of the GHRA. I've been associated with it throughout that period. I'm sorry, I went into a history of the GHRA rather than myself.*

SCHER: Not at all.

MCCORMACK: *During the course of this period, particularly before '92 I had been involved with Haiti and the overthrow of the dictatorship and the military regime. We made a number of visits there. The pre-(Jean-Bertrand) Aristide period. Also during Aristide's short period. I've also been involved in training in the horn of Africa in the early '90s after the overthrow of Mengistu (Haile Mariam) and some opening up in the Sudan. We were invited to do training with some of the nascent human rights organizations that were developing there in Somaliland and Sudan*

---

*and Eritrea and Ethiopia. For a couple of years, we were sort of in and out of there. It was enormously enjoyable for us and very instructive. I don't know what difference we made, but hopefully some.*

*Because of the electoral background here and the work that the GHRA did in organizing domestic monitoring, we found ourselves being invited to monitor elections in other places as well, places like Sri Lanka and one or two other places. The other members of the association, similarly for work they've done on prisons, have been invited to do some training work in other parts of the world. So we've been able to maintain a sense of what is going on in the human rights community globally, without actually traveling extensively, but having done these occasional training missions.*

*The GHRA, in the repressive period, relied a lot on solidarity from organizations like Amnesty and the Watch Committees and the World Council of Churches. The basic methodology was provide credible information to them and they ran with it internationally. Since '92, with the opening up, that hasn't been such a critical relationship. The relationship has evolved. The solidarity isn't as strong. There's no enmity, but the dynamics have changed. That's another story. But just to mention that in terms of international networking, we benefited from a range of contacts with some of the best organizations in Latin America and the US and internationally. So we feel that with all of the support and experience, we feel fairly well grounded here.*

SCHER: That's very helpful, and there are quite a few things I'd like to pick up on.

MCCORMACK: Sure.

SCHER: Firstly, I wonder if we could talk a little bit about this particular problem of extra-judicial killings.

MCCORMACK: Okay.

SCHER: It seems from my reading of newspaper reports and some of your own statements and work, particularly acute problem and something that seems quite hard to deal with. I was wondering if you could just talk about what you see as being the main issue here and sort of what needs to be done.

MCCORMACK: *The problem has evolved. We have been monitoring this issue since the mid '80s. At the time it was a question of police, usually special squads, killing suspected criminals. About '87 we actually, because of our denouncing of what was going on, received about seventeen libel suits from members of the Death Squad which is a very bizarre exercise. Also from the office of the DPP (Director of Public Prosecutions) who we, at the time I think we had criticized for their laxity and the way they dealt with it. But at the time, the nature of the problem was precisely that. What was behind it in many cases was a frustration that if they put these people before the courts, they would get off because the courts were inefficient or were slow.*

*So that rather than send them to the courts, they said they were going to send them to the cemetery. That I think explained a substantial number of the—particularly the ones where there was shooting involved. They would routinely claim they were attacked with a cutlass; it was always with a cutlass. They were attacked—in self-defense they shot the person. The other EJE's (extra-judicial executions) resulting from brutality were few and far between. That's where the corollary of the shooting was the use of excessive force in police stations to*

---

*extract confessions was leading to many cases being dismissed on the grounds that the confession was forced. They did no other investigation work to follow up the confession. So once the confession is thrown out, there's nothing else, the case gets dismissed.*

*Even the presidents at the time complained about the routine, how routine this had become. That would describe the nature of the EJEs for most of the period up to the mid-'90s, maybe even longer than that. Another cause, contributing factor over this period has been where businessmen who are frustrated at the amount of crime that is going on, affecting their businesses, with robbery in particular. They would hire policemen to find whoever did it privately rather than expect them to do it as a routine part of their job. So they'd offer them 20 or 30,000 dollars and these guys would find somebody. They'd either beat the life out of somebody, or they'd actually find whoever it was and they'd kill him. So this was a contributing factor to EJEs.*

*More recently, certainly in the last seven years or so, there have been EJEs, which are at bottom connected to drug activity. But a third one, before we get to drugs, would have been the few political killings that took place, mainly under the (Forbes) Burnham regime. Burnham never made it difficult to leave. So for the most part, they hounded the political activists to the point where the wife and family had just sort of had enough, and they could always leave. So eventually they left. Those that didn't were killed, there was no compunction about getting rid of them, but they didn't need to do it on a large scale to attract the kind of political attention, negative political attention from abroad and so on.*

*More recently, the major problem has been generated by two things: a sense of Afro exclusion economically linked to Afro involvement in drug running. But the drug trade has always been in the hands of the Indo community. The Indian businessmen run the drug mafias here. If you want you could do a faith-based analysis of it, I've often thought it might be worth doing because it is the Hindu businessmen that do the trafficking. It is Muslim cambios or currency exchange bureau that do the money laundering, and it is black elements that carry stuff through the airports and do the local street running, they're Christian. But that's an aside.*

*The deal with the government from the early '90s was clearly that this is not a Guyanese problem. If drugs are coming in and they're going to the US, that's a US problem. As long as the drugs don't stay, here the government will not do anything about that. That was the deal between the government and the leadership. The leadership of the PPP (People's Progressive Party) and the elements who were running drugs here, which were the Hindu business people. Of course there were generous donations to parties and other things, so the party benefited in that way. The deal was they wouldn't pass a money laundering bill either.*

