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Roger Campbell BEETHAM

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Roger Beetham interviewed by Jimmy Jamieson on 21 October 2002.

JJ You joined the Diplomatic Service in 1960 straight after Oxford where you did modern languages which were obviously going to be useful to you in your career. But after two years in London you were posted to UKDEL in Geneva to deal with the Disarmament Conference and spent three years there, your first but by no means your last taste of international diplomacy. Did you enjoy it?

RB It was great fun. First of all it was the beginning of a new Disarmament Conference which no-one thought was going to last more than a few months. In fact it has lasted ever since 1962 and it gave me a taste for international diplomacy, which I retained throughout my career. It was also fun because one was coming into direct contact with ministers and for a young Third Secretary this was quite exciting. And I found them relatively easy to get on with, as long as you treated them like normal people, which many diplomats don't; and it was a good experience for me because if one looks at my career I have been lucky enough to have had more to do with ministers than most middle level mainstream diplomats, so I enjoyed that. It was also fascinating to meet East European diplomats, which was not normally easy unless one served behind the Iron Curtain. The interesting thing was that they were, not the Russians but the so-called satellite countries, much freer when they were outside their own country so one could really get to know them, have them round for drinks and meals and that was enjoyable. We also had a quite exciting defection by a Russian whilst we there so it was a fun time and quite satisfying for a young Third/Second secretary.

The other thing that was important, looking at the rest of my career, is that from Geneva I went four times to Washington, as we used to "go and get our instructions" from the Americans as we used to joke, but what struck me was the very first time I went, I had been to the States when I was 11 but that was different, going there and working with the Americans on four occasions made me aware that I was a European. As Brits we were European. One had the illusion that because we saw lots of American television, and spoke the same language, somehow we were still very close to them; and I was immediately struck by how different they are. That impression was reinforced later when I was posted there. So it gave me a consciousness of however much the differences might strike one between the

Brits and the French and the Germans nevertheless we have much more in common with them as Europeans. The illusion of a common language rather conceals that. Thinking that this was 1962 makes it fascinating to reflect how many people in this country forty years later still have this same illusion. But of course the common systems, and language do make it easier for the Americans to deal with us than the other Europeans for the Americans are not anymore gifted with foreign languages than we are. It is an illusion, fundamentally, so for all those reasons it was a fascinating and extremely important first post for me.

JJ Good. How much actual progress was made in these discussions, which, as you say, continue to this day?

RB Well, extraordinary; in the three years I was there we made more progress than probably in the subsequent thirty years because after the Cuban missile crisis the Russians suddenly changed policy and we got, in 1963 and then in 1965, two landmark agreements. One was the Partial Test Ban Treaty, which I was involved in. We did that mostly in the summer break, and therefore I was not allowed to go on leave in the summer break

RB Once the political decision was taken, then 18 months later we had the Non-Proliferation Treaty, so it was actually against the background of the cold war at its worst, two remarkable agreements and that for us was very exciting.

JJ No doubt the Cuba crisis had brought this on. The Russians recognised that it could easily lead to a nuclear war with no winners if some sort of agreement didn't take place.

RB That's right and the Americans, Kennedy with much support from Macmillan, had struck while the iron was warm, but it was interesting, it showed how you could reach agreements in the middle of the cold war, and agreements which stuck.

JJ And it was fortunate I suppose that Kennedy was in the White House, knew Europe, knew Britain much better than some of his successors, who were very isolationist.

RB Indeed it did help. One fascinating thing about this being on duty during the summer

holidays was that all the pre-negotiations for the Partial Test Ban Treaty were done in the summer and I had to decypher all those telegrams and if you remember in those days it was book cypher. This would take hours and hours but it was fascinating having to decypher these highly secret exchanges.

JJ So after that very rewarding stage at Geneva you went to Washington. What did you do there, what were your responsibilities?

RB I was Second Secretary Commercial. It was the only job I have had in my whole career that I would say was not satisfying. My main role was to liaise between the Commercial Minister in Washington and the Director of Trade Promotion who had just moved to New York so it had this awkward situation the commercial minister being in overall charge and responsible to the Ambassador and the Director of Trade Promotion in New York doing most of the work and I had to shuttle between the two. It wasn't easy and it wasn't satisfying but it was fascinating being in the States at that time, because after my Geneva experience I was quite pleased to be in Washington. The other element of dissatisfaction, it was nothing to do with the job, but I happened to be there in 3 and a half years of unhappiness, it was three and a half years of race riots, I arrived just after the Los Angeles race riots, then departed after the Washington race riots, and secondly it was the period when Vietnam was getting out of hand and of course led to Johnson deciding not to seek re-election. I left the day after Nixon was elected, and I remember saying to my wife, mark my words, no good will come of this! I was glad to have been there and also to live in the States, to be reinforcing the impressions I had gained on my visits from Geneva, that Britain was a European country. I've been back to Washington lots of times since and happily it has become a much different place, it is now a happier city although there is of course the black no-go area.

JJ How did you go about organising export promotions, effectively services and goods? Door-stepping companies in particular areas or particular fields of activity?

RB In the Washington area there wasn't all that much business but I had a particular responsibility for store promotions, British Weeks and so on, and also for trade fairs. There are a lot of trade fairs in Washington, so that I had to organise British participation in fairs

which was fun because it showed that I had an organisational ability which I enjoyed exercising.

JJ What was the quality of the British firms that took part in these weeks or promotions?

RB Not very good. And one of the problems which we will touch on when we talk about my commercial role in Delhi later is that the good firms didn't need us; and so we tended to be dealing with the not very good firms who simply didn't in many cases comprehend that America was a different market. Again the disillusionment because the language is the same, everything is easy, and they were quite unprepared, if they had succeeded in the States, one in 25 businesses succeeded, then they were completely overwhelmed by the demand and if they didn't succeed then of course they would blame us. But we did spend an awful lot of time helping firms who really shouldn't have crossed the Atlantic. In many cases they underestimated the amount of time needed to get established.

JJ Did you feel that it was an open market, in other words, were the Americans sympathetic to what you were doing? Were they prepared to buy British, or did they have a natural tendency to say, 'No, our stuff is better. We do it better.'

RB It was the latter, you had really to sell and persuade them and we suffered an image problem. We were still promoting the Beefeater image, because that was one that the Americans wanted to connect with Britain, but that was a major disadvantage in selling things. We had a very dynamic information officer who spent much of his time trying to get rid of this image, but the ordinary American tourist wanted that image. He didn't want to go and visit power stations, so between the two there was a sort of cultural clash.

JJ But this was at a time when British industry was not exactly gleaming with promise and modernity. It must have been a problem.

RB It was, but what's interesting is that even when it was the cutting edge, Rolls Royce for example, one of the biggest deals Rolls Royce ever did in the States was in the late sixties whilst I was there, and it proved their undoing. This is what bankrupted them. They were so

excited at the size of the order that the Americans fleeced them, basically. Suddenly one of the best British firms greatly under-estimated the requirements. I remember thinking, I'm no more numerate than the next man, but, doing the figures, I said to Rolls Royce, this doesn't add up. Don't worry, they said. That was one of the best companies. You got the small firms who under-estimated the market but even the big ones did so too.

JJ Did you find it easier to sell on the east coast than the west or was there not a problem? How did the sellers themselves manage? What was their attitude?

RB It was easier on the east and on the west coast. It was the middle which was difficult. One thing I discovered was the size of the United States, the fact that there is middle America which stretches from the Rockies in the west to the Appalachians in the east which is a completely different world. I did as much travelling as I could outside my job which wouldn't take me further than New York but I used to say to people, once I had found my feet there, it is very important to go out to Skyline Drive, which runs along the ridge of the Appalachians, go to a place called Front Royal, which was only an hour's drive from Washington, buy the local paper and you might as well be anywhere in Kansas. It always fascinated me. This is something that Europeans don't always understand. It's as relevant today as it ever was, once it was no longer the East Coast establishment running the United States administration, we were dealing with a completely different mind set of Americans. This is one of the keys to George Bush, even Reagan was only halfway there because he was a Californian.

JJ This is the Nixon White House? How did you find American attitudes in general? By this time America had effectively assumed leadership of the free-world and as Dean Acheson said, 'The UK had lost an empire and not yet found a role.' Did this reversal of the old positions in a sense affect the general attitudes of Americans to British government, things British?

