

Chairman : Lord Merrivale

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. G. Hunter

Hon. Treasurer : Mr. N. Doxat

Hobson's, Croft Road,  
Chalfont St. Peter,  
Garrards Cross, Bucks.

NEWSLETTER

No.1

Those who are interested in Madagascar can pick up a certain amount of information at the Society's Meetings, to supplement the minimal reference in the British press. But to provide a better "service" it has been decided to revert to the earlier practice of issuing an occasional Newsletter. This is the first (extra long) letter of the new series.

OCTOBER MEETING

The meeting at the Royal Commonwealth Society on 31st October with buffet supper was attended by approx. 40 members and friends. It was a special pleasure to see three Malagasy resident in this country: Mrs. Hampstead of Tunbridge Wells; Mr. T. Jaovita (studying theology at Chichester) and Mr. Randrianjafy (studying problems of water-pollution in Merseyside); also the students who had recently arrived to take the English course at Colchester. Mrs. Hunter saw to it that they were introduced to as many members as possible. The Society's hyphenated title "Anglo-Malagasy" includes personal and cultural links, but a background to such links is formed by the "official" relations between the two countries symbolised by the close contacts between the Society and the Malagasy Embassy. Each country, however, has closed its embassy in the territory of the other, "for financial reasons". Britain now has a consular agent in Tananarive and also a non-resident Ambassador (our own member, the High Commissioner in Tanzania, whose interest and enthusiasm have found new openings). Lord Merrivale gave news at the meeting of hopes that it may be possible to arrange new contacts to supplement the visits paid, chiefly for cultural purposes, by British officials from Tanzania. So far, no Malagasy diplomat has been appointed as a non-resident ambassador to Britain. The last British Ambassador, Mr. T. Crosthwait and Mrs. Crosthwait (also AMS members) reached their London home after an interesting world trip. Mr. Crosthwait has retired from the Foreign Service.

MEDICINE IN MADAGASCAR

The speaker at the meeting was Mr. Denys Tweddell of the Wellcome Foundation. He gave a fascinating talk on "Natural Drugs", in a style which enabled his audience (lay people in both chemistry and medicine) to understand the main points. Folk-medicine and overseas "medicine-men" have long had a rather poor press, with a grudging admission of a few successes. But Mr. Tweddell showed with what care such ideas and practices are now noted and examined scientifically at four levels - in case something medically important may be found. So far as Madagascar was concerned, Mr. Tweddell had been able to find very little in the Wellcome library, but one plant which could be mentioned was the Madagascar perriwinkle, which had already proved useful in treating leucaemia. An expert from the Foundation is to visit Madagascar in 1977.

To supplement the lecture, it may be as well to give some other information on related matters. The Madagascar perriwinkle is offered in some British florists' catalogues. Interesting details of Malagasy folk-medicine were



given by Dr. Parker in two articles nearly a century ago: "A Malagasy Materia Medica", and another, in Antananarivo Annual (Reprint), 1881, pp 57-61. In 1968 the Bulletin de Madagascar carried a series of articles dealing scientifically with various plants. One of the Writers was Dr. Rakoto-Ratsimamanga, who is now in charge of research into the subject, but seems to be seriously hindered by lack of funds. There is one Malagasy plant which is commercially exploited in Europe. Four hundred kilos of talapetraka are exported to France everyday for the production of "Madecassol". The price of the plant has been suddenly raised by the Government from 80 frcs. to 335 frcs. a kilo. There is a new move in medical assistance. In a general way medical centres cover the country; but when communications are poor, the nearest may be some hours' walk away. A new type of "assistant nurse" is envisaged to help fill in the geographical gaps. To begin with, 500 are to be selected from candidates proposed by "area" committees. After training, they should begin in 1978 to work in their home area (not village). Their duties will include health education.

VISITORS FROM MADAGASCAR

M. Robinson, of the Malagasy Embassy in Paris, attended the 1976 International Coffee Conference in London: an important event for Madagascar where coffee holds a dominant place in the exports. M. Rabenoro, the former Ambassador, was in London on a private visit. M. David Andriamparison and his wife spent several months studying in Birmingham and elsewhere (including methods of treatment for drug-addicts) before returning to take charge of the Friends International Centre in Tananaarive. Two students are studying English in Birmingham, another in Leeds and a fourth at Folkestone.

VISITORS TO MADAGASCAR

Among those who have visited Madagascar fairly recently are Mr. R.W. Gödsal (on behalf of Dalgety); Mr. & Mrs. J. Gilbey who, on behalf of the Council for World Mission, covered some of the ground familiar after twenty years' residence; Rev. W. Whiffen (visiting the Anglican Church); and Mr. Jack Williams, of BBC External Services. There have been suggestions from time to time that the Society should organise a comparatively cheap charter flight to Madagascar, but this has not been possible. In November 1976, however, a special tour of a different type was organised by Hammersmith Tours (at a cost of £750 per head). The itinerary included Tananarive, Nossibe, Perinet and an area in the extreme south (before moving on to Mauritius). A leading British ornithologist was announced as lecturer.

