

Sir Brian Leon BARDER (b. 20.06.34).

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Sir Brian Barder interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Thursday the 6 of March 1997 at Sir Brian's home.

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MM Sir Brian, would you like to begin by telling us how you joined the Colonial Office in 1957?

BB Well, the Colonial Office was part of the Home Civil Service, quite distinct from the Colonial Service, and it was a 'home' job. It didn't involve any obligation to serve overseas. So after University I joined the Home Civil Service, having passed CSSB, and opted for the Colonial Office as my first choice and got it. I didn't even apply for the Diplomatic Service. It was possible to apply for both but I didn't because I had no interest in diplomacy and I didn't want to spend most of my life overseas. So as far as I was concerned, I was quite happy to spend the rest of my life as a Home Civil Servant in the Colonial Office or other Departments.

MM And you became Private Secretary to the PUS?

BB Yes, that's right, Private Secretary to Sir Hilton Poynton, who was the last PUS of the Colonial Office before it was merged with, initially, the CRO and later into the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. Most of the new entrants in the 'fast' stream in the Administrative Class, as it was called then in the Colonial Office, had a stint as a Private Secretary, either to a Minister or to the PUS, and I worked for the PUS who died only very recently, Hilton Poynton, a very splendid rather old-style, conservative, scholarly, bureaucrat who used to lapse into ancient Greek sometimes when dictating his minutes, to the consternation of his unfortunate secretary.

MM Indeed. Do you have any outstanding memories of the issues that were being discussed at that time?

BB Well, yes, it was the hey-day of de-colonisation. I joined the Office in 1957, as

you say, when it was already clear that we were shedding the great majority of our colonial territories, although the pace of de-colonisation was still very much an issue and very few of us had any idea how quickly it would happen. There was a good deal of debate within the Colonial Office about how quickly it ought to happen, with some of the older generation arguing that much more time was needed, I mean 20, 30, 40 years, for preparation for independence so that we could allow time for an educated elite to emerge in the territories and for economic and social standards to be raised before they were cast loose on the world as independent states. Others, mainly we younger members of the Office, argued strenuously that there was no justification for lengthy delay; that we should be guided by the wishes of the political leaders in the territories as to the speed and time of independence; that if they felt confident that they could manage it, it was not for us to say that they couldn't have it; and that we should at all costs avoid the kind of conflict that the French were getting into and the Belgians and Portuguese were obviously in danger of getting into as well.

MM Do you feel in retrospect that that was wise?

BB. Yes, I don't think we had any serious option. Obviously not all the colonial territories proved to be great successes as independent countries but I don't myself believe that delaying independence would have improved their chances. In fact it would almost certainly have got us into serious trouble, serious conflict, probably bloodshed, which for the most part we avoided. I think we have a very good de-colonisation record even though the performance of the countries that we de-colonised has of course been pretty patchy. I don't think that was the result of the way, or the timing, with which we de-colonised. I think it was partly a function of lack of preparation during the colonial years because on the whole those administering the territories didn't see them as potential independent countries, certainly not for centuries, and ideas and attitudes just changed radically, basically during the second world war I think.

MM Do you think that we could have done more in the time available?

BB Well, I think by the end of the war not much more. It was during the war that we introduced the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts and really started serious aid programmes in the colonies. We made mistakes of course during that period of development aid and opinion has now swung around from the big sexy projects like the groundnut scheme, which was the most famous of all the failures. We learned many lessons, but we had to learn those lessons, we couldn't expect to do it all perfectly right from the start: and we really led the way, I think, in introducing the concept of the colonial power's responsibility for improving living standards and social standards in the territories we were responsible for. The other thing was, and this is something that I think is largely overlooked and has got buried, and has some relevance now perhaps to Hong Kong, was that the Colonial Office was absolutely committed to the doctrine of the paramountcy of interests of the colonial peoples: so where there was a clash between Britain's interests and the interests of the colonial territory, the Colonial Office invariably argued strongly in Whitehall that the interests of the colonial people took precedence over the interests of Britain. This is really a remarkably altruistic, idealistic doctrine and it was one that was really applied very seriously indeed. There were endless conflicts over cotton, Hong Kong cotton competing with Lancashire cotton; and Indian cotton, but India was independent early on, in 1947, so in the period that I am talking of, late fifties early sixties, it arose particularly over Hong Kong cotton competing with British cotton interests. Of course, there were strong pressures from the Board of Trade, the Treasury and the other Home Departments to put British interests first as they were always accustomed to doing, and as Foreign Office people inevitably and instinctively aimed to do. The Colonial Office always argued strongly that we had the responsibility as the colonial power to look after the interests of our colonial peoples even if it was at the expense of Britain's own interests.

MM Could we take the case of Nigeria in particular. You have had a lot to do with Nigeria in the course of your long and distinguished career. When did you first come into contact with Nigeria and can you tell us something about the way Nigeria has developed from what was apparently quite a promising start?

BB Yes, it was my very first job. The first day I joined the Colonial Office and became a

Civil Servant - this was in the days before training had been invented - and I was ushered directly to the desk I was to occupy for the next couple of years; it had a large pile of files on it, all in the IN tray, nothing in the OUT tray. My principal, my immediate boss, my line-manager, was sitting at the desk opposite. The two desks were front to front and my predecessor who had moved on to another job because my principal couldn't stand any more of him, my predecessor was there and said these are the most urgent files on top - get on with it. The job was Nigeria. I was the assistant desk officer for Nigeria in the West African Department of the Colonial Office and in 1957, when I joined, Nigeria was just three years away from independence so I was heavily involved in all the last stages of Nigerian colonial dependency. The great independence conferences were held at Lancaster House, because the terms of independence and the independence constitution were negotiated, line by line, with the Nigerian leaders who were all formidable and considerable figures, mostly good lawyers or traditional leaders from the north, and they were real public figures on the international scene. There was no question of us imposing an independence constitution or independence structures on them: everything had to be agreed with them. There was a good deal of resistance to the idea of independence, especially from the northern leaders who were afraid that once Britain pulled out and they were on their own these clever-dicks in the south, particularly the Ibos in the southeast and the Yorubas in the west, would in effect dominate the whole of Nigeria and the north would be squeezed out; educational standards and living standards in the north were lower, they had fewer graduates and were not so sophisticated, so they were determined that they were going to be protected and that they were going to have the whip hand and not allow themselves to be replaced in positions of power and influence throughout Nigeria by these southern upstarts. So it was basically a diplomatic exercise, really, the negotiation of the terms of independence. It was a prosperous country. It was before the discovery of oil in any quantity so we did not know at that stage that oil was going to play such a large part in Nigeria's future, but agriculturally and in other ways Nigeria was potentially prosperous, it was a very large country in population terms and in area and very influential in Africa even before independence. So it was very promising but at the same time we were aware of the enormous frictions between the various tribal groups and the problems of the minorities, those who did not belong to any of the three main groups and who were frightened of being dominated by them, again