RB There was a lot of impatience. We seemed to be so slow to change, not just we the British but the Europeans as well, and a feeling that we really ought to be getting together. Because the Embassy was staffed with very bright young First Secretaries spending all their

days down at the State Department this helped to induce the illusion that something was special but away from all that the Americans were impatient that we weren't entering the market in the way that they had.

JJ Well, after Washington you returned to London in 1969 and you went into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office News Department as a spokesman. Which particular subjects did you cover?

RB I was responsible for Europe; this meant our still rather difficult approach to the European Community and other European matters such as the thorny subject of Berlin. To this day I still don't know how I got posted there. It was partly Robin Haydon, then Head of News Department. I had worked with him in Washington and we got on very well, so he must have seen talent in me which at the time I didn't realise I had, but it was certainly one of the best jobs. It was exciting and I took to it like a duck to water.

JJ A talent for getting on with the very sharp press lobby, London foreign correspondents as well as those in Fleet Street?

RB Yes, perhaps I am a non-typical diplomat, or was, in a sense that I always liked both politicians and journalists, rather than diplomats. I found, perhaps because I am a Lancastrian, my family was fairly straight-forward and I found that that was absolutely vital in dealing with the press, you had to be straight and straight-forward. I took to it right away and managed to make some pretty early friendships with journalists that survive today. That was very important when I was hit within 6 weeks of joining the News Department by the Soames affair.

JJ Yes, we'll come to that. But it's a difficult job in a sense that there are things that you cannot say however hard you are pressed, off or on the record, and you have to be very careful that something you let slip doesn't appear as a headline in the Guardian the next morning; a dangerous job in other words.

RB Yes, that's true. But the other danger is that you have to establish trust, and that means

with a journalist understanding you can't say everything, but what they don't forgive is if you know more than you say and you mislead them in your line and that is as difficult as going too far. Once or twice I did go a little far and I remember once, I think a comment by Lord Brimelow, Sir Tom Brimelow, when he said, 'I see the whole of our brief is on the front page of the Daily Express today.' I said, 'Yes, but it is accurate.' He said, 'I suppose for the Daily Express it is. But I rarely got into trouble on that score. It was important also that Robin Haydon, Head of News Department, always backed us up. But, to my mind the establishment of the trust of the journalists was absolutely vital.

JJ But it was quite reasonable nevertheless to be quite economical with the truth; you didn't have to tell them everything.

RB And also you have to be a bit selective. I remember on one occasion when one of the journalists, our mutual friend Squire Barraclough, the diplomatic correspondent of the Express, was on to something about Norway during one of my briefings. He was in the company of other journalists. I was quite happy that he should have this story but I didn't want it to come out in all the press. I was desperately trying to change the subject and he was desperately trying to pursue it.

JJ Did you have what was known when I was in the Commonwealth Office News Department as a group of "trusties", journalists to whom you could say things which they might use indirectly, but not immediately, but which served as useful background for future articles? Did that run on your side of the house?

RB Yes, but it was more difficult I think because the Commonwealth was a special subject and there are particular countries that some of the journalists became expert on and it was easier to trust them. We could do it but one had to be a little bit careful. It was perhaps easier during the negotiations about entry into the community, the way you could differentiate more easily between the experts and those you could talk to off the record, partly because no-one in News Department was under any illusion that we were the sole source; the knowledge that they could go to other people...

JJ Including ministers, who could be more open...

RB There was a joke at the time when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister that he had investigated eighteen leaks that happened during one year but they couldn't publish the report because it was established that seventeen of the leaks came from the Prime Minister himself.

JJ The Labour Government was preparing to resume negotiations in 1970 but at that time there occurred what is known famously as the Soames affair; Soames was posted as a political ambassador to Paris and certainly upset de Gaulle. Perhaps you could tell us about that?

RB It was for me a pretty traumatic experience because I had only been in News Department for about six weeks in 1969 when this famous affair hit us. I suddenly realised in preparing for this interview that of all the people very closely involved in the decisions of what to do about the interview, the lunch that Soames had with de Gaulle, I'm the only one still alive. The key people were Harold Wilson, Prime Minister, Michael Stewart, Foreign Secretary, Denis Greenhill, the PUS, John Robinson in charge of the European Department, Robin Haydon, Head of News Department and me, in London. Of course Michael Palliser was at number 10 and there was the Paris Embassy, but...

JJ Wasn't Lord Chalfont involved in this as well?

RB Not directly. He had a more direct responsibility for disarmament matters. He was in theory the European minister but in the decisions relating to the Soames affair he wasn't involved, so I've tried to reconstruct as clearly as I can what actually happened. There is, as you know, a pretty good account in Hugo Young's book, 'This Blessed Plot.' There's quite a good account in John Dickie's memoirs...

JJ The Daily Mail correspondent?

RB The Daily Mail diplomatic correspondent. I've read everything in the French biographies of de Gaulle. None of them is quite complete. The funny thing is apart from

John Dickie no one has previously asked me about this. Anyway, trying to reconstruct things from the time of the lunch with de Gaulle, it was clear from his French biographers, de Gaulle wanted to be nice to Soames and make a gesture. This gesture was the lunch and then the suggestion, which fitted in with all the things de Gaulle had been saying; that there should be a different approach to European co-operation. Soames re-constructed this conversation and took great care not to clear but to send a copy of his reporting telegram to the Elysée, to check that there was nothing wrong with it. And it was checked both by the Secretary General of the Elysée and Monsieur Debré who was then Foreign Minister. They made one or two little changes but confirmed it was an accurate account. The reaction in London was a bit mixed, there were those like John Robinson, who as Hugo Young said, saw this as a trap, though others felt it posed a dilemma and then others who believed, with Soames, that this was an approach that we should pursue. The synthesis of all this was a great deal of caution for two reasons. One, that we didn't actually share de Gaulle's ideas of a "directoire" either for NATO, which he had already proposed, or for Europe, so that...

JJ The directoire being just two or three major countries rather than...

RB That's right. So there would be Britain, France, Germany and possibly Italy as far as the European Community was concerned. That wasn't our approach and we didn't really want to go down that way because not only would it not lead to the sort of European Community we wanted to join but we knew it wouldn't be acceptable to the other five members of the EEC. Secondly, we were, and perhaps this is a bit more controversial, we believed that the only way we would join the EEC was with the support of the five who would somehow convince the French, or maybe de Gaulle, who of course, was not eternal, and we could convince his successors so we had put all our trust in working with the five and the feeling was that even if we had shared de Gaulle's view, if we went down that route, this would be a serious breach of trust towards the five. This is how, basically, the Foreign Office and number 10 reacted. At that stage the reporting telegrams hadn't been going on a wide distribution, they were only distributed to posts abroad after this basic reaction had been established.

JJ British reaction?

RB British reaction, and the number of people who were involved in this was quite small. John Robinson in particular had a fear that the Quai d'Orsay would misuse both the de Gaulle approach and whatever our reaction would be because he had this fundamental distrust of the Quai who didn't want us in the EEC and certainly didn't like the de Gaulle approach, and he feared that they would be looking for another opportunity to wrong-foot us. Whether this was justified or not is a matter of opinion. I think there was something in it, and it was this fear that we had to, if we didn't play our cards very carefully, the Quai would use it against us, that led to what Michael Palliser subsequently described as mistakes in the handling. An extra complication was that Harold Wilson was about to go off on a visit to Bonn and he was sure, the Foreign Office was sure, that some sort of briefing would be given to the Germans by the French. We weren't confident at all that this briefing would be accurate. In fact at that stage we over-estimated the personal relations between the Quai and the Auswärtiges Amt because when...

JJ The German Foreign Ministry?