DIPLOMATIC LINKS

Since a visit to North Korea by President Ratsiraka, the leaders in Madagascar have shown great interest in the efforts made by that country to re-organize its life and especially in the Djoutche, the exposition of N.Korea's political philosophy and plans. In September 1976 a Conference was held in Tananarive to expound and discuss the Djoutche under joint N.Korean and Malagasy auspices. It was made "international" by the presence of delegates invited from several dozen other countries. N.Korea has provided a large sum for the construction of a Youth Centre at Tamatave; President Kim is expected to come to open it. RUMANIA has signed an agreement to help agricultural production by improving facilities in Madagascar for the repair of tractors; and will build a factory for the construction (with imported materials it would seem) of Jeeps and lorries for rough roads. CUBA has sent two technical sugar production experts as advisers. The very large French sugar estates and factories in the north-west have been nationalised.



### MADAGASCAR AND SEYCHELLES

They are both "islands in the Indian Ocean" and for long the latter was even more remote than the former - until the tourist boom. There seems to be a Malagasy strain in the Seychellois (and one wonders whether Malagasy has left any traces in the local speech as it has in the Mascarenes). Links are likely to be closer. The President of the newly independent Seychelles paid an unofficial visit to Madagascar (where he seems to have been officially received); and an air service Tananarive-Nossibe-Seychelles started in December 1976. It is to be noted that the Holiday Inn being built at Nossibe at a reported cost of over one and a half million pounds is expected to open at Easter 1977.

### SOME BRITISH NEWS ITEMS

Three days before Christmas Britain (in the person of the non-resident Ambassador) presented Madagascar with ten refuse-lorries (expected to arrive within two months). They were a special gift to help solve some of Tananarive's municipal problems. A British husband and wife team is spending a year and a half in Madagascar to make a wild-life film for Anglia Television.

### COMORIANS IN MADAGASCAR

The troubles in Majunga just before Christmas were very much more serious than those (between Malagasy) in Tamatave in December 1972, which led to many returning to the central area. The spark which started the blaze, so to speak, at Majunga seems to have been the breaking of a Comorian tabu by a Betsirebaka child (the name given in other areas to people from the south-east). The Comorian reacted very strongly and the Betsirebaka, deeply offended, became violent. The killing of Comorians in the town, burning of property and so on, continued for the best part of two days. The exact number of the dead is not clear; official Malagasy figures (referring it seems to those brought to a mortuary) are around 130. The Comorian Foreign Minister said later in Dar es Salaam, that the figure was 1374. Thousands of Comorians have been repatriated by their own Government (not expelled by the Malagasy Government). It cannot yet be said how many will remain in Madagascar out of the total Comorian population of between 50 and 60 thousand. Those known as "Zanatany" who have been in Madagascar for two or three generations do not wish to go to a "homeland" which is in some sense foreign to them. Writers in the Malagasy press (some after making a special visit to Majunga) have been analysing the underlying social situation in Majunga. One entitled his article "we are all responsible"; and blamed successive Governments for not dealing actively with certain conditions. Some other violent incidents are reported from two or three West Coast areas (notably Mahabo).

### FIRST YEAR OF THE REVOLUTION

President Ratsiraka began an anniversary message at the end of 1976 by saying that eighteen months of revolutionary orientation have now reached the point of "No Return". Official visits, several bi-lateral agreements and expressions of view on matters of world interest, he said, showed that Madagascar was not cutting itself off from international affairs, but at the same time, the international proletariat movement would not stifle the "specific character of our revolution". In a long



list of some of the achievements of the first year a Malagasy writer includes: completion of the road between Antsirabe and Miandrivaze; the Polytechnic at Antomboka (Diego): a coconut palm project at Sambava; fishing cooperatives at Tamatave and Tulear; over 4000 hectares more land planted with trees (for production of paper). Two actions are officially regarded as specially important. First, the re-organisation of the former six banks into three, which will be especially concerned with, respectively, rural loans, industry and commerce. Second, in the Manajary area all estates over 100 hectares (to a total of 30,000 hectares) were expropriated for future exploitation by socialist cooperatives; owners will be compensated.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The law has been published which sets out the new pattern of "local government". The traditional Malagasy fokonolona (local community) has had a long and varied history; recent discussions and plans have shown differences between what might be called "traditionalist" and "modernist" interpretations. The old fokonolona is now officially the Socialist fokonolona, which forms the base of a series of self-governing bodies. The emphasis is on participation and consensus. The local community will control technical experts in its area. There will also be the AREMA (the group of "militants"); but it is not yet clear how their relationship to the decision-making process of the local community will work out in practice.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Elections for a national assembly with some authority (the first for several years) will be held at a still unknown date in 1977. Voters will vote for "lists" (as has long been the practice). Instead, however, of such lists being put forward by political parties, only the Group will be authorised to present lists. There is some speculation as to whether the general rule will be two such approved lists between which the voters in a constituency could choose; or only one.