looking to Britain during the colonial period as referees and umpires and safeguards for their rights. So we were aware of the extreme difficulty of devising a structure that would enable all these different peoples at different stages of development to live together in a single country. We negotiated an enormous constitution which involved two major conferences. But, eventually, we got a text that everybody could live with, including a trend-setting chapter on human rights which was taken over by many subsequent constitutions. That constitution, in fact, lasted in Nigeria for six years after independence until the assassinations and breakdowns in 1966. It was by no means a failure; it didn't in the end of course constitute a sufficiently hard glue to keep them together, although Nigeria has survived as a single country despite civil war and appalling corruption, military takeovers and the rest of it. But we were aware of the difficulties and aware of the problems - it wasn't that we were complacent or that we failed to take account of the frictions and the fissiparous tendencies that there were going to be.

MM So you ended up as High Commissioner in Lagos in 1988 to 1991, thirty years after independence. How had it changed in that period of time?

BB Well, of course, Nigeria had been through fire and water since independence by then. I was also involved with Nigeria again at the time of the Biafra war as one of the two Assistants with Patrick Moberley in West African Department in the Foreign Office (which was my second job after I transferred, somewhat unwillingly, to the Diplomatic Service). So again I was involved in Nigerian affairs while they were in the middle of a civil war that was a great UK domestic issue at the time. One tends to forget now that it was headline news for well over a year. It was a real problem for Harold Wilson's government with a lot of sympathy in Britain and elsewhere for the Biafran side and a lot of pressure on the British government to stop supporting the Federal government against the rebels and to be more even-handed: or even to support the Biafrans in a recognised Biafra as an independent state - pressures that Harold Wilson fairly courageously resisted, twisting and turning and going in for all sorts of gimmicks in order to enable him to protect his chosen policy. It was a policy that I think proved, in the event, to be right when the Federal government won. I was a bit of a heretic at the time, as I was at various times during my career, and argued

quite strongly in the Office that since we had a lot of clout with the Federal government as its main supporter internationally and as we were playing a significant role in holding together international support for the Federal government, we had a duty and an opportunity to use that clout with Lagos to apply much more pressure than we did for a negotiated settlement. We did try, of course. There were negotiations on board various battleships with Harold Wilson going out and meeting the two protagonists and so on but we never really came down hard on the Feds, I always thought, in the way that we could have done to persuade them to rely less on violence and on a military victory and to rely more on negotiation to bring the thing to an end. I think it could have been ended earlier if we'd been willing to twist Federal arms a bit more; but anyway the Feds eventually won militarily. So, in a rather belated answer to your question, by the time that I was actually posted to Nigeria for the first time in 1988, after Poland, Nigeria was utterly changed. The civil war was over but the Ibos were still pretty much in a subordinate position, unable to flex their muscles. The north had established a very strong position, with a kind of assumption that the north would continue to dominate the whole of Nigeria politically; and I think this is still one of the major issues in Nigerian politics. It was because a non-northerner appeared to have won the elections a couple of years ago that the military government decided to cancel the elections and declare the results invalid - because I think the northerners were not prepared to contemplate a southern Yoruba, even a Muslim Yoruba, as the Head of State. So that's been an issue right through, its been a consistent issue but I think the civil war tended to confirm it as a major factor in Nigerian life. When I was there as High Commissioner relations between Britain and Nigeria were extremely good. Babangida appeared to be genuinely moving towards the restoration of democracy and civilian rule. I still think that at that time he did genuinely intend to hand over to a civilian elected government and that he was prevailed on to change his mind when it looked as if the north might have its grip broken. He was also engaged in economic reforms which met with approval from the IMF and the British Treasury and so on, so we were able to give him a lot of economic and financial support. So it was an interesting time but it was a depressing experience really because the level of corruption in Nigeria is so huge. It's very hard to imagine either a civilian or a military government in Nigeria that isn't infested with corruption. It's just part of the way of life, so on the whole I'm rather depressed by the

experience of Nigeria over more than thirty years.

MM What gave rise to this level of corruption in your opinion?

BB Well, I think there's always been a fair amount of it in Nigerian life and in fact in many African societies. Part of it is because of the extended family system whereby any member of a very large family who attains a position of power or wealth, not necessarily the same thing, even a minor clerk who is issuing permits for some harmless activity, comes under enormous pressure from the rest of the family to see them right and it is regarded as a filial duty to do the right thing by your huge family. So the pressure on you to extract money from your job, perhaps more than your salary will yield, by accepting bribes in exchange for the issue of driving licences, import permits or whatever, is very, very strong and it really takes almost superhuman strength to resist it. People are quite seriously threatened, their lives are threatened, if they fail to support their aunts and uncles and second cousins, nephews at three removes and so on, once the family reckons that if they tried hard enough they could come up with the goods. So I think that's certainly a factor; and another factor, of course, has been the huge wealth that came from the oil boom in the '60s and '70s which aggravated the differences between the richest and the poorest and caused a great many Nigerians to aspire to very considerable wealth and to be prepared to cut corners to achieve it. The wealthiest Nigerians really live in a style that reminds you of Hollywood in the 1930s - it's quite extraordinary for an essentially poor country.

MM Well, poor country but very rich in natural resources?

BB Rich in resources but with a very low average income per head.

MM Well, talking of low capitas per head and all that, you went from the FCO in 1970 to Moscow as First Secretary and Press Attache. That was a bit of a change in direction wasn't it?

BB Yes, I transferred to the Diplomatic Service while I was in New York. It had been a

condition of my posting from the Colonial Office to the UK Mission to the UN in New York that I would transfer to the Foreign Office. It was obvious that the Colonial Office was about to disappear because we were the victims of our own success - we didn't have enough colonies left to make a separate department viable any more. I had intended to stay in the Home Civil Service and in fact was about to transfer to the Ministry of Labour, as it was still then called, when I was offered the appointment in New York as the First Secretary, Colonial Affairs, meaning de-colonial affairs really, but on condition that I transferred to the Foreign Office. The prospect of 4 years in New York, living in Manhattan, was just too attractive so I swallowed hard and agreed to become a diplomat (which is why I say I was a somewhat reluctant convert to the force). So I did 4 years in New York at the UN, still dealing mainly with decolonisation, and then went back to the Foreign Office and did a couple of years in West African Department at the time of the Biafra war, and then went to Moscow, having been told by Personnel Department that I was going to be a Commercial Officer in Latin America. I was preparing to learn Spanish and do a commercial course when suddenly I was told that in fact I was going to do a political job in Moscow. So, off I went. I said, "well, what about learning some Russian before I go?". "Oh, there won't be time for that," they said, "but you can learn it over there and anyway most of the rest of the Embassy speak Russian so you won't need to." It was a nonsense! It was a great handicap actually having virtually no Russian at all when I arrived.