*Despite the pressures from the World Bank and the IMF to pass a Money Laundering Bill as part of the whole restructuring package that was required after '92, because the economy was collapsing. Our economy had been nationalized to extreme lengths under this weird form of socialism that had been imposed by Burnham and the PNC. So that this started to unravel in the late '80s. There were a number of economic measures that had to be taken to get the economy back from being a basket case into something reasonable. But that law, I think last week I saw in the newspaper that it is to be fully implemented. It went—for a long time they did nothing; then eventually they passed a law which they didn't implement. Then there was more pressure from abroad; they implemented part*

---

*of it. Some of the things they never appointed, some of the committees were never set up. It is still not fully operational. So that was the basic deal under which this thing operated.*

*To give you a little understanding of why the EJE link with the drug trade. In 2002, February 2002 or February 2003, the situation within the drug world had apparently reached the stage where the Colombians were demanding money that was owed to them by whoever ran—the two or three people who ran drugs here. They'd given drugs out to all kinds of people to sell and the money hadn't come in. So these fellows, although they had their own gangs of security people who came from, largely from the police and the military. They helped engineer a jailbreak of five major criminals and they successfully got them out. What they wanted them to do was go and collect, because they knew everybody who owed and they knew how to collect.*

*They also set up shop in a village up the east coast called Buxton, at the back of Buxton. They created an outpost almost that over the next two years attracted a number of other criminal elements, and it became a major place where these, the drug people were operating out of. As a result of this, many bodies started to be found around the place. The police intervened, and there were twenty policemen killed in one year. The significance of that is that in the previous 162 years of the Guyana police force, one policeman had been killed in the course of duty. So you had twenty within a year. The police force became completely demoralized. They were incapable of dealing with this. The army would not get involved because of the politics of it. The army saw this as an Indian government doing nothing about Indian drug running, and the people who were turning up dead tended to be predominantly Afro but not exclusively Afro, but the army would not get involved.*

*At that point, the government turned to the drug barons to bring the situation under control. Killing became a minor industry, this killing for hire. All kinds of people were hiring people to get rid of other people. But the central core of this stuff was being run by the Minister of Home Affairs. They were providing lists to the drug lords of who needed to be eliminated. All of this came out in the newspapers when we got to about 2005, the place was out of hand in terms of the killings. I don't know if the government's idea was the drug people will bring this thing under control because they have the resources to do it and then we'll deal with them.*

*The miscalculation was that this took on a life of its own. Apart from what the government was doing, other people were clearly settling scores. There were many bodies found that were not all killed by the police by any means but there was a police grouping, a squad, that worked in conjunction with some elements that were drug connected who were killing and torturing these elements. It led to a commission of inquiry into EJEs, which in turn led to the forced resignation of the Minister of Home Affairs, who was then appointed to be Ambassador to India, by the way, in recognition of his services. But the thing died down. The US government by then had taken things into its own hands in terms of the drug thing and managed to effect the arrest of several of the key drug elements. The major one seemed to be some sort of sting operation in which he went down to Suriname on drug business. The Surinamese grabbed him and bringing him back here as a prisoner, he was intercepted in Trinidad by the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), who whisked him up to New York. He is to be on trial I think in November, but he has done a deal which means that a lot of what went on will not come out in court, which is a pity, because part of what went on was, as I mentioned earlier, there was a forced resignation of the commissioner of police.*

*Halfway through all of this, the new commissioner of police was appointed. He was almost eighteen months between being designated police commissioner and being allowed to take up his post because there was no political control of him. He was an independent person but by far the best qualified to be police commissioner. So he couldn't be easily bypassed. He was very popular in the rank and file of the police. But within a year and a half, I think, of being appointed, the drug elements were issuing tapes of conversations that were taped by sophisticated methods by the drug element who were sending this stuff around to TV stations and radio stations, conversations of the police commissioner with members of the opposition, doing nothing particularly damning in the conversations, but the language, he used a lot of foul language which governments expressed sort of horror at and all of this sort of thing.*

*There were full-page ads taken out by the drug people saying they don't understand why the commissioner of police is taking this attitude, because what he started to do was raid their nightclubs and their offices and close them down and so on. He was challenged by full-page ads in the newspaper. The government never came to his defense in any way at all.*

*The thing had gotten to the stage here, slightly before, I think slightly before he took over or maybe early in his reign, before the killings had been brought under control, when the head of security at the American embassy was playing golf on the only golf course we have which happens to be in the vicinity of Buxton—he was kidnapped on the golf course by two teenagers, and they negotiated a ransom on his cell phone with his mother through his girlfriend while the embassy here and the State Department were loudly claiming this was a complete waste of time, we never negotiate with—everybody knows the State Department doesn't—so there's no point in taking hostages.*

*In the meantime the family had settled with whatever these fellows wanted and then released him. But it was so humiliating for the embassy they said they're suspending all scholarships and support for the GDF (Guyana Defence Force) until they get involved and clean this thing up. So at that point, there was a different wave of EJE's because the army did get involved and they cleaned up Buxton. You had all sorts of revelations, for example, this business of the link between the Minister of Home Affairs and the drug people was taken to the press by one of the men who had been hired by the drug people to respond to this. You see he knew all the inside information about how it worked.*