RB Yes, who hadn't been given any version by the French, but there was much discussion, both before Wilson left for Bonn and when he was on the plane in the air, as to how much exactly he should tell the Chancellor, and in the end, like many compromises a sort of messy summary was agreed which was so difficult to understand that Kiesinger didn't really know what Wilson was talking about, so although I think, with hindsight, it wasn't a bad idea to get our retaliation in first, it wasn't done very well. The other complication arose because things were starting to leak. John Robinson and a few others had been absolutely convinced that the Quai would leak at some stage a grossly inaccurate version to use against us. Now at the time of the lunch the press didn't know that Soames had been to see de Gaulle, let alone what they talked about but this started to become common knowledge, and in particular, Mohsin Ali, who was then the chief diplomatic correspondent of Reuters who was more than a normal daily contact, almost an hourly contact, said to me, 'look we know there was this meeting, please make sure that we the British, Reuters, are the first to be told about it when you have decided what you are going to say. As time went on, and time being hours, not days, I said well look Mohsin, will you tell me, will you alert me if you get any sense that this is leaking from Paris sources. We talked earlier about trust and it was absolutely vital

that Mohsin Ali and I trusted each other because he was invaluable in tipping me off when things were leaking and equally I had undertaken we would make sure that the British press was briefed and Reuters in particular as soon as we felt that we were no longer masters of the situation. Indeed it did start to leak at about the time Wilson was on his way to Bonn. We had decided to do two things; one, prepare a friendly Italian newspaper to write an article essentially based on an off the record briefing from Soames' reporting telegram. That had being set up for the following week assuming things started to leak in Paris. Well they did and I at once sensed quite a haemorrhaging but Mohsin gave me convincing enough information for me to alert Robin Haydon, then to alert John Robinson, Dennis Greenhill and Michael Stewart that things were getting out of hand...

JJ Michael Stewart being Minister for Europe?

RB No, he was Foreign Secretary. He was very important because, there have been suggestions that this was officials acting without ministerial cover, nothing could be further from the truth. At every single stage Dennis Greenhill and Michael Stewart were told of and authorised everything that we did. Anyway, I warned them that things were starting to get out of hand and we knew that the Quai had tipped off the Figaro inaccurately, we heard this before it actually appeared in the Figaro, this was just what John Robinson was waiting for and, if you will forgive my quoting him, exactly, in a family interview, he jumped up and down, with Robin Haydon and Dennis Greenhill and me, 'We've got the fuckers, we've got the fuckers.' This is the sad side of things because he was absolutely convinced the French, or the Quai d'Orsay, were going to misuse the information. To me it was rather sad that they did, but he was absolutely delighted because it confirmed all his worst suspicions.

JJ But it didn't do us any good.

RB No, it didn't. However, it was then decided that the only thing to do was to summon the British diplomatic correspondents and give them the full Soames account. When this had been done the French criticised us for only giving a partial account but one of the important things was that Robin Haydon and I both said that if we are going to do this we have to be totally open; it is no good giving a doctored version so I remember, we just topped and tailed

and ran off the reporting telegram. It was very important that what we gave the press was accurate.

JJ You had the very solid back-up that the French government had itself agreed the text of that telegram.

RB Indeed, and I think it came out. So it was important that we gave the press the full account, and of course Mohsin Ali got his coup. I think that although, unfortunately I don't think it was handled very well with Christopher Soames because he wasn't really consulted as to whether we should do this, partly because time was very short and he disapproved. Where I think we were perhaps open to criticism was that although the version we gave was exactly the same as in the reporting telegram, I mean glosses were put on it, and I think it might have been better left as it was; but what is important in all this although there were only a few people involved that at no stage were officials acting without ministerial cover. For me as you can imagine it was quite a traumatic experience. It stood me in good stead though after because of Robin Haydon's and my insistence that what we gave to the press should be full and accurate.

JJ I suppose also that your involvement in the Soames affair and your very good liaison with the British press, and Reuters in particular, stood you in very good stead when you then went shortly after to be Sir Geoffrey Rippon's press officer when he headed up the negotiations which opened in the autumn of 1970.

RB Yes, it was almost seamless because before that George Thomson had been put in charge of preparations for the negotiations and if Labour hadn't lost the general election in June 1970 George Thomson would have been the Geoffrey Rippon and there wasn't really a formal appointment of me as the spokesman for the delegation. It was just assumed because I travelled with George Thomson and his pre-negotiation visits, it was just assumed I would do it but I think that baptism of fire of the Soames affair must have helped my credibility somewhat so when, well first of all if you remember Antony Barber was supposed to be the minister negotiating then when Ian McLeod died he moved to the Treasury and Geoffrey Rippon took over.

JJ The interesting thing I suppose is that the Conservative government having had to take up the reins of the negotiations I assume more or less took the briefs that had been prepared over the previous months, as they were, with very little amendment or slant.

RB Indeed, when I was preparing for this, my memory was that the Conservatives were very proud, and it helped them a great deal when subsequently Harold Wilson tried to row back on the points he had previously favoured, as Conservative ministers kept saying we picked up the brief prepared by the Labour government. There was no time to do anything else. Of course during negotiations the Labour government might have put more emphasis on this or that, but it is true that what had been prepared for the Labour government was exactly the same brief that the Tories proceeded with.

JJ Looking at it from a personality point of view I had the impression that Antony Barber was a very dry, no doubt efficient, minister dealing with the briefs; Geoffrey Rippon had the very open, relaxed "cigars and brandy" approach to diplomacy which I think possibly our friends in Europe appreciated more.

RB His great advantage was his self-confidence and relaxed style. During the month that Tony Barber was doing it he was very nervous, he wasn't well, he had an ulcer or something similar and he was in some pain, he was not relaxed. It was very difficult, mind you, with Ted Heath looking over everyone's shoulder, because Ted Heath was very conscious that he had not been able to succeed in the 1961 to 1963 negotiations and I think that Tony Barber would have taken a somewhat less relaxed and independent attitude. Geoffrey Rippon felt, well, I've been given this job, I will do it and I will account for my actions afterwards. I think it would have been a bit more difficult with Tony Barber. Of course it might have been that if he had stayed there that he would have relaxed more and got into it but it was a great help to us all in the negotiating team to have someone with Geoffrey's style.

JJ And of course he was also a lawyer which helped. He could not escape the legal intricacies and entanglements when you are drafting a treaty.

RB Indeed, but the other aspect of the thing that was absolutely vital was that he was a successful QC and had earned a lot of money at the Bar; he had the ability that all good QCs have to pick up a brief and absorb it very quickly. He was known as relaxed and so on, but the other side of Geoffrey Rippon, less well known, was that he had an extremely sharp brain and picked up things very quickly; and this was a great plus.

JJ The general approach of the British government nevertheless, one must assume, was that we must on this second occasion join the EEC, not regardless of the terms but that was the end that had to be achieved and if there had to be compromises on our initial position at least then that had to be accepted.

RB That's true and that was the big difference between 1970 and 1961 to 1963 and the determination to join and I suppose if there is to be a criticism it must be that that overriding political objective sometimes meant that because we were in something of a hurry, we were forced to swallow things which maybe Tony Barber, maybe a Labour government, might have fought a bit harder for, although, as you know, in Con O'Neill's account of the negotiations, he feels we actually tried too hard for New Zealand. We could have got away with less. But you're quite right that this imperative, this political imperative did govern our approach to the negotiations, and it was a political imperative, the argument that everyone said at the time in the government was that the economic pluses and minuses were finely balanced but there is absolutely no doubt about the political imperative.

JJ Also Con O'Neill, who was the senior official leading the negotiations, did say, again in Hugo Young's book, 'This Blessed Plot', that staying out of the EEC would in the long run be more damaging to the British economy than joining it. Presumably the Treasury had done its sums as far as they could, looking into their crystal ball, that this had to be done, we had to join.

RB Yes, I think there was the danger, the economic danger of exclusion. It is very interesting when you look at the Treasury at that time because one can be, and I personally am, very critical of the way the Treasury at almost every stage since the inception of the European Community has been either sceptical if not actually hostile to our involvement in

successive moves towards European integration and the interesting thing about the period of the negotiations from 1969 to, say, 1970 to 71 was the dog that didn't bark in the night. I suspect it was two things; one that if we had failed they wouldn't have seen it as the disaster that the Foreign Office, and certainly the Prime Minister, would have seen it as; and secondly having Tony Barber as Chancellor, the man who would have lead the negotiations, did rather put the mockers on those in the Treasury who would have been sceptical. It is very interesting that the Treasury representative on the negotiating team, Raymond Bell, who fitted in admirably into the team wasn't actually one of the top people in the Treasury so it is rather as if they said let this lad go off and play, but when you think of the Treasury's attitude previously and the Treasury's attitude now in 2002 towards the Euro which is at the very least cautious, this was a period when the Treasury wasn't being quite as active as it had been before. It is interesting.