MM You were also described as Press Attaché?

BB Yes. 60, 70, 80% of my job was as First Secretary, Chancery, doing just straight political work but I was also the Embassy's Press Attaché, responsible for relations with the Press. There was a small group of western journalists in Moscow and it was good actually to have the excuse for maintaining contact with them, cultivating them because they were a good lot and very interesting and usually they were able to tell me more than I could tell them. They were a very good source of information. While I was there the British Government expelled 105 Soviet intelligence officers from Britain, to the consternation of the Russians who did not believe that a second rank power like Britain could possibly behave in such an impertinent way. And so relations went to rock bottom for several

months. There was a good deal of Press interest at that time and so my Press Attaché job suddenly became quite large.

MM Did they not expel a number of our people from Moscow?

BB Well, they couldn't expel 105, as we only had about 18 diplomatic officers in the Embassy. Well, a few more other staff than that, but nothing like 105. So, yes, they expelled 4 from the Embassy and they produced a blacklist of I suppose 18 or 20 people who had been in the Embassy or in other roles in the Soviet Union and who they said would not be allowed to go back, with catastrophic effects for some of them for their careers. A couple of them, at least two or three I think, were academics who were specialising in Soviet affairs and who were really very badly affected by not being allowed to go back, but it was pure revenge and there was no serious suggestion that any of them were spies.

MM Was it apparent to you at that stage that the Soviet economy was not working terribly well?

BB Yes, it was one of the very reassuring things about living in the Soviet Union that the system quite patently did not work. There were all sorts of obvious nonsenses because of the command economy and the failure to adapt the economy to genuine demand. For example, for at least a year of our time in Moscow, it was impossible to buy an ordinary domestic saucepan anywhere in the Soviet Union. The reason for this was that the saucepan manufacturers had been set a target, expressed in tons, and they very quickly realised that you could hit your target very quickly and easily by making huge, restaurant tureens, vast saucepans weighing a quarter of a ton each, rather than making a whole lot of fiddly little domestic saucepans that people actually wanted. So the path to success was not to produce what people wanted but what was laid down in the plan. So that was perfectly obvious and it was reassuring in a way to feel that the country which was our principal adversary in international affairs was so incompetent at so many straightforward economic and management tasks. Although, of course, it did enable them to put huge resources into defence and space in a way that's much more difficult in a market economy.

MM So you were pretty glad to get out of Moscow in the end?

BB Well, it was a fascinating experience, but the restrictions were onerous at that time, at the height of the cold war, particularly made even more icy by the expulsions and counter-expulsions. Restrictions were very great, the security limitations were considerable, the feeling always of being eavesdropped upon, listened in to and your correspondence read and your conversations taped and so on, it can be quite onerous: one gets used to it but it's a relief when it's over and you can resume normal life, so we were quite glad to go. But we were glad to have been there as well, it was an extraordinary experience and of course going to Poland a few years later provided an extremely interesting contrast.

MM Yes, you went to Poland in 1986 so that was well before there had been any significant collapse.

BB Well, yes and no: Solidarity had become a serious challenger to the regime in 1980 and indeed there had been earlier threats as well. The Poles never really settled down to accept communist rule which they always associated (quite rightly) with a system of government imposed on them against their will by the Russians. Solidarity emerged in all its splendour in 1980-81. There was an attempt to negotiate a settlement between Solidarity and the communist regime which was torpedoed by the Polish communist regime, Jaruzelski principally, in 1981 with the declaration of martial law and the fairly gentle detention of Lech Walesa and the other Solidarity leaders, who were later released. So by the time I arrived in 1986 Solidarity was once again beginning to present quite a serious challenge. Walesa was back in the shipyards but still an internationally known figure, exercising immense influence in Poland and a serious challenge to the regime, which was frightened of him and tried very hard to discourage international and diplomatic interest in him, without the slightest success. But none of us foresaw that the whole thing was going to collapse only a couple of years later; and in fact in 1988 when I was about to leave (I left a year early because the job of High Commissioner in Nigeria fell vacant a year earlier than expected, so I did two years rather than three in Poland) but shortly before I left in '88 I

went to Gdansk to see Lech Walesa and say goodbye - because I had seen him intermittently right through my time there - and I asked him, among other things, whether he thought that he would ever again play a recognised constitutional role in Polish life as he had in 1980 before martial law. He said no, he thought that the change would come eventually, the principles that he and Solidarity stood for would eventually triumph, but probably not in his lifetime. And a year later he was President. So even he didn't foresee the speed with which the whole communist system would collapse. It was largely due to Polish political pressure combined with the pressures for economic reform in Hungary.

MM Can you tell us why Poland is important to Britain? I see from today's 'Times' that you've got a letter about not extending.....

BB Well, yes, I hope some of my Polish friends won't be too horrified to see my doubts expressed in print about the wisdom of extending NATO membership to Poland and the other eastern central European countries. Poland is obviously important, not only to Britain but to all Europeans and in fact internationally as much the largest of the countries that lie between Russia and the West. It's always been caught up in this vice-like grip between east and west and has suffered enormously as a result of that geography; and on the whole Poles have felt it necessary to commit themselves firmly in one direction or another in the hope that either the west will protect them against Russia or Russia will protect them against the west. Having been attacked by both the Russians and the Germans over the years they are not unnaturally extremely suspicious of the intentions of both. At the moment, and for the foreseeable future, they see themselves very much as a western country which in every material respect they are, and they are extremely keen to join the European Union and to join NATO and to be firmly in the western camp if there is ever again a split within Europe with Russia on one side and the west on the other. They want to be firmly within the western camp and every person of goodwill would hope that they would be and that they could be. The doubt I have expressed in my letter in the 'Times' today is whether, after giving a guarantee of military protection to Poland as a member of NATO, we would actually be in a position, in the event of a conflict, to fulfil the guarantee. We gave them a guarantee in the '30s of protection against German attack but when the time came and they

were attacked by Germany we declared war on Germany but did absolutely nothing to come to the assistance of the Poles, who have never forgotten or forgiven that (and the French were in the same boat as us). Admittedly we were probably in no position militarily to do anything very much to help them against the German invasion: but we should have been able to foresee that we probably wouldn't be in a position to help them and therefore we shouldn't have promised that we would; and I just have a nasty feeling that we're at it again.