*He was to come to court. He made charges against somebody. He was to be a witness. He was shot dead. There was all this kind of mayhem surrounding EJE's. Since the DEA got involved, the DEA agent was also killed very cruelly and brutally in the Pegasus Hotel. It was clear that the police did nothing; they knew it was drug-related. He was actually an alibi of being here, as an HIV/AIDS consultant. There were lots of folks from the US here under the aegis of the money involved in HIV, because we have one of the highest incidences outside of sub-Saharan Africa.*

*So there were a number of reasons that propelled serious US involvement in this EJE mess. It has now subsided because apart from Roger Kahn, the man who was arrested in Suriname, two or three other key people have either been arrested or they've disappeared or they've been extradited. So there is a lull. But there is also a whole heap of unanswered questions about what has really been going on.*

---

*In terms of the links between the government, the drugs, the connection between the elements in the police force, and the drugs, how high that goes, after Felix had been removed, Felix being the commissioner I mentioned who had moved against the drug people—his successor has a checkered history. The Visa to the US of the current Commissioner of Police were suspended.*

*There has never been anyone charged indictably here for drugs. Everything, no matter what they catch, the biggest I think was like 2.5 tons of cocaine in a boat, and that was charged preemptively. The max you can get for that is three years. No, the minimum is three, the max is five. If it were charged indictably you'd get life. What normally happens is with much fanfare you get three years or four years. Nobody knows how long they actually spend in there, because once the spotlight is off it, there are all sorts of deals made with people getting out of prison and so on.*

*So EJE thing, to tell that story, has gone through a number of phases. What we're faced with at the moment is that EJEs have become routinized. That's the difficulty. Even though it has subsided as a problem, the mentality of elimination and the torture being acceptable is a higher level than was the norm. If you take drugs out of the picture, we are actually going back to where we were in the mid '80s in terms of the kinds of allegations we receive here, cogent allegations about torture. These are linked to, in our view, the fact that the GDF is now involved in crime fighting almost on a routine basis. You have these joint services operations, whether they are against violence, drug-related elements—.*

*Last year there were three massacres perpetrated by—under really weird circumstances. One can only speculate as to what was really behind them. The money, the sheer coldness and calculated nature of them had all the hallmarks of drug backing for this. On the other hand, they were carried out by elements that were Afro-Guyanese elements. Some of the people killed were Afro-Guyanese, some were not. Nobody has come up with a satisfactory explanation of who they were. But everything points to some tie in with the drug world.*

*They were all eliminated, all the elements in those gangs were eliminated in confrontations with the military. We are told they were confrontations. It is impossible to believe that there was no situation in which no one could have been arrested and brought before the courts. There are two people in prison at the moment who are charged with crimes that were related to those, being part of the gangs and part of the massacres. But the courts have never been a source of information for us as to what is going on because of political intervention within the level of the police force. That's EJEs.*

SCHER: Quite something.

MCCORMACK: *It is. This is why the original title of your program here would generally seen as more appropriate.*

SCHER: I guess I have one small question related to EJEs, something that I've noticed reading local newspapers. That is that seemingly large number of people killed during the carrying out of petty crime.

MCCORMACK: Yes.

SCHER: That doesn't seem to be part of this broader network of drugs or anything. Just last night somebody was stealing a windshield, I read, and was shot and killed by the police. It seems sort of low-level crimes.

**MCCORMACK:** *Except in that case the vehicle was in the police compound. That was seen to be—but that would explain the killing for me. The fact that he had the nerve to go steal something in the police compound. But it's true, and I think it is because the culture of violence has risen as a result of what I've been telling you, the society has been subjected to in the last five years. The levels of violence have introduced violence into everyday criminality in a way that wasn't the case before. The other link is a lot of these, the people who are casually shooting people, are young kids and I think the impact of this violence on young people has not been estimated. We have no sense of trauma of the massacres last year, but it had to be enormous on children because it was enormous on the population in general. The number of young people who have been killed in the EJE's, 16, 17, 18-year olds.*

*One of the earlier drug-related massacres was carried out in a printery, they just brought the staff of the printery to lie on the floor and they just shot them in the head one night, about six people. That was carried out by 16 and 17 year olds. It is a dimension that gets overlooked once the incident fades from view. But I think it has a contributing influence on this casual killing, killings that appear to be unnecessary in relation to what the original objects seems to have been, if you want to steal something, why the killing?*

**SCHER:** You mentioned that you've been involved in training, in introducing training modules. Can you talk a little bit about that and what you tried to incorporate into this training and how you try and I guess bring awareness of the issues surrounding say EJE's and other such things.