JJ And indeed during the negotiations at the Luxembourg meeting in June 1971 it was announced that we had "broken the back of the negotiations", in fact we announced at that meeting that we were prepared to give up the role of Sterling to which Treasury must have given its blessing, however reluctant.

RB It's very funny, this question over the role of Sterling altogether. Because we had never put it as one of the key issues for the negotiations, for us it was the Common Agricultural Policy, New Zealand, sugar and community financing...

JJ And Community Fisheries Policy.

RB Yes, although that came a bit later but when we broke the back of the negotiations, as you described it in June 1971 in Luxembourg, for us Sterling wasn't an issue. It was really only an issue for the French. The French had this belief that the role of Sterling gave us some advantages. No-one in the Treasury, as far as I know, believed any such thing. It was a great nuisance although for some it signalled we were a great power but it had actually been removed as an issue before the negotiating meeting in June 1971, when Ted Heath went to see Pompidou and although a very little of the content of that meeting has been made public we do know that Pompidou was convinced by Heath that it wasn't a problem. I suspect that

Pompidou, as a banker, must have been rather puzzled why so many of his officials were telling him it was a problem. When Ted Heath convinced him a) of our determination, our political determination, to join and secondly explained the real position of Sterling as a reserve currency he concluded that it wasn't a problem. And there were still a lot of French people who thought it was but never really explained why, and I well remember at the negotiating meeting after Heath and Pompidou had met when the French let it be known that Sterling was no longer a problem, the apoplexy of Raymond Barre, subsequently the French prime minister who at the time was vice-president of the Commission in charge of economic and monetary affairs, was absolutely livid. He came out of the meeting telling the press, he almost knocked me down, saying "c'est zéro, plus zéro, plus zéro". He was livid first because, like many French people, he was convinced, for reasons we never understood, that it was a problem and secondly because this was a political deal from which the Commission had been excluded.

JJ Exactly. It was rather late in the day when we were preparing our briefs before the negotiations actually opened that the Community decided to establish a Common Fisheries Policy, and this did cause the UK great problems because we did have a flourishing fisheries industry. Would you like to say anything about that?

RB Yes indeed. Not only did it cause us great problems but it was the main reason why Norway didn't join. Because we were concentrating on the CAP, New Zealand, sugar and community financing we focussed on those because they were issues of quite a different proportion and I suppose looking back we hadn't thought through what we would do about CFP, partly because we hoped it wouldn't happen because in the period of negotiations the Six were just threatening to have this. I think that we perhaps under-estimated how probable or indeed inevitable it was going to be, but we also thought that once we had broken the back of the negotiations in 1971 the relationship with the Six would be rather different. We did ask them not to do anything, they agreed not to do anything until after this. I think it was a fact that we underestimated the seriousness of it but we didn't want to add yet another condition which would cause things to drag on. In the end I think, given that they were determined to do this, I think we did quite well in what we salvaged. But it was essentially a salvage and of course for the Norwegians, who didn't care about New Zealand, it was

absolutely vital. We just had to conclude there wasn't enough we could do.

I remember, just an anecdote, I was in the habit before each ministerial negotiating session, the night before, I would have open house for the journalists not excluding any nationality and although it tended to be mostly Brits, the Norwegians, towards the crunch, came in increasingly large numbers. I remember the night before our crucial meeting on the CFP, for once all the Norwegians, they wouldn't sit down with the other journalists but stood around the walls, they wouldn't have a beer or a drink, and the hostility was almost tangible because they knew we were going to, as they saw it, sell out the following day. And it was at that moment I thought, these people are not going to join. What I am not sure about is whether that decision to try and improve things round the edges was actually responsible itself for the decline in our fishing industry. I think there were other factors subsequently, although we perhaps made not even the best of a bad job. I don't think that is the fundamental reason why our fishing industry is now so small. There were much bigger things like the whole Spanish attitude. Things really only got disastrous when Spain joined the community.

JJ You mentioned the question of the Australians and New Zealanders wanting to protect their dairy industry, their dairy exports, that also was a very tough negotiation, not least between the British and our colleagues from those two countries.

RB It was indeed and I am glad you brought up Australia as well because in the end we had a much better relationship with New Zealand than we did with Australia. We had decided right at the outset that we had to do something for New Zealand, particularly for their butter and their lamb. The best thing we could do was to make sure there wasn't a common lamb policy but for butter something had to be done, just as it had to be done for the Caribbean and other sugar producers. But we had decided at a very early stage that we were not going to do anything of that nature for Australia, except negotiate a reasonable transitional period, which we did. Somehow or another the Australians took a long time to understand that this is what our policy was and they seemed to have some belief that we would do something special as we would for New Zealand. Both deputy prime ministers, Doug Anthony from Australia and Marshall from New Zealand, were regular visitors and I don't still to this day understand why the Australians didn't understand what we were trying to do. I remember when on the day we

announced in the negotiations that we were going to come to terms with the Common Agricultural Policy not to seek more than a transitional period that of course meant, except for New Zealand, we weren't going to do anything for anyone else. When I briefed the Australian press they were quite relaxed about it because they understood. I remember when we then had a meeting with Doug Anthony he tore into me personally and said that I had been misleading everyone and I told the Australian press things that he had never been told and I said to him, well, sorry, that's not my problem. The thing is he hadn't really understood and there was a terrible row between us and the Australians and I remember talking to a friend of mine in the Australian High Commission and he said, thank you for being a scapegoat, we tried to explain to Doug Anthony the realities but he couldn't grasp it.

The New Zealanders were difficult but they weren't unreasonable although, as I mentioned earlier, Con O'Neill, in his account of the negotiations says we could have got away with less for New Zealand. In view of Harold Wilson's attitude when the outcome was known, he particularly fixed New Zealand as a failure, I don't think Con was right politically, I think we had to do as much as we did. What was a bit of a nuisance was having Marshall camping on our doorstep and during that night you mentioned we broke the back of the negotiations in Luxembourg we, particularly Geoffrey Rippon, had to spend as much time with Marshall as he did with our community future partners. But in the end he flew back with Geoffrey Rippon in the plane and you may remember a wonderful picture on the front page of the 'Times', showing me, Geoffrey Rippon and Marshall coming down the steps. So I think it was important to carry them along. Now just a word on Australia and New Zealand. I think actually we did a good deal for New Zealand and it's funny, you worry one year that things are going to be terrible, half the lamb eaten in France now is New Zealand lamb, New Zealand sells without difficulty, ditto butter, and Australia is a completely different country. I was fascinated on a personal level when I went there this Spring for the first time ever. This is a new country, it is open, it's economically successful, you remember 30 years ago it was the most protectionist country in the world and the best thing we ever did for the Australians was to join the European Community and let them come to terms with the geopolitical and economic situation which they have done very successfully.

JJ Yes. The Common Agricultural Policy of course is still with us and we are still having

problems with it. It is still taking up more than half of the EU's own resources budget and even in this weekend's press apparently France is still refusing any reforms on the subsidies until at least 2006. This is still a major problem for HMG and its financing.

RB It is. I think it's partly our fault because I think that during crucial years we spent too much time on getting our money back, if you like, and not enough time on pressing for reform of the CAP. There was a period when we were benefiting enormously, when Britain was contributing more to the butter and beef mountain than any other country because we had relatively efficient agriculture as we had succeeded agriculturally beyond any expectations back in the early 1970s. What we concentrated on doing back in the early 1970s was protecting our hill farms which were vulnerable; we never assumed that our agricultural production would actually increase. My brother-in-law is a farmer and he said to me a few years ago at the time when we were producing milk, what are we supposed to do, the Ministry of Agriculture is telling us there are increased subsidies for milk production? We know that won't last more than 2 or 3 years, are we supposed not to take advantage of that? I think there was always a very short-sighted view in MAFF that, well, let's take advantage while we can instead of concentrating on pressing for reform. When we did start to do so, after Mrs T had settled her budgetary problems, I think it was a little bit too late and we never worked with natural allies and I think we didn't start in the perspective of enlargement, I don't think we started working for reform early enough and I think - we may come on to this in a moment about enlargement - it is very worrying that nothing is going to be done to prepare for enlargement until enlargement has already been there for two years.

JJ Although I recall that the Permanent Secretary in the MAFF, Freddie Kearns, said at the first meeting after it was all over, that yes, we have accepted the principles of the Common Agricultural Policy but not the mechanisms, and we must now start thinking about the consumer and not just the producers.