In other words that we have been too lavish with our promises to come to the aid militarily of countries whom we would wish to help but whom in the event we probably can't help. We did exactly the same, as I mentioned in the 'Times' letter, with Australia. In my last posting in Australia before I retired I came across very much the same attitude as I used to come across in Poland, namely people saying that "you British are all very well, you promise us that the Royal Navy and Singapore and so on would always be there to ensure our safety, that if Australia was threatened Britain would be there, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force would come to our defence: but when the time came you were too hard pressed yourselves and you weren't able to do all the things you had promised to do." It seems to me that the aim of statesmanship should not be just to give promises based on goodwill: they should also be based on a reasonable attempt to foresee what sort of circumstances might arise and a judgement about whether one can expect to fulfil promises made in happier times. I have a nasty feeling we are at it again.

MM Well, let's turn from that rather dismal subject to an even worse one, Addis Ababa. You were there in 1982-86 and of course that's a real disaster area, Ethiopia. What were your impressions of that particular country? We did do something to help there of course.

BB We did a great deal to help and it made an enormous difference. We, and the many other countries that came to Ethiopia's aid during the great famine of 1984/5/6, saved millions of lives: a great success story, really, in very, very unpromising circumstances. When I was appointed to Ethiopia as Ambassador, my first Ambassadorial job, a lot of my friends in the Foreign Office said: "You'll go mad with boredom, there will be nothing to do, nobody in London will be interested in anything you report, nobody will even read it. It will all be filed, you'll never get any replies to letters, you won't even have anything to

send telegrams about and you'll be bored to tears." I said: "Nonsense, I'll be glad to have a quiet life for a bit, I have been very busy and it will be fascinating to get to know a country of which not a great deal is known outside the ranks of the Ethiopian specialists." I did have a fairly quiet first year or so although it became increasingly obvious that a serious famine was brewing up; but then in 1984, with a series of television programmes, news items and so on, culminating in the Michael Buerk programme in late 1984, the famine became headline news all over the world, starting in Britain. Britain was the first really to give prominence to this through the media and it became a huge political issue: we were on the front pages for a couple of years. No danger of being bored at all or of nobody in London reading my reports.

MM So what was your reaction to that situation?

BB Well, it was a tricky one, because Ethiopia was governed by an extremely disagreeable communist military dictatorship, combining just about every unpleasant feature that it is possible to imagine: repressive, murderous, headed by a man who had literally murdered his way to supreme power; puppet of the Russians, very much under Soviet domination still, treating its own people extremely badly. Very, very few redeeming features, and operating an economic system which was itself obviously liable to aggravate famine rather than help people to escape from it because there were serious limitations on freedom of movement of food from one area of the country to another, prices were controlled, so market forces were largely prevented from helping to ameliorate the famine.

MM And that really was Mengistu?

BB That was Mengistu and his colleagues. Mengistu had very little freedom of action. He faced a full-scale rebellion from a substantial part of the country, the Eritreans and the Tigreans were in full revolt and there were other lesser revolts in other parts of the country as well. I don't believe myself that Mengistu could or should be blamed for resisting those rebellions. I think any government resists armed rebellion, and he relied for resistance entirely on Soviet support and he had to pay the political price for that. I don't believe he

was ever intellectually a communist, or that he was intellectually anything, he was just interested in preserving power and in resisting the break-up of his country, which was not an ignoble or dishonourable objective in that limited sphere. So, what with rebellion, extreme poverty, a repressive dictatorship, a military dictatorship which was politically insensitive and subordinated to Soviet policy aims, it was just about as unfriendly an environment for western humanitarian aid as it is possible to imagine. So it was really a minor miracle that the thing went as well as it did - the international relief effort was a huge success. It was partly because of the almost total lack of corruption in the Ethiopian establishment, partly because it was a very, very poor country, there's not a great deal to be corrupt with, partly because they had set up, after an earlier famine, an extremely effective body called the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, the RRC, under a tough and effective leader, now in exile in the United States, Dawid, and partly because a great many Ethiopians were extremely glad to be able to be working with western governments and NGO's, relief organisations and so on rather than with the Russians and their allies. We had a lot of willing co-operation from all sides among ordinary Ethiopians and the Ethiopian government; Mengistu and his people really had very little choice but to accept western aid on whatever terms it was given. It worked remarkably well and it was a fascinating time, I think for all western diplomats and other diplomats as well, in Addis Ababa. Kurt Jansson, the very distinguished Finn who was appointed Assistant Secretary General for relief in Ethiopia and came to Addis to co-ordinate and mastermind the whole international relief effort, says in his book about the famine that it was the only time in his long career and great experience of these things when virtually all the diplomats became relief workers, gave up practising diplomacy and became full-time relief workers. It was absolutely true, we did virtually nothing else.

MM Administration?

BB Administration, assessing and identifying needs, identifying overlaps where help was being duplicated, discovering areas where people were running out of food or had run out of food, where perhaps there were no roads or tracks and it was impossible to get vehicles so we had to rely on airdrops or air delivery of aid, reporting on what particular needs would

help to bring relief to people, negotiating with the Ethiopians of course on the terms and conditions on which we could bring in our own people, our own vehicles, our own relief supplies.

MM If you were giving food aid, and I presume you were, how were you able to prevent that food aid from destroying whatever local economy there might have been in food production?

BB Well, at the time, it was a problem that we were all very much aware of, but it really hardly applied because there was almost no food production left. The rains had failed almost throughout the whole of Ethiopia for three years running. This is almost unprecedented, not quite but almost; nearly always in the past there were some areas where the rains had been good and there had been reasonable harvests and it had been possible to move food from one area to another. But this time almost the whole of Ethiopia had been without harvest for about three years so there was almost no local food market to be affected by imports. Some of the relief food was sold under controlled arrangements and the money used for other purposes to pay people for irrigation work and so on. Food for work programmes were increasingly used to generate income for people to raise their own living standards and to give them jobs. If the market has completely collapsed and nobody's got any money you don't do any harm by bringing in food. So many people, around 7 or 8 million, were facing death from starvation within months. Estimates varied a bit but I think everybody agreed that that was roughly the scale of things. This is more than the population of most African states. So the immediate imperative was obviously to get food to them, extremely difficult in a country with very few roads. Even where there are markets people may have to walk for 3 days to get to them and then 3 days to get back, and there are many areas where you can't deliver food by truck. We brought in hundreds of trucks from outside (I say "we", ie the international community), hundreds of trucks to beef up the transport system but we also had to bring in aircraft to deliver food, either by delivering it to tiny airstrips all over the remote areas of the country or by dropping it. We brought in the Royal Air Force and the Luftwaffe, both NATO air forces, to work closely with the Ethiopian Air Force and Ethiopian Airlines, with the RAF and the Luftwaffe operating out

of Addis Ababa with their military markings, and negotiating that with the regime was quite an interesting exercise - negotiating with a Marxist military dictatorship that was very closely allied to the Warsaw Pact: there was huge resistance to it from some of the Ethiopian Politburo who were dead against it because the Russians were deeply suspicious. So that was a substantial job.