**MCCORMACK:** *We were approached by the head of the training, not at the top of the training, but de facto officer in charge of organizing courses on the day-to-day basis. But he took the initiative to approach us. We really welcomed it because we had had a good relationship with the prison service, which originally started in the same way as the relationship with the police in terms of being difficult because we were denouncing prison conditions. Then a rather farsighted prison governor invited us in and said, "Why don't you complain about the lack of something-or-other when you're doing these things because that's what we need." He was smart. He took advantage of the fact that we were criticizing things that were true, but we were overlooking things that if they were addressed, would actually improve the prison situation. Politically, it was very astute and it changed the nature of the relationship actually.*

*It didn't mean we stopped criticizing them. But he also wanted to introduce human rights ideas into prison training programs. We set up a program with them, the training center is actually around the corner, it's a couple of blocks down the road. Whenever they had a course there, both for new recruits and middle-ranking officers, they would come around here for an afternoon, for a couple of hours, deal with some of the issues with respect to detention and human rights and minimum standards for prisoners and so on and this kind of thing.*

*They'd all march around and line up outside and then would come in. That went on—unfortunately in the last year or two, that has deteriorated. We've not been asked to go back. I think the prison service is under pressure because this joint services thing includes them. Two people have been killed in the prison. This is unprecedented, as a result of brutality. Defence Force people have been involved, I think, in both of the killings. Certainly in one of them. So it is taking its toll on the morale of the prison service. Parts of the cost of this hard-line*

---

*approach is that we have become more critical of the government's general approach to policing and so on. We've not been so directly critical of the prison service, but I think they feel the need to distance themselves a little bit for political reasons from human rights.*

*We were also on the Prison Visiting Committee. That has become so politicized that we withdrew last year. They regretted it, the Prison Service, but we couldn't really stay on it and not criticize what it was doing because it was undermining the whole concept of the Visiting Committee. But with the police, we had never been able to establish that kind of relationship with two sides. Yes, you criticize when it was necessary, but we hope there are more positive things. It was a really excellent relationship with the prison.*

*Then we got this call from the director of the Police training program to ask if we would help do something about human rights there. So we started off by going, giving lectures in their routine training programs. That developed after Commissioner Felix's appointment into a relationship that we felt we could really do something much more substantial here. We produced the manual, brought over the South African Prison Services' director; he was former by then. We ran a major workshop with them all. We then produced the manual. There were other materials, videos, DVDs, that kind of thing. We brought in people from the region, regional police forces, Jamaican, Trinidad, Grenada, I think, or was it Barbados. Suriname as well. When we'd done that with the prison services as well; we'd actually organized meetings of prison directors. We got funds for that so we could access, and they couldn't.*

*So there were a lot of good things going on. That's still the case, there was also a core of trainers who were trained in human rights techniques. The issues we were dealing with then, I mean, EJE's were one thing, but things like the rights related to arrest and detention, to prison conditions, how you treat people when you're detaining them and public order issues and the use of force, and introducing them to the relevant international standards that pertain to policing and law, that any law enforcement officials have to obey. So that relationship has waned somewhat under the current incumbent, because we've actually found ourselves, having to be vociferously critical of some of the stuff that's going on.*

*The training is still going on, we still get calls, and we're still involved in the program, have good relationships with many of the officers who are trying to do a good job. When we start to talk about the police force, we could go more into how it is that you've got some really good officers in there, and yet you've got this image that is almost universally negative of the police. The society simply dismissed the police—it's an extremely difficult job to do now, particularly if you're ambitious and so on. But that was the police training.*

SCHER: Just under that police training, how receptive are the people you're training to this type of training, this type of human rights information. Essentially in many ways you can imagine how they could see it as almost restraining their ability to act as they want to when it comes to a whole series—.

MCCORMACK: *Well it depends how you go about it actually. I mean, the idea that human rights hampers efficiency you can get rid of fairly readily. I mean you can show that the whole sequence I mentioned before of beating confessions out of people, get thrown out in court and so on, so what's the point. You'd have to shoot the guy. All these things. When you talk about rights of women, rights of children, the way police deal with people with disabilities, you're actually offering them also ways of dealing with issues that normal training doesn't work with*

---

*either. So you get resistance to issues, the idea that you can't rough people up, that they say some of these fellows, the only thing they understand is a beating and so on. I sympathize with them. It is one thing to say there are no circumstances under which you should beat someone. At the same time, if you are not working with the facilities or conditions that are conducive to non-violent methods working, what in fact do you do? I'm not saying you beat them, but I sympathize with the dilemma, because of the conditions under which the police operate, the lack of facilities, the lack of expertise, the poor training and the investigative techniques, questioning methods and all of this kind of thing, the overcrowding and all this stuff.*

*So yes, there is some resistance, but much less than your average citizen would assume to human rights training in the police force. That's partly as well because the general public has a rather limited notion of human rights as well. It lets them harbor similar kind of attitudes to the police. Until you actually start getting into human rights, most policemen would see human rights as inhibiting and restricting, and really airy-fairy compared to what they have to deal with. But, in fact, when you get in, the people that we've had most difficulty with is when you have joint services training courses. The GDF elements that come to these courses are the most disruptive. They are the most ignorant, you would say, in terms of their understanding or lack of understanding of how to deal with civilians.*

*In one sense, that's because the military is literally that, it's a military organization. The police is a civilian organization; it's supposed to be a civilian organization, or under civilian control ultimately. The army is not. There has only been one occasion in which we were invited to run a workshop for the joint services by the GDF. The GDF put the thing on. There was more GDF in that one than in the others, and that is tough, getting through to the GDF what human rights are about. But the police and the prisons, much less of a problem. The army in the last year or so has been under considerable pressure, because of torture allegations, forced to investigate. This is brutality against their own ranks, actually, in one case it was civilians, the other case was against their own ranks.*

*Again, it reinforces to our mind, it is an extension of the political interference in the discipline services which is encouraging this kind of behavior. They're looking for results, and they're using excessive force.*

SCHER: What are the types of questions or concerns that the police raise when you present them with human rights training and ways of dealing with situations. Are there common concerns that they have or common issues that their current training does not prepare them well enough for?