RB That's very true. I mentioned a moment ago that I felt that we hadn't done enough to bolster reform. One of the reasons is connected with our whole attitude to Brussels. When you have a situation ever since we joined that one or other of the major British political parties has been split on the subject of membership and our attitude towards future

integration, it is not, as you and I know as professional diplomats, it is not the best way in which to make your voice felt in Brussels. If your partners, whom you are trying to get to change their ways, if they say, oh well we needn't do anything for a year or two because there will be a change and why make concessions to a country that's split. I feel that we haven't been able to pursue and promote our views in Brussels sufficiently because of this constant domestic argument and the best thing for the future would be if we could finally decide what we want to do, where we ought to go. This rather sad situation set in immediately after the negotiations. We had been a very close knit team with pretty good support back in Whitehall but all that was somehow dissipated. The team broke up. Interestingly enough the prime minister decided, Ted Heath decided, that no-one was to be given any honours. Normally if you are part of a successful negotiation then some of the key figures are honoured but he was against that. And then of course when the Labour party decided to contest the terms, then, when they came to government, to re-negotiate, much of the impetus which had been built up over the negotiations dissipated. Many Departments were only too happy to move those who had been on the negotiations off to other jobs, happily not in my case, almost as a punishment rather than as a reward, and that's a bit sad.

JJ John Robinson, for example, who Con O'Neill praised as the man who kept Whitehall in line, was posted to Algiers.

RB Indeed, Freddie Kearns was not well treated. And people just seemed rather forgotten or punished. This was, after all, one of the most successful negotiating efforts in diplomatic history, certainly in the 20th century.

JJ If we can now move on then, Roger, after all the excitement of Brussels and so on you went back to bi-lateral diplomacy and as Head of Chancery in Helsinki from 1972 to 1976. There was a cold war, Finland walking a tightrope between independence and the Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union next door. What were the British government's aims and objectives at that period?

RB Basically to encourage Finland to be as robust as her geographical situation allowed, although what is ironic is that when Finland started to show signs of independence, for

example in promoting the European Security Conference, the Foreign Office was not best pleased. My first year in Helsinki was fascinating. First learning Finnish and getting to know the Finns, which is, as you know, not all that easy. Also coping with the so-called Helsinki consultations that preceded the first stage of what became the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Finns saw a chance of enhancing their independence by pushing this conference idea and having it in Helsinki which they thought would actually make them a little bit more independent of the Russians and, as I say, I think it is ironic that the Foreign Office actually didn't see it the same way, and we were instructed, initially, to be very cool on the whole thing. What changed matters was a realisation that, particularly by Crispin Tickell who was then Head of the Department dealing with European security, that this thing was probably going to happen and therefore we might as well make the most of it and introduce, for example, human rights.

JJ The Basket three?

RB Basket three. So I had a fascinating but rather difficult year trying to do two jobs which, as an active member of the Security Conference delegation and then getting to know Finland at a time when bilateral relations with the Russians were going, ironically then, through one of the difficult periods. This was when the Finns decided they wanted a free trade agreement with EFTA, not to join EFTA but to have an agreement, and the Russians were not too pleased by this and the Finns decided not actually to sign it in 1972, but to initial it. We had to scurry around and find out what was behind this. At the same time the Russians didn't mind the Finns promoting the security conference idea, I think possibly because they didn't realise how important this was in terms of real Finnish neutrality. So this gave me a year more of a new sort of multilateral diplomacy which I much enjoyed and then when the conference went off, after the first stage, to Geneva, I concentrated on the bilateral job of getting to know and understand the Finns which was a challenge but very rewarding. In the end it was one of my favourite postings partly because I was extended into a fourth year because of The Queen's impending State Visit and with a change in Ambassadors the Foreign Office wanted some continuity.

JJ A sensible decision. Not one the Foreign Office usually bothers to take.

RB It wasn't unrelated to a certain amount of pressure from Buckingham Palace.

JJ But the CSCE process was quite a coup for the Finns really, wasn't it? It brought them into the domain of the greater Europe where people talked to each other and so on, instead of being an isolated little country right up near the Arctic Circle.

RB Indeed, and although it put the spotlight on Finns and caused as you remember, the spate of articles about Finlandisation, in fact this did more to anchor real Finnish neutrality than anything else because in the CSCE between the two blocs of east and west, the four neutrals in the middle, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria, played an absolutely vital role. They shared our view on human rights but they played things in a very clever way so the Russians found it difficult to gainsay them and this, I think, did an enormous amount to anchor Finnish neutrality.

JJ And, as it turned out as I recall, the CSCE process and the results particularly Basket three, as it was called, the human rights wing of the agreement, turned out to be very good leverage on the Soviet Union to start thinking about human rights.

RB Absolutely, and it put human rights on the international agenda. It was also, we have been talking about Europe and the United States, this was long before we had a common foreign security policy in the European Community, this was the first case of Europe speaking with one voice and having a policy that the Americans weren't totally happy with. Kissinger, the greatest cynic since Metternich, thought this was a total waste of time. This was his most significant failure of judgement. I think he thought it was irrelevant. The Russians wouldn't do anything. I wouldn't say there was an inexorable connection between the CSCE and the fall of the Berlin wall but there is absolutely no doubt that it hastened the break-up of the Soviet empire and it was thanks to the Europeans putting human rights on the agenda against the American view.

JJ And it certainly did no harm to the Finns in their relationship in the longer run with the Soviet Union?

RB None.

JJ They managed the relationship pretty well, don't you think?

RB I think they did. Their aim, Finland's aim, was to make sure the Russians didn't have to think about them and although we thought at the time that the Finns were playing the Russians' game on the CSCE that was also a misjudgement. The Finns were doing this with the deliberate aim of making themselves more independent.

JJ Wearing your bilateral hat, did you find that the Finns were helpful in helping us, if you like, to understand what was going on?

RB No, they were their own worst enemies. It was like pulling teeth. The sauna was an absolute part of this. I found, talking to my Finnish contacts, almost entirely political, that they would only talk in or after a sauna. I remember on one occasion thinking to myself I understand what he is saying but I don't understand what he is trying to say. They were terribly elliptical. It's almost as if they were criticising us in the West for talking about Finland but they didn't do very much to help us. And I remember the only time I had a row with my oldest Finnish friend, previously the Helsingin Sanomat correspondent in London and now the foreign editor. He said to me, you're not supposed to understand things. And it was as if they liked to have their little secrets but it did do damage to their image quite often and I...

JJ It made you read between the lines rather than spell everything out.

RB It was quite satisfying working to get through this but sometimes it was intensely frustrating. Occasionally I would say why do I bother? But in the end it stood me in good stead, learning Finnish and persevering. Because I think I made more lasting friends in Finland than almost any other posting.

JJ Well, the Finns had to survive economically too, didn't they, so they had to be very careful

about the relationship with their neighbours because there was a lot of trading and they were coming out of the post-war period themselves and indeed turned out to be very successful, but they had to keep the trade, oil particularly, flowing.

RB Yes, and they had to and sell their timber. It was a forest based economy and you remember when the Soviet Union collapsed so did half of Finnish trade. It was a terrible problem and thanks to Nokia almost entirely they got out of it.

JJ So after that bilateral and multilateral post you returned to pure multilateralism; you went in 1977 to Brussels, this time as the spokesman for Roy Jenkins who had become President of the European Commission after pressure from Giscard d'Estaing and the German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt. How did you find that job and what exactly were you doing?