There were various interesting aspects to the Ethiopian famine relief effort. I touched on one which was the use of the RAF. We had quite a sizeable contingent from the RAF, actually stationed in Addis Ababa for 14 months flying every single day, Sundays, Christmas, from dawn to dusk. Every day, they wouldn't stop at all. Britain's record in delivering grain, medical supplies and every other kind of supply by air was far and away the top of the league table, quite closely followed by the Germans. The operation itself was interesting, particularly the air drops as distinct from air deliveries to airstrips. The air drops were done jointly by the RAF and the Luftwaffe, who both did the actual drops, they carried the grain to the remote areas and dropped it over prepared dropping zones in collaboration with the Polish Air Force, which was at the time part of the Warsaw Pact. The Polish Air Force provided Soviet-made helicopters and Polish crews who went to the dropping zones in advance, landed the helicopters at the dropping zones, prepared the zones, made sure there were no people who were liable to be hit by the bags of grain as they came out of the aircraft, and who monitored the collection and storage of grain so that it wasn't pinched by the more able-bodied people in the area; the Poles kept in touch with the RAF and the Luftwaffe by radio and guided them in and told them when everything was ready for the drops.

So this, in itself, created quite an interesting diplomatic problem because the air drops all had to be co-ordinated with the Ethiopians and among the various participants in the operation so we had the Luftwaffe and the RAF, ancient foes from the Second World War and now NATO allies, operating very closely with the Poles who were now Warsaw Pact adversaries but had been allies of the British against the Germans in the Second World War and were very delighted to be working with the RAF again; all in a joint operation with the Soviet-dominated, quasi-Warsaw Pact Ethiopian Air Force in a common enterprise to save

Ethiopian lives. A very touching, rather moving situation, and all those concerned, all the air force people from the different countries, got on incredibly well.

MM Were the French or Italians involved in any way?

BB The French somewhat kept their distance because it was very largely an Anglo-Saxon dominated relief operation and also to some extent because Ethiopia had been rather closely linked with the British from the war onwards, with the Emperor taking refuge in Britain and British led forces liberating Ethiopia from the Italians quite early on in the war. So their relationship was somewhat distant. They took part, of course, in the relief effort and French relief organisations like Medecins sans Frontieres were active although politically somewhat difficult from time to time. The Italians were quite prominent. The Italians, through having been a quasi colonial power cum military occupier of Ethiopia, had a very special role, and still do, in Ethiopia. A lot of people of Italian origin were still living in Ethiopia, particularly Eritrea, so they played a significant role. For most of my time there the Italian Ambassador, who was the senior of the western ambassadors, was chairman of the donor government ambassadors' co-ordinating group which played a quite significant role in the co-ordination of the whole relief effort. I succeeded him as chairman when he left, having, though I say it myself, been to a great extent instrumental in getting this group set up, but that was quite an interesting separate aspect of the exercise.

MM Well, we have already touched on your period in Poland. Your final posting was as High Commissioner in Canberra, after having spent a period there in 1970s as Counsellor and Head of Chancery. You must have developed a great deal of knowledge about Australia in your time. Could you start perhaps by telling us why Australia is of particular importance to Britain?

BB Well, without getting into facts and figures most of which I have now forgotten and which are anyway out of date, Australia's relationship with Britain is actually a good deal more meaty and substantial than most people realise. Australia, I think, is still the third biggest outside investor in Britain, a much bigger investor than almost any member of the

European union and certainly, during my time, a bigger investor in Britain than Japan - but not usually recognised as such. Britain is the second biggest investor in Australia. There's hardly a substantial, well known British company that doesn't have a subsidiary or partner operating in Australia. We have enormous trade links. Well over a million Australians visit Britain every year and something approaching that figure of British people visit Australia. There are probably round about 8 or 9 million people in Britain who have relatives in Australia whom they know about and are in touch with; increasingly by e-mail, by fax, by letter and by visit. The connections between the two really are extraordinarily strong in almost every sphere. Sport of course is very, very important, cricket especially but many other sports as well. Australian soap operas on television have played a huge role, not always beneficial, in making British people aware of Australia. The Australian film industry, the production of outstanding films for many years now, have brought Australia more and more into the consciousness of British people. There are terrible stereotypes, many of them very harmful and usually comic, on both sides. I think Australians regard British people as inherently comic figures and to some extent vice versa. Both have enough grain of truth to make the stereotypes quite damaging and seriously distorting.

MM Then of course there is the Royal link?

BB This was a significant theme throughout my final stint in Australia. Bob Hawke was still in power when I arrived, leading an Australian Labor Party government, and he was replaced very soon after my arrival by Paul Keating who was still in office when I left and who was a keen republican. The republican movement in Australia gathered considerable force while I was there. It was widely regarded, both in Britain and in Australia, as an element in British-Australian relations, with the corollary that many people saw any break with the Crown on the part of Australia as damaging to Australian-British relations. So I devoted a good deal of effort and time to try to combat this notion, on the grounds that the relationship is much stronger than would be implied by the suggestion that it depends on our having a common head of state. We have very close relations with many other countries who have their own separate heads of state and that's not regarded as a negative factor in our relations: and I believe the same applies to Australia. On the other hand, of course, it was

difficult to project this point of view and to correct this mistaken picture of the effect of the republican movement on our relations, without appearing to support republicanism. Many people, both in Britain and in Australia, would have been deeply offended by the spectacle of a British High Commissioner seeming to be telling the Australians that they could go ahead without any kind of adverse effects in getting rid of The Queen. One of the elements in this is that as British High Commissioner in a Commonwealth country which also has The Queen as Head of State, I was not representing The Queen. The Queen is represented in Australia by the Governor General, not by the British High Commissioner, so my position vis-à-vis The Queen was exactly the same as that of the Canadian High Commissioner or the New Zealand High Commissioner. When The Queen came to Australia I was not involved, I was not in attendance as it were. I was no more involved than any of the other ambassadors or high commissioners in Canberra. She came as Queen of Australia. Her representative in Australia, the Governor General, was deeply involved and the visit was organised by the Australian Government. It was nothing to do with me but very few Australians realised that. Very few people in Britain realise that a British High Commissioner doesn't represent The Queen so there many pitfalls. It was a bit of a minefield really, this whole topic. So the line that I had to take and did take was that the question of the future of the monarchy in Australia was entirely a matter for the Australians to decide - it was nothing to do with Britain and it was not for us to advise them or press them one way or another; and to stress also that our links were so strong and so substantial in so many different areas that it was hard to conceive, whichever way they went on the issue of the monarchy versus a republic, that any serious harm could be done to our relations. Our relations depended on many other things besides sharing a common crown. But it was a delicate issue and the monarchists, the anti-republicans in Australia, tended to look instinctively towards the British High Commissioner for support against the republicans. Well, of course, that was not something that we could provide but it tended to cause acute disappointment when I refused to enter the lists on one side or the other.