MCCORMACK: *In terms of human rights issues, I suppose it depends, relates to what you're dealing with. In terms of crime fighting or trying to reduce crime levels, there's a kind of an acceptance that it makes sense not to use force. There are other methods that can be used. But to convert that understanding into practice is a major leap, clearly. The other problem is that we don't get access to enough people in the police force. Even though it is now part of the training courses, they can only train relatively small numbers, or involve small numbers in these training programs when they put them on. Because they are understaffed, the force is undermanned, is understaffed.*

*So to pull people in, if it is sergeants or noncommissioned officers, or well new recruits, you could get some access to them. So one of the problems is that we don't get to the critical mass from the point of view of really changing the culture.*

---

*So the individuals who are convinced about this in terms of their own behavior may influence them, but there aren't enough of them for this knock-on effect. I think that's probably the biggest problem. There is no well-organized resistance. There are clearly groups in the force that, at the moment actually I'm not aware that there is any special unit, but for almost all the time, since the '80s, they've had something, some special squad, quick reaction squad, some name, or some elite group, crime-fighting group, who are considered to be above the rules. Whatever they do, they get covered for it. At the moment I'm not aware of such a group.*

*So that really at the present time, while there are allegations of extrajudicial killings, they're not numerous. I think it may get into double digits, but it's in the teens, it's not in the 20s. You more get complaints of excessive force and brutality and conditions of detention than actual killings. We do, they're reported at the time.*

SCHER: I wonder if we could talk a little bit about efforts that have been made to reform the police as an institution. Going back a number of years I've read various initiatives and attempts to make the police a more effective and more accountable unit. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, the Disciplined Services Commission, and the British have been involved, IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) has been involved. I wonder if you had any thoughts on these efforts?

MCCORMACK: *Yes, the Disciplined Services Commission was the most fundamental effort to reform the police force. It recognized the problems went beyond individual weaknesses of officers and that structurally, there were problems. How did they arrive at this? I think that the major contributing factor to the crisis in the police force in Guyana was the manner in which it was politicized during the period of the PNC rule, which went from '64 to '92. During that period, everything was seen as an arm of the party. We had this doctrine of the paramountcy of the party. So the courts, the party flag used to fly over the Supreme Court. The police were seen as an arm of the party. Everything was an arm of the party. So it was politicized, meaning that the authority of the police was undermined and poisoned by political interference.*

*It also had the effect then of lowering professional standards. The police became an unattractive career for ambitious or intelligent people. Police remuneration began to fall vis-à-vis other public sector and certainly private sector—there wasn't much of a private sector. So financially, it wasn't an attractive career to be in, so the quality of recruits into the police force has been an important factor in its inefficiency.*

*After '92, the nature of the—the political interference I would say waned. From '92, for about a decade actually, the PPP did not attempt to influence the police politically, in my view. The other factor which came into play most noticeably after '92 was the fact that the police ethnically is an Afro-Guyanese institution along with the military, the public service, these are predominantly Afro-Guyanese. That is a historical, it is a feature of history, but it also has a cultural aspect to it as well. Historically, the Afro community since slavery has become predominantly urban. It paid salaried occupations - predominantly an urban phenomenon, so it was logical. Because of the nature of the work, you had physical requirements at one point that Afro-Guyanese met and many Indians didn't.*

*The nature of the work is tough and rough and so on. There was a sense that Afro-Guyanese more accommodated themselves to that than Indo-Guyanese or*

---

*Amerindians. So it became an Afro-Guyanese institution. From '92 onwards, we had an Indo-Guyanese government. We also had a rigorous economic restructuring program, which was privatizing. One of the thrusts of it was to privatize this bloated public sector, and along with other parts of the public sector, the police and the military also started to be downsized. There was a political dimension to that in that it suited an Indo-Guyanese government to downsize black militia, black military and black police.*

*All of these factors contributed to a crisis that led, eventually, to creating the Disciplined Services Commission. The other problem with policing, which contributed to this, which had never been addressed, but it was a point we made strongly at the Disciplined Services Commission was that the Guyana Police Force began life as a militia. The model on which it was based was the Royal Irish Constabulary. The Royal Irish Constabulary was the instrument by which the British suppressed Ireland, not Northern Ireland, Ireland, the original Ireland. It became the model, the template for the colonial police forces. It was a militia. It was structured like a military force, operates in barracks and basically had a repressive role. That's what was created. That's how the Guyana Police Force began life.*