PRIME MINISTER'S PALACE

The familiar Tananarive sky-line has been slightly changed by the destruction early in September of the roof and other parts of the "Prime Minister's Palace". The exact cause seems not to have been precisely determined, but it has already been decided that it should be rebuilt. The Palace was designed and its construction supervised by William Pool, of the London Missionary Society and was completed in the early 1830's. Not only the architect was British. The "wrought-iron dome, 32 feet in diameter" was provided by Pitfield Iron-works, London; and the "fluted glass" came from Chance and Sons, Birmingham.

Great damage was caused at the Panomad factory in Moramanga (making Isorel) when the boiler for the treatment of wood-pulp blew up. There were several dead and injured; the factory is not working for some months.

BOOKS ON MADAGASCAR

Books in English are not numerous and news takes time to circulate. So, although they were not published "last week" it may be as well to mention three fairly recent books. The MALAGASY REPUBLIC by B. BAILEY



and others has 64 pages of a simple but interesting text and many photos. (Published in the USA in 1974 and distributed in Britain by Ward Lock Ltd: one of a "World" series). The MALAGASY REPUBLIC by A.D. MARSHALL, though apparently also a part of a series, springs out of a more direct personal interest, as Mr. Marshall was US Ambassador in Tananarive. The book is dedicated to Sebastian, his pet ring-tailed lemur. 72 pages and numerous photos taken by the author (Published by F. Watts, New York in 1972). A book of a different type is HAND TO PLAY by Sir Laurence GRAFFTEY-SMITH (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975). The whole book (along with the author's previous autobiographical volume Bright Levant) is of great interest. Along with other parts of the world, it includes "Civil and Military Gazette" (pages 24 - 74), dealing with Madagascar during the war. From personal experience Sir Laurence gives some illuminating information often available only when the archives are opened. Though originally written in English, R. ARCHER'S book appeared in French in December 1976 as MADAGASCAR DEPUIS 1972: LA MARCHE D'UNE REVOLUTION. (Published by Ed. l'Harmattan, Idoc France, Paris; 190 pages. Price in France is 30 frcs; a British bookseller quotes £5.55). The author worked as a "volunteer", at the University and returned later for research. He says he owes much to a group interested in studying Malagasy affairs. favourably reviewed in Le Monde.

#### MADAGASCAR/ RENOUVEAU

The former luxury review Revue de Madagascar has been replaced, after an interval, by a new French language review Madagascar-Renouveau. It is described as "a quarterly... richly illustrated ... dealing essentially with the political, economic social and cultural events ... of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar". It is issued by the Minister in charge of "Information, Ideological Orientation and Relations with the Institutions". The first 64 page issue appeared at the New Year. It includes articles on the President; economic and diplomatic affairs; and a long article on education, the history being analysed from a new point of view. The overseas subscription is 1,500 FMG to be sent to M. le Regisseur des recettes de la Direction de l'Information, Tananarive. The review is sent by air.

#### MR. MERVYN BROWN ON MADAGASCAR

Mr. Brown (to no one's surprise) has written a manuscript on some aspects of the history of Madagascar (laying some stress on links with Britain). Those who have seen the ms. are as eager as he is to see it in print. As a first step towards publication, a subscription list is being organised by Mr. Damien Tunnacliff, a member of the Society's committee and professionally experienced in the publishing world. The hope is that the price would be about £3. If the list is long enough, it should be possible to publish. Those who would like to put their name down are asked to inform Mr. Tunnacliff, at 3, Romsey Road, Cambridge.

#### CYCLONE EMILIE

The fifth cyclone of the year has caused very serious damage along the east coast and as far inland as Fandriana and Ambositra area. About 10,000 lost their homes. After being flattened a few years ago, Nosy Varika has again lost perhaps 90% of its houses. Reports about the number of dead vary from 7 to 36. EMILIE was followed almost at once



by FIFI; a case perhaps for the Malagasy proverb: "One Crocodile has gone, another Crocodile has arrived".

ANNUAL DINNER

The Annual Dinner was held on Friday, 4th March in the Main Dining Room at the House of Lords, attended by 63 Members and their guests. It was a most enjoyable and successful evening. The Guest of Honour was Mr. P. Mansfield, Assistant Under Secretary of State at the F.C.O. There were 8 Malagasy present, 5 of whom were students from Colchester.

MARCH 1977

*A.G.M. Wednesday, May 18th. Details later.*

MADAGASCAR RENEWAL

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CYCLONE BILLIE

The fifth cyclone of the year has caused very serious damage along the east coast and as far inland as Randriana and Ampositra areas. About 10,000 lost their homes. After being flattened a few years ago, Nosy Be has again lost perhaps 90% of its houses. Reports about the number of dead vary from 7 to 38. BILLIE was followed almost at once