MM Acute disappointment amongst our staunchest friends?

BB Well, that's right, yes, although sometimes these very staunch friends were friends of

a Britain that no longer exists. I think one finds, I am sure you have found the same thing in your overseas service, that the very, very pro-British, both among local people and among the British expatriate community, are very often staunch supporters of a Britain that ceased to exist a few decades ago without their really spotting that things have changed in the home country. That's also a peril, I think, not just in Australia, but for British diplomats generally trying to represent the contemporary Britain, rather than the Britain that local people very often believe themselves to love and respect.

MM Now you were in Canberra at the time of the Falklands affair. What sort of impact did that have in Australia?

BB Not a huge amount, although actually I arrived just after the Falklands war. I don't think the Australians were really in any doubt at any stage about which side they were on. I think they were surprised obviously by the extent of British willingness to resist the occupation of this remote territory. They had a good deal of respect for the military, naval and indeed airborne prowess that we exhibited at the time. One of the very close links between Britain and Australia is the intelligence link. Not just in the sense of not spying on each other but in exchanging information of all kinds: not only covert, but every kind of information and assessment is exchanged. The Australians were particularly interested in sharing with us the lessons of this military engagement. They wanted to know how our various weapons systems had performed and we were obviously able to share a lot of that with them, so it was partly a technical interest.

MM I was wondering what the impact of our membership of the European Union was having on our relationship with Australia and what its implications are for the future?

BB Well, I think there's been a considerable change in Australian attitudes during the period of British membership. I was first in Australia during the 1970s, immediately after Britain became a member of the EEC, as it then was, and in fact at the time of the British referendum on continued membership; and then I was there much later in the early '90s when our membership was much more settled and had really fallen into place. Initially

the Australians undoubtedly regarded it as a betrayal and as significant turning away by Britain from its Commonwealth links and as a drawing into its European shell by Britain, an abandonment of its global interests and responsibilities, at the expense of countries like Australia and New Zealand which stood to lose by Britain throwing in its lot with Europe rather than with the Commonwealth. I think that's now very largely changed, partly because the Australians and the New Zealanders and the others have made their adjustment to British membership of the EEC and have adjusted their trade relations globally to take account of that: but also because they have increasingly come to recognise that British membership of the EEC actually offers opportunities for Australia, rather than being damaging to them. A great deal of Australian investment in Britain, which as I said earlier, is very considerable, is based on the use of Britain as a gateway into Europe, and Britain is an obvious candidate for that kind of role. We share a common language with the Australians. The Australians know us well; they understand our system and they have close links with innumerable businesses and firms in Britain. They can break into the European market most easily and quickly through Britain as a gateway: so that really, in many ways, has strengthened rather than weakened the British-Australian link.

Rather paradoxically it's still quite difficult to get that point across, other than to people who are directly involved in exporting and investing who are already familiar with it: but it was a very common theme of my after-dinner speeches and television interviews and so on throughout my time there. I think we were getting the message through and it was beginning to be appreciated that our membership did offer opportunities rather than a threat, and more and more Australians, I think, recognised that.

MM That is very encouraging. Canberra was a wonderful end to a superb career. What sort of general lessons do you think can be drawn from your many experiences, Sir Brian?

BB Well, I think the lessons are probably different in each case. I think if there is one overall lesson (and I'm not sure that there really is), it's that it has proved much more difficult for Britain to adjust to its post-colonial role than seemed likely in the late '60s, by which time most of our decolonisation efforts had been completed. I felt at the time and I

think many others felt at the time, that we had come through it relatively unscathed and that we had not suffered the traumas that the French, for example, and the Portuguese and the Belgians had suffered through the loss of their colonial roles and their empires, and that we were in good shape to adjust to a different world role in the future. I think that proved to be over-optimistic. I don't think we have really fully recognised our diminished place in the world. I don't think we have entirely adjusted to the fact that we have been less successful economically and socially than a raft of other countries which have now overtaken us. Our political leaders, and to some extent our diplomats, still have a damaging tendency to assert, quite wrongly in most cases, that Britain is still in some sense a leader. The words leadership, giving a lead, playing a leading role, crop up time and time again from the mouths of politicians and diplomats and I think very often this is now an embarrassment. Not everybody in the world does see us as a leading country, not even in Europe. Our failures have been just a bit too many. We still do many things extremely well, somewhat against the odds, punching above our weight as Douglas Hurd used to say, but I think we would be more effective and our influence would be greater if we were a little more modest about our place in the scheme of things and if we stopped talking all the time about the need for us to give a lead and the opportunities for us to give a lead. We should regard ourselves as partners rather than as leaders, and I don't think that lesson has really fully sunk in and it does tend to work against us. Foreigners and particularly Commonwealth friends who are well disposed to Britain tend to wince at assertions of British leadership which don't match their perceptions and I think that's one of the ways in which we have not yet adjusted to a different place in the world. Dean Acheson in other words had a point and I think we still haven't fully found that role. I think more and more of us have realised that role is going to be an essentially European role but there's still a huge resistance to that as we know from our daily newspapers and television programmes.

MM Are we doing enough to argue our case in Europe do you think?

BB Well, this is really a political rather than a diplomatic point, possibly, although I think diplomats have played their part in helping to arouse unreal expectations about our role in Europe. I think it was a great mistake to oversell the advantages to Britain itself of our

joining Europe, as I believed happened in the '60s and '70s; and I think that the combination of trying to stand aside from the main movements and developments in Europe with the assertion that we are in some way a leader in Europe and setting an example to others in Europe, is a very unfortunate one. Whether our diplomats are as guilty of that as our politicians I am not sure, but I think we have colluded with our political masters in making assertions that are not really borne out by reality and it would be fitting to be less assertive. I don't think this is a party political matter, I think that leaders in both the Conservative and the Labour Parties tend to talk too much about Britain's leadership role and the need for Britain to give a lead. This is not our role any more, except in very unusual circumstances and I think it's time we recognised that.