*As things progressed its name changed, but its functions didn't and never have. It was interesting that last year some police officers from the UK who were here as part of the UK support and training program, they actually came from Northern Ireland. Because there are other interesting—the racial problems here have a lot in common politically with the kind of situation you have in Northern Ireland. In Ireland's case it plays out in religious terms; here it plays out in race. So it made some sense to have some of those guys down. But one of them said he was struck by the forms that the police still use here. They're the same kinds of forms they used to use in Northern Ireland, years and years ago in the old Irish Constabulary. But this feature of policing has never been addressed. What it means internally is that there is little incentive to use your discretion. You always cover your backside in terms of the way you function.*

*The number of ranks we have in our police force is ludicrous. This creating ranks of assistant this and assistant that and deputy this and deputy that was a way of giving increments in your emoluments. Because you then qualified for something because the political situation being what it was, the police couldn't negotiate their wage level, as I mentioned; it was so repressed. The one way of trying to address that is creating ranks. So the thing is top heavy, very inefficient, entirely centralized from top down, has a presence in the communities that is more akin to occupation than anything related to community policing.*

*That's the nature of the police force, which also because of its racial composition was seen by the Indo community as an occupying and alien force. Because of its brutality has alienated the Afro community. Most of the crime that is committed, the kind that ends up in court, tends to historically have been committed by Afro-Guyanese. So the whole administration of justice thing and the criminality has been a black thing in Guyana. It has been a black thing not for racial or ethnic reasons, but more because of urban-rural reasons. Most crime gets committed in urban areas in any country. Here in Guyana, it means it is largely an urban thing.*

*Most of the people in prison are Afro-Guyanese, but it is because of the urban-rural thing rather than the Afro community is any more criminal than the Indo community. The other thing is is that the nature of the crimes committed. Indo-Guyanese would figure more highly in white-collar crimes, the bribery and corruption stuff, which rarely end up in court. The non-paying of taxes and the*

---

*evasion of duties and all this sort of thing. So that the image of the Indo community is that the police force is an occupying force.*

*Part of the purpose of the Commission of Inquiry was to try to address some of these issues. How can we improve Indo-Guyanese recruitment? What if the culture of the police force is Afro, I mean the food that is served, it is predominantly Afro-Guyanese food. If they have religious services, they go to Christian church. There is an assumption in the culture that it is an Afro-Guyanese institution. Because it predominantly is, there's some resentment to the fact of why we have to change things to accommodate people who aren't here. The fact is the efforts to recruit Indo-Guyanese into the police force have been notably unsuccessful. They're unsuccessful for reasons that are economic rather than cultural though.*

*When the economy is really in the doldrums, the Indo recruitment rises. When the economy gets back on its feet and if things are not doing too badly, Indo recruits leave because if rice farming happens to be prosperous because of world rice prices, what's going on on world markets, people get into farming. They'll hire more laborers. It is more lucrative to be in rice farming than it is to be in the police force. Other factors produce the same dynamic. So that even though the police force will be ostensibly open to a broader, more diverse range of recruiting there are periods when it's not going to happen.*

*I, two years ago, was at the Passing-Out parade of the latest batch of recruits, and there were actually more Indo recruits than there were Afro recruits. So you think wow, this thing is really working. But then they'd say yeah, it is, because the economy is in a mess. Give it a couple of years, they've all gone. They know it's not being cynical, they know it for a fact this is what is going to happen.*

*So while there is no severe or intense internal dynamic towards diversity, the factors that modify the dynamic or dampen it, are not racial or discriminatory, they're in the sense, they're practical, they know—they're experiential. Whenever we do this, we try and adjust, to accommodate Indo-Guyanese, but they don't come. They've been significantly more successful at Amerindian recruits. I think there's a very sensible policy to get Amerindian recruits in to police Amerindian areas. Certainly the recruiting has been successful; you see lots of them around Georgetown. Whether they can keep them in the interior I don't know.*

*I think that having got into the police force and become efficient police officers, I don't know if they're disposed to want to go back to Amerindian areas but hopefully they would. But that has been more of a success story than the East Indian issue.*

SCHER: Can I ask who has been sort of driving this recruitment process?

MCCORMACK: *It is really an internal thing to the police force. I think at the time of the Disciplined Services, it became—and because of some Indo political statement, not directly from the ruling party, but from the parties which were more ostensibly representing the Indian community, small parties which criticized the PPP, because the PPP will not acknowledge itself as an Indo party. They say it's a diverse party that is open to any race, and it couldn't get a majority as it gets in elections if only Indians voted for it; therefore, the people were voting for it; therefore, it resists the notion it is an Indo party. The PNC, I might say, adopts the same position. They claim they are not an Afro-Guyanese party. So while this only complicates life in terms of trying to understand what is going on here because both of them depend heavily on an ethnic dynamic playing out during*

---

*elections. In fact at election time they both will start ostensibly appealing to ethnic security. It is ethnic security that drives the way people vote.*

*While many Indo-Guyanese are completely disillusioned with the performance of the ruling party, at election time they feel the need to vote for it because at least it is not the Afro-Guyanese. If the Afro-Guyanese party gets back in power they remember what happened before '92 when as a minority party, it was much more ostensibly racial than the PPP feels the need to be because it is in a majority. So jobs and scholarships and other factors of repression against Indians inhibit the idea of voting for parties other than your own ethnic majority.*

*But some of this sentiment has actually influenced the police force. Some of the criticism that has come, not from the ruling party, but from some of the other ethnic parties that the police force is resisting Indo-Guyanese and so on has in fact led them to these kinds of experiments. The police force has acknowledged it should be more diverse and so on, has tried, but the larger cultural dynamic is not conducive to this. If the society were more committed to pluralism and diversity, that would then more naturally start to reflect over time in the composition of the police force, the military, the public service. But you can't sensibly demand the police force create something the larger society can't create, in other words of being a diverse police force, particularly when it is an organization of that kind where the nature of the work needs to have a kind of special appeal.*

SCHER: No, it's fine, it's very relevant.