RB Well, to start with I was reluctant to go there. I mentioned that Crispin Tickell, my Helsinki contact, had become Roy Jenkins' chef du cabinet, in September 1976 and he immediately asked me if I would like to be his spokesman. I said I had just come back from Helsinki and I said no because I thought it was a bit too soon to be re-doing Brussels. But Roy couldn't find anyone he liked as his spokesman so just before Christmas I was approached again. I was still reluctant especially as Personnel Department didn't want me to do it because it was the "not invented here syndrome". They made life very difficult for me. But Michael Palliser, by then the PUS, said if Jenkins wants you, you should go. So I did go but it was not a happy way of going especially as I didn't know Roy Jenkins. With hindsight I should have said yes in September and then spent a few months getting to know him because the early days were difficult. Although Roy Jenkins is a total European in the sense that he is at home there in every way and he knew the leaders. You mentioned Schmidt and Giscard. They had all been finance ministers together so they knew each other but Roy would be the first to admit that it was a bit like Churchill's comment about his relationship with Christianity; he is a buttress rather than a pillar of the church. Roy was rather like that as far as Europe is concerned. He knew it from outside but not from inside. It was very difficult for the first months, not least because of his reluctance to speak French; his vocabulary is incredible, he reads Simenon in the original, but he was very reluctant to use his French, except socially. There a few occasions when this was almost provocative, trying

to represent, as I was, a European president who declined to speak the Brussels language. It wasn't that he couldn't; and it did make things difficult. It took time for him to come to terms with that. The other thing was that he had also appointed a chief spokesman and head of information with whom I didn't get on, and he didn't get on with me, so that made the relationship a bit difficult. The first six months were not very well prepared so we had to spend... it was a bit like losing the first set in tennis, you spend a lot of time in winning the next one to get back to where you started.

JJ Did each Commissioner have his or her own spokesman, and how did you get on if... or did you work together, or did you not work together?

RB Pretty well actually, because although we were all attached to the cabinet of our Commissioner we lived together in the same part of the building, we had a morning meeting where we exchanged information and views and the deputy spokesman was very successful in giving us, insisting, we had a sort of community spirit, one or two were less co-operative. I made a point of using the knowledge I got from the Jenkins cabinet, where we met every morning, to make sure that my colleagues knew what the President was thinking and that was much appreciated by the others. When I was parachuted in as Jenkins' spokesman I made a point of behaving in a collegiate manner. Most of the others did, the better ones were less good at doing that, the less good were much more collegiate but by and large it was a pretty cohesive and happy group and reminded me in many ways of News Department which was much the same.

JJ That of course did depend on the President, Roy Jenkins, being very open and frank with you, so that you knew what was going on inside the Commissioners' meetings pretty fully.

RB Yes, and my colleagues in the spokesman's group knew that, but so did the press. I think it was a bit like my relationship back in the days of the negotiations. It was easier to establish that relationship with British journalists because they knew a bit about my reputation and some them I knew of course from the entry negotiations. It was more difficult with some of the other nationalities because they weren't used to an individual Commissioner's spokesman actually talking to other nationalities, but using the fact that I

could operate in French and German and I did try to break this down; most difficult with the French, easiest with the Germans and Italians.

JJ But George Thomson described the local press corps as a nightmare? Was this just his personal experience?

RB No, it was also Roy Jenkins's view and I didn't find it easy to have to be the bridge because I didn't find it a nightmare at all. One had, as with the best journalists during my News Department days, you could have a friendly relationship which was actually extremely important in establishing trust but it didn't mean that, when it came down to it, you had lost your integrity. I thought the friendly relationship was a key which apparently no longer exists in Brussels, this good relationship between the spokesmen and the press. Again in Brussels I made from my previous spokesman time out there, and with Roy Jenkins, I made friends who are still my friends today, mostly journalists.

JJ I suppose it would be even more difficult with 25 commissioners, but we will come to that a bit later on. In Roy Jenkins's "European Diary" he does seem to suggest that the EC was treading water when he arrived so, it seems from the diary, he thought up the idea of proclaiming the goal of monetary union with the concurrence of the French and German leaders, Giscard and Schmidt. Was it really as simple as all that?

RB Well he realised that each President of the Commission is expected to have a big idea, and he realised there needed to be some initiative to mark his Commission. Coincidentally there was a member of his cabinet who had in any case been pushing the idea of promoting monetary union and during the summer holiday in 1977, looking at various things, Roy Jenkins decided that that should be it. He launched the idea in a speech in France in November 1977 having, I won't quite say cleared it with Giscard and Schmidt but mentioned it to them. By this time Giscard was President of France, Schmidt was the German Chancellor and he didn't get any negative reaction. Schmidt actually encouraged him, but straight after that, because it is no good launching an initiative if you don't do something (and one of my few criticisms of Roy Jenkins is he was not always active enough in pushing things). He realised it would die on the vine if he didn't push it. So he did promote it, very

actively, and got particular encouragement from Schmidt, a little more caution but no discouragement from Giscard, and incomprehension in London. The Florence speech was given fairly good coverage particularly in the Economist, although rather sceptical coverage. The Telegraph had its correspondent sent up from Rome but a British tourist had disappeared the same day so he decided that the Florence speech wasn't worth covering; the British tourist was more important. This lack of interest in London was actually fairly deep and right up until the time when the majority of the EU the following year had endorsed the idea in principle, Jim Callaghan, who was Prime Minister, was still pretending it wouldn't happen because the Treasury was saying that if we ignore it, it will go away. The Brits might have had good reasons for not liking the idea but to pretend it wasn't going to happen was, I think, ostrich-like in the extreme. It was amusing to read in the Guardian (in reporting the meeting in Copenhagen) one report of the views of Jim Callaghan that the whole thing was not worth thinking about and another report of the views of Roy Jenkins that this thing was going to run and run.

JJ Of course Jenkins in a sense was building on the report made by Werner, the prime minister of Luxembourg back in 1971, and he had very recently been Chancellor of the Exchequer himself so he knew about monetary matters but at the same time Sterling was in a rather shaky position wasn't it? Perhaps it was feared that it was too drastic a step at this particular economic juncture in any case.

RB Well, it was Jenkins' experience as Chancellor and the fragility of Sterling which was one of the things which impelled him. I remember him saying once to Sir Roy Denman (who was Director General for External Relations in the Commission and had previously also been, apart from being a member of the negotiating team, our most experienced trade and tariff negotiator), you spend five years getting down to a wrangle about reducing tariffs by 8% and then in one day that value is wiped off Sterling in the foreign exchanges. This experience as Chancellor meant that he had a rather sceptical view of things like the strength of Sterling and for him it was not so much the level as the stability you get when you have an economic and monetary union, which is important.

JJ And that idea of stability is something which runs right up to the present day in

discussions about the euro and the euro-zone. The European Monetary System and the exchange rate mechanism which caused such a problem for us came into being in March 1979. Callaghan's government fell a few weeks later, but Geoffrey Howe, as a Tory minister appeared to believe the European Monetary System was indeed a useful step forward, and that we should join when the time was right. How did Roy Jenkins take that?

RB He took more literally that the time should be right, but equally he felt that this should only be a step towards proper Economic and Monetary Union because he didn't feel the EMS alone gave us stability and experience would suggest that is right. This famous phrase about when the time is right was Mrs T's way of saying it never will be. And when she finally gave in to pressure from Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson it was done at the wrong moment. But I think Roy would criticise the decision, not just because it was done at the wrong moment at the wrong level but it was done as an alternative rather than something contributing to a more fundamental monetary union.

JJ Yes, Mrs Thatcher was a very reluctant European and indeed eventually showed that she was very pro-British and not much else. She went so far at the Dublin summit in 1979 of the EC heads of state to demand our money back, in other words to bring our receipts up to the average level of the receipts of the community. This must have gone down very badly in Brussels.

RB It did indeed but what went down badly was her approach rather than the argument itself because the justification was self evident. We did need to do something about it and in many ways she made it more difficult for us to get justice because they didn't like being hit over the head with the famous handbag. If you remember, when we joined, the wording on Community financing was that if there was an imbalance then the very nature of the Community would require a solution be found. This is the fundamental way in which the Community normally worked. The trouble is if you say, 'we don't believe that;' Geoffrey Rippon used to say the moment you cast doubt on anything that you have just signed up to, you are reducing your own leverage in getting your partners to accept that, and I think that Mrs T did a lot of damage to the fundamental British case for action by appearing not to understand that the outcome would have to be a compromise. You will remember when

Carrington was Foreign Secretary, negotiating what most people thought a very good deal, she pulled the rug from under him and insisted on carrying on for more months, and what she got in the end was not much better. Roy Jenkins did his best, his relations with Mrs T were OK, given the fact that they were on different sides of the fence and he really did his best both to convince his continental colleagues that Britain had a case but also in trying to get her to understand that there were other ways of skinning a cat. But she wouldn't listen. Our relations remained throughout all this remarkably good. My own relations with Bernard Ingham didn't suffer at all from our fundamental disagreement on and how to handle it.