On the other hand, I think that our diplomacy is surprisingly effective and it's very difficult to know why that's so given that we are incredibly under-trained. I think that's another point that I would make as a sort of overall lesson from my years in the diplomatic service: I think it's very remarkable that we manage to hold our place among other diplomats, despite the fact that unlike, for example, other western European diplomats, we go in very, very little for training apart from ad hoc training for particular jobs. I think that very often shows. It exaggerates our pragmatism, which is all very well and can sometimes be a useful corrective to the theoretical utterances of other diplomats, but we can overdo it and we frequently do. We don't really know enough about our own history. We don't know enough economics as diplomats. We don't know enough about international history and European history to perform as well as we should and I think it's sometimes shaming to compare the amount of preparation that we get for a career in diplomacy with the experience of our European partners.

MM Yes, that's interesting. Do you draw any particular lessons from your time in Poland?

BB Well, I think the main thing was that the role of diplomats shouldn't be and isn't purely to try to maintain good relations with the host country. It's always a temptation to diplomats to bend over backwards to improve relations at almost any cost, because it's nicer to be on good terms than bad with the people you see in the Foreign Ministry and to be

told things that you wouldn't otherwise hear. The atmosphere is more pleasant and so on. Here we were in a country with a very unpopular regime, running a very unpopular system, regarded as imposed from outside, very anxious indeed to try to convey the impression that there was no serious or relevant opposition to them in the rest of the country, and one had to be prepared to accept a good deal of criticism and protest and objection in, for example, maintaining contact with Solidarity leaders. Very soon after I arrived in Warsaw, in fact within days, I was called to the Foreign Ministry and told that if I invited Solidarity people to the Queen's Birthday Party which was coming up a couple of weeks later, then nobody from the Polish Government would attend and the whole thing would be a fiasco. I had to say, "well: a) the invitations have already gone out, so you're too late; b) I am not going to be told by anybody whom I may or may not invite to my National Day party; c) I regard Solidarity people as an important element in Polish public life and diplomatic contacts with them as essential to anybody who wants to follow in a sympathetic way what's going on in Poland; and d) if you and your official and ministerial colleagues don't feel able to come to a party that Solidarity people are at, I should be very, very sorry and we shall miss you, but it would be surely a great mistake on your part and I hope your minister will think again." The official was painfully embarrassed at having to deliver this message in the first place and said, well, he had expected me to react in that way and he would report to his minister accordingly; and indeed of course the Solidarity people all came in force and so did the government people, as always on these occasions. They thought that with a new Ambassador they could bully him into cancelling invitations to Solidarity. Every time I went to see Lech Walesa in Gdansk I was always summoned to the Foreign Ministry during the following week and lectured about how damaging this was and how I was getting a false impression from this nobody, from this person who had no importance and no role in Polish public life. We used to have great arguments sometimes in the European Community Ambassadors' meetings about the relevance of Solidarity and whether it was really a legitimate function of western diplomats in Poland to offer Solidarity people the degree of protection that came with links to western embassies and the degree of recognition and status that our contacts with them conferred. There were some who used to say "Solidarity is really finished, we should concentrate on influencing the government and the communist party because they run the country whether we like it or not. The more we are seen to be

talking to Solidarity the less influence we have. We can help the Poles more effectively by recognising the realities and concentrating on the government." The rest of us used to say that this would be a betrayal of everything that the west stood for, that Solidarity represented democratic, liberal principles and that one of the functions of diplomacy was to encourage the sustaining of those principles against repression, totalitarianism, communism and all the values that stood against us. In fact, I think the way that things came out in the end obviously justified the position of those of us who took the latter view.

MM Have you got any opinions that you would like to express in relation to the matter of arms sales?

BB Yes, particularly the question of arms sales to dubious countries. I had a particular experience in Nigeria to which we had already, before my time there as High Commissioner, sold very considerable quantities of arms, tanks, aircraft and so on, weapons systems most of which were rusting away, unused and un-maintained, lacking people with the skills and training to use them. I found very soon after arriving in Lagos as High Commissioner that I was under really quite strong pressure from London, mainly from the Ministry of Defence but also to some extent from the FCO, to try to sell more British arms to the Nigerians, and this was pretty un-promising stuff: the Nigerian economy was in serious trouble and it was obvious that Nigeria didn't actually need any more arms, they were not threatened by anybody from outside and it was very difficult to imagine in what circumstances they would be able to make any use of weapons of the kind that we were trying to sell them. So eventually, prompted by a particularly offensive letter from somebody quite senior in the MOD asking why, during my stewardship, arms sales to Nigeria had fallen away so badly and what I was proposing to do about it, I wrote a carefully considered blockbuster letter, which I copied to someone equally senior in the Foreign Office, pointing out that one part of the machine in London was constantly instructing me to go and see the Nigerian Finance Minister to tell him to cut down on unnecessary public spending and in particular to cut down on lavish spending by the army in order to ensure that Nigeria would qualify for western aid and be able to reform its economy in line with IMF policies, supported by London: and another part of the machine in London was urging me to persuade the

Nigerians to spend money that they hadn't got on weapons that they didn't need and for which they would never pay - so that at the end of the day, as had happened with previous arms sales, it would be the British taxpayer through the export credit guarantees department, ECGD, which would pay for these sales. So the British taxpayer would be paying the British arms manufacturer to send unused and unwanted hardware to Nigeria and I questioned whether any British national interest was served by this ludicrous kind of transaction. I took a deep breath and waited for a tremendous rocket in reply and of course, predictably as I should have realised, I got no reply at all. I later learned from a friend who was in Whitehall at the time that my letter had triggered an extensive debate in Whitehall: committees had been set up to examine this whole question and, of course, as one might have expected, it proved utterly impossible to get any kind of agreement: the departmental interests involved were so entrenched that nobody was prepared to give way. The MOD insisted that it was the absolute duty of every head of mission overseas to sell arms to anybody who could be persuaded to buy them on whatever terms. The FCO was stuck in the middle, the Treasury and the international finance people were on the whole persuaded that it was a bad idea to sell arms to countries that didn't need them and couldn't afford them. But I do think this illustrated a more general point that there is a very, very strong arms sales lobby in London, it's strongly represented within and adjacent to the Ministry of Defence, it's represented in a number of posts overseas by its own officers, it operates essentially on behalf of an important but narrow part of the private sector in Britain, it represents certainly a substantial subsidy to this particular bit of the private sector in Britain. We saw from the Scott inquiry what kind of serious effects it has on the level of internal discussion and transparency in Whitehall and in my view it's quite seriously overdone and I think it's time that somebody took a careful look at the nature of the so-called defence sales business and whether in fact it tends to distort many aspects of our international diplomacy. We give it far too much emphasis and we're not nearly discriminating enough about our customers.