MCCORMACK: *The Indo-Guyanese, the economic thing, that they can make more money outside of the police force accounts for, influences a reduced recruitment from the Indo community. The same problem influences the Afro community in a different way. The elements from the Afro community that would raise the quality of the police force, in other words, the ambitious, educated, talented Afro-Guyanese are inhibited from joining the police force because they don't see it as a career. The prospects of the police, for example, if you're interested in forensics. Let's say you went to the university and there was something about forensic chemistry or something, and you think the police would be a good way to advance myself. Those types of opportunities are extremely restricted because the technology available to the police force is rudimentary in most of the areas of technique. Even things like drivers, I was going to say pilots, but I mean forget that. But you get the point. In other societies, the police would be an option; here it is not.*

*So the question of where are the recruits to come from that will change this culture, the people who—there is an assumption that more educated people are more tolerant and open and understand diversity better than people who have not had the benefits of education. If it is true, that is one of the factors that doesn't help the police force in its diversity issues.*

*Some of the factors that led to the commission were these elements I've mentioned, the diversity thing, the low level of efficiency, the constant criticism from all sides. The conviction rates are so low, detention rates are even lower. The conviction rates are very low but that's not always the police problem. Detection rates, arrest rates are very low. The ethnic issues, the EJE issues. The British response to that has been to offer training to the police force. My criticism of the British program would be that they have seen the solution is purely technical when in fact they should recognize there is a political dimension to the*

---

*limitations of the police force here. The political interference directly is the obvious one, that they are subject to all sorts of political interference.*

*The second is the structure of the police force and the decentralization issue. The politicians feel no incentive to address that. It is difficult to address it internally, because the people at the top will be divesting themselves of power. So that only the major external influence that could put pressure on this are the donors, because they are providing funding. If that funding were made conditional on modernizing of the structure of the police force, reducing the number of ranks and decentralizing police operations so that commanders in each of the police regions would have a budget that is their responsibility to handle, would see themselves as answerable for what happens in their district, could set up some kind of committee within the command, within the division, whereby some civilian elements from within the thing could be brought into this.*

*So that if you want to get effective community policing in place, you want to improve say lighting in certain areas which are major crime areas, all of these things you could address in conjunction with elements in your community. You can have visiting committees in police stations so that the constant criticisms about the state of police lockups and the brutality in police lockups could be addressed at the district level by issues that you could raise with—. If you knew that monitoring was taking place, that's a deterrent. But also a monitoring committee could help raise funds if you need to improve the physical conditions of lockups, put toilets in, have running water, put a window in some of the places, this kind of thing. These are dungeons of medieval quality that pass as lockups in police stations at the moment.*

*Now none of that, that sort of modernizing, is possible without a strong political commitment that would force the top brass in the police force to implement it. When Felix was there, Felix set such a process in motion. He actually had an internal planning committee comprising senior superintendents. I think their main job was doing this, and other ranks as well. It was a dynamic thing. They actually came here, members of that committee, to interview the GHRA about a number of changes they planned to implement. They were asking our opinion of what they intended to do. They were very progressive ideas, and they were implemented in a very liberal, modern, democratic manner. The whole thing was a breath of fresh air and it all came to a grinding halt when Felix departed.*

*While the ostensible causes of Felix's demise was that he underestimated the political strength of the drug barons, I'm sure there were enough people internally within the police force who were glad to see him go for these reasons as well, that he had begun to initiate these kinds of reforms.*

*The British program unfortunately has been, it's been demanding, but in very limited and rather self-serving ways. For instance, there is a lot of money available for weaponry for the police that they insisted be only made available for certain kinds of weaponry which the office of the president didn't want. What they wanted were uzies and all sorts of fancy high-powered weaponry that could combat what the drug people had. The British said we're not into that, we're into the kind of weaponry that you need for normal policing. There is something called a, a pistol called a P5 or something that the EU will readily license for export, and which I think the British police use. The British said that's what we're giving you. They said we're not interested and they didn't take it. They had this standoff for years. I think they've got over it by now—on both sides. The British want to spend the money, the government—. I think actually in the end the government*

---

won here. But when they first—they actually tried to bypass the British and they sent the paperwork directly to Brussels and so on.

The Germans got into it, and they said we're not licensing—they wanted some other fancy German thing instead of this P5, and the Germans said, we can't do it. It doesn't work like that. So that the government here was prepared to jeopardize the modernization process within the police force, rather than accept the weaponry that was on offer. Because they have that view, they don't have the commitment that is needed for an independent, modernized police force. This government is not that interested frankly in that kind of a police force.