JJ You are out of it now in a sense, but the problems remain, don't they? And we have seen the recent statements coming out of the Commission that the stability growth pact is "stupid", the Brits seem to be doing better on their own with their system of budgetary controls. Does this suggest that we should stay outside the Euro system until either Brown's five conditions have been met or until new solutions have been found to the present 'imbalance'?

RB Although I am out of it in a sense, I still follow it since I was around when Jenkins launched the whole idea, and last year I edited a book on the Euro debate which brought together contributions from people across the political and economic spectrum on the arguments for and against joining the Euro, so I have retained that interest. I felt when the stability pact was first mooted and agreed that first of all it was a good idea, but it is never a good idea if something is imposed by one of the major countries in the European Union on another major country against its better judgement. I think that it was done for German reasons and now, ironically, it is the Germans who don't like it. It seems things like that shouldn't be set in stone and I think it is a pity that up until early this year the Germans were entirely resistant to the idea of re-negotiation. The Commission seems to be split, you get the Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs saying it must be strictly adhered to and President, as you mentioned, saying it shouldn't. What it illustrates to me is how awkward it is for us not being in there because we can't influence it. There was a very good radio interview with John Monks yesterday, the retiring general secretary of the TUC, now going off to the European Trade Union Organisation in Brussels, making precisely this point. I have always felt that one of the things lacking in the Euro system is a body that will decide what to do when things go wrong. There is a thing that used to be called the X committee

which is now the committee of those 12 member states who are in the Euro zone and this is the embryo of something that I think should be built up. A lone stability pact isn't enough, particularly if you get the Commission being the sole interpreter. It ought to be the member states. I would like to see, and of course I would like us to be in there influencing it, I would like to see this committee, which is a sort of subsidiary committee of ECOFIN, the financial council, being given more bottom. The Economist magazine suggested that a couple of years ago but doesn't seem to have reverted to it. Fabius, when he was Finance Minister in the French government in the late 90s, suggested it as well. Logically we ought to be first to support this idea, but because we are not there we can't. If this committee existed it would have to have real political input, because as we know having Finance Ministers deciding important political questions is dangerous. We really ought to be in there with an ability to influence things. Basically I come down in favour of Britain joining the Euro, when the time is right, particularly if the exchange rate is at a sensible level, because as a professional diplomat like you I'm concerned at our lack of influence over things that are affecting us.

JJ Turning to European enlargement, Roger, perhaps you could give us a forward look at the EU of the future, now that Ireland has voted 'Yes' on the Nice treaty and we can look forward to negotiations to expand the EU by another 10 member states. How will the EU be able to swallow that, or re-organise itself suitably?

RB With much difficulty. Already the existing community union of 15 is creaking. After all the whole thing was designed for 6 and it just about worked with 9; it is not working properly with 15. The Commission is already too large. But I worry very much that this hasn't been thought through. It isn't just a question of qualified majority voting or something, you need a completely different mental approach, a completely different mind set, and I don't think that anyone has wracked their brains about how a community of 25 is going to work. It is particularly incumbent on those countries, notably Britain and Germany, who actually want enlargement, to think it through. You mentioned earlier the continuing French opposition to reform of the CAP. At least the French are intellectually consistent, they don't particularly want enlargement so they don't do anything to prepare for it, but it is terribly worrying how we are going to run the place. Quite apart from the extra languages and so on, what a pity it is that a long time ago the Union didn't do what the Council of Europe has done successfully,

and that is limit itself to two working languages.

JJ Official languages.

RB Official languages. What a pity it is that at the time when I was working in Brussels, and when you were, we went into the lift in the Commission and everyone spoke French; French was the language you used. When we joined that became two languages but now everyone insists on having their own language, and the expense and the heaviness, it does not make it any easier for countries with smaller languages actually to operate.

JJ And you could have the result of having more people in Brussels working as translators and interpreters and producing documents than you would have 'teeth' operational staff. Not to mention buildings.

RB No, it's a nightmare. No-one seems to want to face up to it. I recently ran into the Director General for Enlargement in the street and I expressed my concerns and he said the problems are so serious that it is only when we have to face up to them after 2004 that anything will be done. But the danger is that it will all be spatch-cocked.

JJ Thank you for that forward look, Roger, not an optimistic one at this stage. Moving away from Europe then to India. You went in 1981 as Economic and Commercial Counsellor to New Delhi. What was your main function there?

RB It was a dual function. I was doing export promotion and co-ordinating the export promotion work of the three Deputy High Commissions, because Delhi itself was not a great business centre, except that the Government of India plays a very important role in the economy. The other half of my work was running our aid programme, at £125m our largest bilateral aid programme, and trying to fit that in with our commercial aims, in other words trying to make sure that we met both Indian and British priorities in development aid. This actually, during the time I was there, worked quite well because one of India's priorities was improving her power generation so that we concentrated both our export promotion efforts and part of our aid programme helping them to bridge their power gap.

JJ Did this include nuclear power?

RB No. It was thermal conventional power.

JJ Was this £2.5 million aid...

RB £125 million each year...

JJ Sorry, an awful lot of money.

RB It was and I was proud of the fact that it was the most cost effectively administered aid programme of any country, not to speak of the European Commission, anywhere in the world.

JJ By whose measurement?

RB By anyone's. A good example, a good test, was when the newly appointed Permanent Secretary of the ODA, Bill Ryrie, who had been second in the Treasury came out and decided that he wanted to establish a thing called a DEVDIV, a British Development Division, in India which is how the ODA normally administers major aid programmes. A DEVDIV now exists in Delhi. It employs more people than the whole High Commission, for an aid programme which is even smaller. I was running an aid programme with three UK based staff and visitors and at the time Bill Ryrie came out with a Treasury review he concluded that my primary arguments for not having a DEVDIV were justified, especially as he agreed that it was an extremely efficiently run programme. What helped its efficient running, funnily enough since one does not always associate the Indians with efficiency, was the fact that we were working so closely with the Indian Department of Economic Affairs. This aided administration and with no corruption and with a great deal of efficiency; so I got a lot of satisfaction out of that.

JJ So in other words you knew where the money was going, and it was going into the right

places. Presumably you had quite a lot of technical experts on the ground supervising different aspects of the development?

RB Yes, although we did it more through visits than people on the ground because there wasn't always work for 12 months of the year. From the High Commission we would visit regularly to see how things were going and this would be supplemented by specialists from London. I found it one of the most rewarding jobs I've done but one of the difficulties was trying to reconcile the conflicting aims of the Department of Trade and Industry and the ODA. The DTI wanted most of our aid programme to integrate with, and to support, if not subsidise, our exports. The ODA and I felt you had to have a credible chunk of the programme devoted to poverty aid and assistance. One thing I did manage to do was force the DTI and ODA to negotiate an agreement whereby there would always be at least a quarter going to poverty aid out of the £125m.

JJ But that was, I thought in any case, the broad policy of the British government that aid should be designed to reduce poverty, not just a small percentage but...

RB That view was not always shared. You remember the famous Malaysian dam scandal. We used to have constructive arguments but essentially we had a policy which was laid down by John Thomson, the High Commissioner, when I arrived which I continued and implemented. What helped was working with the Indian Department of Economic Affairs but also this was a time when the Indian economy was opening up, so they were encouraging banks to come in.

JJ But was there a percentage of the aid that was in fact tied to British goods and services?

RB It fluctuated. What was established was that the poverty related portion would never go down below one quarter, sometimes it was more, it would depend on what we were doing in the power sector with the rest of the money, but it was usually around two thirds or three quarters on commercial projects.

JJ Were arms sales involved in your statistics?

RB No. That was handled by the defence attachés, although they would come in to consult me about how to go about it. Much of my time was spent trying to encourage them, and British arms firms, not to give too much in bribes. I never believed that bribes were necessary if you had the right equipment. If you were selling the right goods, bribes were unnecessary. Of course you have Indian middle-men, and that reached its nadir after I had left with the Bofors gun scandal. Fortunately, we were not involved in that, mainly because we didn't have the right gun so that we were not competing with the Swedes, but that is a prime example of the way corruption gets totally out of hand.

JJ Yes, corruption is still around in India, not just in India of course. There was an article in the Financial Times last weekend quoting an un-named Indian official: 'corruption was part of the system, now it is the system.'