MM Thank you very much, I think that leads very neatly onto another point, and that is the general question of export promotion, Sir Brian, could you say something about your opinion of that always perennial topic?

BB Yes, I have somewhat mixed feelings about it, as in the case of arms sales it is a form of public subsidy to the private sector for which the private sector pays very, very little in return. If successful it produces benefits almost entirely for the private sector rather than for the exchequer and on the face of it it's an activity that the private sector ought to be able to fund and staff for itself. On the other hand I think that, particularly for medium and small scale businesses in Britain, it's quite difficult to break into the export business without some sort of local expert advice and it's hard to see who is going to provide that kind of advice if not the commercial sections in our Embassies and High Commissions. I think this applies particularly obviously in developing countries, third world countries where importing and trading and investing and receiving investment are very much a government activity, or government-controlled activity, and where diplomats have the contacts and knowledge of who counts and who needs to be approached and what permissions have to be gained and the state of local legislation and so on, which a visiting British businessman couldn't possibly acquire for himself. So it seems to me there's an obvious case for a degree of trade promotion in developing countries just as there used to be in the communist countries, and still is in the remaining communist countries where again, trade is a government-controlled activity and Embassies have the contacts and the local knowledge which is essential if you are going to trade with or invest in communist countries. The case is much more complicated I think when you come to first world countries like Australia, where we had quite a substantial commercial effort, or the United States where again, in principle, businessmen ought to be able to make their own contacts, especially if there's no language barrier as in Australia and the United States; and indeed the large companies don't need help from our missions in countries like that and on the whole don't seek it - in fact on the whole they're allies in providing information and insights which are useful to our missions rather than the other way round. But even in Australia it's quite difficult for a small Midlands businessman to get the essential preliminary information about an investment in, or an export contract with Australia, to establish where there's a market for his particular product, to establish who might be a useful agent for him in future trading, to help him set up a programme of visits and meetings when he goes out to do his first reconnaissance of the market, and I think it's perfectly reasonable for us to do as most other comparable

countries do, and give a degree of support for that. I think it's probably, on balance, healthy that we now require some degree of payment for these services because it stops people just going in for it casually, on the basis that they've got nothing to lose and they can get a nice subsidised swan out of it. So I think we've probably got it about right. It would certainly, I think, be a mistake to close it down altogether as has occasionally been suggested. It's one of those activities where all our competitors do it in one way or another, sometimes in a different form, and I think we would suffer if we alone didn't give some support to our would-be exporters and investors.

MM What do you think about this frequently raised suggestion that we might do better if we had more businessmen appointed to the Diplomatic Service as Ambassadors?

BB Well, I think it represents a misunderstanding of the function of Ambassadors and of businessmen. Businessmen should, if they are any good, know about business and Ambassadors should, if they are any good, know about government and politics and the economy of the country that they are serving in: and each of them needs the other. If you try and mutate the roles so that the Ambassador is a businessman, he really has nothing very much to offer to other businessmen who presumably know as much as he does about business. It isn't information about business that they need from the Ambassador: it's information about who's on the up and up and who's going down the scale in the government, who are the key officials, what the investment climate is like, how the economy is likely to perform in the future, what the openings are, what the risks are - these are things which are best judged and advised on by diplomats who are experienced in making these assessments and who have a wider scale of perception than most businessmen. Businessmen don't want advice from other businessmen, they want advice from people who are politically and economically and socially savvy.

MM Thank you very much. I think perhaps, finally, it might be a good idea, if you would, to say something about this matter of overdue concentration on one's own national interests to the exclusion of consideration of wider interests.

BB Yes, it's a thing that made me uneasy at various times during my career, partly influenced I think by the degree of idealism or wider vision in the old Colonial Office where all of us were very conscious of the needs and requirements of people in far-flung countries who were much worse off than ourselves and for whom we had a special responsibility. So we didn't concentrate exclusively on British national interests in dealing with our colonial territories and in fact the Colonial Office was committed to the paramountcy of interests of the colonial people, even when these clashed with British interests. And then also at the United Nations there was a certain effort on the part of many of those who served at the UN, particularly perhaps in the 1960s when I was there, to try to look at global interests and the interests of all countries rather than just looking at everything through the reflecting prism of one single country and its own interests. But I think this tendency to be rather cynical about one's own national interests at the expense of everybody else has grown as the years have gone by. We've all become disillusioned with utopianism - I think the collapse of communism has tended to accentuate this trend; we don't have to compete with the communist countries any more for influence and standing in third world countries; and it's now traditional, particularly in discussing European affairs, for both sides of the House of Commons, to take the single currency as an obvious example, to say that Britain's decision on the single currency should be determined purely and exclusively in terms of British national interest. Nobody is prepared to get up and say we should consider Europe's interest in making this new system work and, at the end of the day, Europe's interest is also Britain's interest, so to a degree this is a clash between short-term and long-term British interests. But it now takes a brave man, or woman, to speak up in Whitehall or in diplomatic correspondence for a wider vision than immediate short-term national interest and I think that's a loss. It's a pity that more of us aren't prepared to look beyond our immediate national horizons and I think we suffer from that, and I'm afraid I think the world will suffer from that. It isn't only in Europe that I think this is a disservice, it's also in our attitudes to the third world, to aid, to trading conditions as they affect very poor countries, and to the whole question of the huge, and growing, disparities in wealth between the richest in the world and the poorest in the world. When we faced that kind of huge disparity in this country, in the last century, it took far-sighted and idealistic people to see that it was in everybody's interests to try to remedy this great disparity. It's now time, I think, for far-

sighted people in all our countries to recognise that vast disparities in living standards between the exorbitantly rich and the shamingly poor in the global village urgently need to be remedied, in the interests almost as much of the rich as of the poor. It will mean large transfers of resources redistributed from rich to poor, but in the end it has got to be done: and when it is done, we shall all be better off, just as we were better off when wealth was more justly distributed within our own country.

[Postscript by Brian Barder: Readers of this transcript should please bear in mind that this interview was recorded before the general election of May, 1997, and that some of the comments on government policies and practices do not apply - or apply with less force - to those of the new government elected then. BLB, 30 July 1998]