The second factor is that they don't involve civil society in this, and there can be no serious modernization of the police force without a role for civil society. This is a civilian organization. They are talking about policing in the community. We have a community policing force here, which is a government style of militia, frankly. They are groups, they're all male, they operate at night. People are attracted to them because they can get their hands on weapons. They're inefficient. We get complaints of brutality. They're heavily politically directed.

Since all this money became available for security as a result of the massacres and so on, the beneficiaries are the community policing structures. We argue with them that this is not what community policing is about. First of all, they need a different concept. It has to be policing with the community, not policing in the community in the way they have it. The people who live in the community most of the time, who are there all day long, they know what's going on, are women. So there should also be a women-driven initiative. It should be fashioned in ways which women are comfortable with. Part of the problem in communities is that people are—it's housebreaking and robbery of properties and things of this nature. That's because people don't secure their properties properly; they don't know how to.

Women are in the community the whole time, they see these things, they know who is hanging around the place. If you had intelligence-led policing as one of your goals, you'd involve a lot more women and you'd catch a lot more. You'd actually be a far more effective force both in terms of crime fighting and in terms of earning a secure community with the features the communities need such as well-lit areas where kids can play in the evening or that kind of stuff. There's none of that is effective. The community policing has a macho image which it likes and enjoys and the government are very happy with it, but it does nothing for modernizing the police force.

If agencies like IDB and the British would involve civil society or insist on the involvement of civil society, not just in occasional meetings between the government where you get an update on how they're spending British money or IDB money, but force the involvement of the kind of police themselves were looking for when they came here, when they were running the planning thing themselves. They came here and started talking about these community groups. So that the foreign-funded programs are a mixed blessing in terms of what they've produced. The results are no way comparable to the kind of money that is being spent in there. The concepts behind community policing and involvements of civil society are underdeveloped.

Their idea of involving the community is largely to hire consultants from outside, or British police officers. The British police come. They will eventually find a way, most of them find their way here, their trainers, they would come because the police hear about it and they come. The high commission wouldn't encourage

---

*them to come because we're not on their radar. In fact, I had this conversation about two weeks ago. I took the opportunity to suggest to them, that they are not taking civil society seriously enough, and that their idea of how to influence the government is really a very colonial one. It's how can we influence the government rather than how can we strengthen civil society to influence the government.*

*So technically, things are improving, but not in any way that takes into account modern approaches to policing that requires more intelligent police officers, that encourages and rewards well-used discretion or initiatives or incentive. So that a police officer who is told to do something will do it. If the next level up is not in agreement with it, he will suffer, so he is not going to exercise his discretion. This is where this ranks and militia thing really works against modernized policing.*

*On the individual level, I mean we're into this, this is where a lot of individual police, I think, and even the younger elements, if they were in an environment that encouraged initiative and incentives, we would have a much more efficient police force, and a police force that had more job satisfaction involved with it. While we have the same structure that the British left behind, and the British had worked as a militia for years, it doesn't even work well as a militia now because there were—I mean being a member of the police force also meant, like police athletics were well-organized, sports facilities within the police force. We used to have good cricket teams and good soccer teams and good athletics teams. So there was a lot more good recreational stuff associated with policing.*

*Being a police officer had much more of the camaraderie and involved families and stuff than it does now. There are still certain amounts of that of course, but not enough to offset the drawbacks. So because of the poor salaries and so on, they're very vulnerable to corruption. The routine response to being stopped for speeding or stuff like that is to offer a bribe, and it is almost routinely accepted. You've really got to get rid of that if you want law and order to become part of the culture.*

*Under a corrupt government, not paying taxes was seen as some sort of—it was rationalized as some kind of liberation gesture, that you're not giving money to this repressive thing. Of course then it's no longer repressive, it was also quite convenient not to be paying taxes without the rationale, so you tend to be bribing tax officials and you're bribing police officers. The culture of law and order is still a very fragile concept here because you're seeing so much routine corruption, blatant corruption and illegality from high levels of the government.*

*There's been, over the last few—as an issue, it has been rolling on for a couple of years now, but in the last few weeks became high profile. An importer illegally imported 190,000 cases of beer, Polar beer, it's a Venezuelan beer, illegally. It was stopped by some customs officers. Millions of dollars in taxes were evaded.*

*This week, yesterday, the charges against the importer were actually withdrawn. When the customs officers were all charged with all of this, people said well, why are they not charging the guy who bribed them, which is a logical thing. But nobody has answered that question.*

*It is one of the instances where it is perfectly clear a very high government official is a major shareholder in that company. I'm not sure who it is. It illustrates why the entire society is cynical about law and order.*

---

*A few weeks ago, another investing group from Queens in New York bought former state property, huge factory the Chinese had built, a textile factory and all kinds of other stuff, for a song. I mean, it was outrageous what the buying price was. They were then also extended huge duty-free concessions on all kinds of things that they are supposed to be building there.*

*All of this is common knowledge around the society, and the instances of it are numerous. This is what the police are confronted with in terms of how do you demand law and order when they know that all of this is going on. People know the police can't move against it. So the prestige of the force is not—this is a poodle, this is no Alsatian—the police itself is toothless, frankly when it comes to politics. That's the general cultural perception of where we are in law and order. I might need to end here.*

SCHER: I was just about to say thank you very much for giving me so much time, I know you have many other things. This has been an incredibly helpful conversation and very helpful to our work.