RB When I was there it was manageable, but I did spend a lot of my time trying to discourage British firms from giving money to individuals whom I had better not mention because it might be slanderous, who we knew perfectly well were not only corrupt but wouldn't actually deliver. And a lot has changed. At the time I was there things were run pretty centrally so that the states were not permitted to raise their own finance for projects and that meant that corruption was somewhat limited. What has happened now, which is clear from the FT article you mentioned, which I also read, is that the state governments are now involved so that is just hopeless because many of the states are now so corrupt that it just doesn't work. The DEA when I was there was a major force for openness and I had to spend a lot of time with them.

JJ That's the Indian Department of Economic Affairs?

RB Yes. Which had the central role, and I had to spend a lot of time discouraging British firms and banks from running after people who said 'I can get you this...'

JJ You mentioned Deputy High Commissions. How many are there, where were they?

RB Three. Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

JJ Were there regular meetings with the outposts, either in Delhi or at outposts, to make sure you were all co-ordinating your different efforts?

RB We had our overall strategy which was established when I got there and which I confirmed when I was there and that was refined each year by, this was before the imposition of 'targets' by the Foreign Office, I performed the same, actually better function because it wasn't too detailed, so they knew what our policy was, we would have a commercial conference with the three DHC's every year. I visited Bombay probably 5 or 6 times a year, Bombay was the commercial capital of India, Calcutta probably 4 times a year and Madras twice plus other cities in the meantime. It was important to have a particularly good relationship with Bombay because the banks were there...

JJ Just in Bombay?

RB Mostly, yes. There were a couple who had representatives in Delhi, but Bombay was the banking centre. Fortunately I had the best possible relationship with all three DHCs but particularly with Bombay. Calcutta was important because we gave about 15 percent of our aid programme to the development of the Indian coal sector and that was in the Calcutta area. It meant I travelled a lot commercially and visiting aid programmes.

JJ Were there opportunities for other staff on the political side of the High Commission to travel or was there so much paperwork that it was hard to get out of the office up-country to see what was happening at the grass roots?

RB The High Commissioner travelled a lot. I was probably the second busiest traveller, and the third busiest was the First Secretary in charge of internal politics. He spoke Hindi. I think basically the staff didn't travel enough, in a country like India where the capital is not the largest city, but where life is almost entirely politics your sanity gets a bit tested. I found it absolutely vital to travel, a bit like in the United States, Washington is not the largest city in the USA and it is important to get out, and I felt that some of my colleagues in other

departments suffered from not travelling enough. The other thing was that although my relations with the economic departments, with aid, with power, coal and so on were first class with no political hang-ups, at the time the Foreign Ministry in Delhi was still stuck in a bit of an Nehru era time warp. There was this anti-British feeling in the Foreign Ministry which you didn't find elsewhere in India and my chancery colleagues suffered from this. They didn't have an easy relationship with the Foreign Ministry. And that, combined with not having to travel too much, meant they tended to develop a jaundiced view.

JJ As an information media man how did you view our operation in the High Commission, or did we have one? There used to be a very big one.

RB We had a small one. There was a good, bright, First Secretary Information and the two who were there while I was there were first class. But it was hard work. If you had a High Commissioner who was interested in that side of things that helped enormously because the Indian press was a bit snobbish so it meant that my First Secretary colleague didn't always have the access that he should have had. If you had a High Commissioner who was interested that redressed the balance a bit. But this is linked to what I mentioned about the anti-British feeling in the Foreign Ministry, that many of the papers would take their lead on things British from the Foreign Ministry. We had two or three very good British correspondents there, The Times and of course the BBC and the FT, first class correspondents, and because the FT in particular was very interested in the business side I tended to do that side of the press relations information. I am not sure if it would have been any better with more staff but I think it meant that if the High Commissioner wasn't particularly active in that field it suffered.

JJ Presumably the main papers in Delhi were mostly in the English language, but there must have been hundreds if not thousands of other papers in different languages; was the High Commission able to get digests of what other editors were saying up and down the country?

RB Absolutely. There was a very bright assistant information officer who was in charge of that. I don't think we suffered, we didn't make much effort with the vernacular press, I don't think we suffered because English is still, perhaps a bit less now, but at the time it was the

political language and certainly all the influential newspapers were in English.

JJ So you knew what people were saying, because it was reflected in English language newspapers...

RB Yes, we were helped by the fact that during the time I was there Mrs T had a very good relationship, first of all with Mrs G and then with...

JJ Mrs Gandhi...

RB Yes, so that helped. She came out in every one of the four years I was there.

JJ Going back briefly to export promotion, what was the broad philosophy that governed your activities?

RB Essentially that one needed to be selective. It was a market that was just opening up, it was not a market where anyone should come so that one should be very careful about whom one encouraged. It was quite useful having the banks come out because they would be able to make an informed judgement as to what sort of prospects there were, then they could encourage their clients. In comparison with my export promotion days in Washington where I wondered whether we were wasting our time and money, in India it was absolutely vital. First of all because of the role of government, you couldn't do anything without government approval. We had extremely good co-operation between the DTI, which had their major project unit which was concentrating on encouraging, taking a leaf from the French, picking out the favoured people who would succeed and working extremely closely with the banks in financing and with the Indian government in making sure what we were doing fitted in with their priorities. That was a very rewarding time. What I learned from that, my lesson would be that we should not waste our time as a government in doing too much export promotion in developed and OECD countries, we should concentrate on countries such as India, Malaysia and China where the government still plays a role and where you need to work very closely with government institutions and banks.

JJ Which means also you are looking at serious, big British companies, not door to door salesmen sort of thing.

RB The smallest things we were doing were in the coal mining field, and that was £10 million per year, and the biggest things we did whilst I was there were two major power stations. To see government, business, banks and ourselves working together was very satisfying.

JJ Did British banks have their own banks or liaison banks in India, special links...

RB It was mixed. Grindleys and Standard Chartered were there because they had always been there, but what one saw beginning in the late 1980's was merchant banks coming out on regular visits. They would have a sort of liaison...

JJ They knew the territory from their history...

RB And this forced other banks such as Barclays into catching up...

JJ After India, Roger, you returned to London to be head of Maritime, Aviation and Environment Department, quite a mixed bag of subjects, quite a broad range. Why was the Department set up in such a way?

RB When it was first set up I think back in the 1960s it was called General Department because there were certain subjects which didn't neatly fit into geographical departments. Maritime questions are a case in point. Someone needed to develop a sort of specialisation and also be a sort of political minder for the Whitehall department concerned who would not always understand the political implications. Similarly in air services which, as you know, can become intensely political.

JJ Particularly with the United States...

RB Particularly with the United States. It was important that the Foreign Office had an input

and it wouldn't have worked if North America Department had done that because they would only know about North America. We built up a credibility both within the Foreign Office and with other government departments because we knew enough about, say, the aviation business but also could provide a political input.

JJ You must have had good relations with the DTI though to be able to operate in that way.

RB Aviation was Department of Transport. We had more difficult relations with the DTI, particularly on the question of the Airbus that we dealt with. It's partly that the DTI at the time was probably the third largest department in terms of experience. Foreign Office, Treasury and DTI. DTI are also used to dealing with abroad and this meant that they thought they knew everything about political relationships, so with Airbus we had some problems getting into an understanding. The Americans did have concerns about subsidies which were taken seriously, but in all the other cases, particularly in the Department of Transport absolutely first class. With the Department of the Environment it was a bit difficult to start with and when the environment started to become a big international question the DOE wasn't too happy with the Foreign Office muscling in. Then when it became a really big subject the climate changed. The relationship was just transformed...

JJ Do you think the environment should have a Department of its own?

RB Well it does now, because when I left it was decided the Department had got too big and my departure was a good moment to split it. It was difficult keeping a handle on everything. Fortunately it was very rare that dealing with one problem meant that I couldn't deal with another; for the first year or two while I was there the Channel Tunnel was dominating things, then it was air service negotiations with the Americans then it became more the environment, so things went in waves. My Assistant and I always had a sensible division of responsibilities so I wasn't doing everything and there were things he concentrated on. It was quite a business managing that Department.

JJ What were the main problems attached to the development of the Channel Tunnel?
Political?

RB No though if you go back to the Soames affair, what I enjoyed about the Channel Tunnel was working with the French and not against them. That was very satisfying. It was just resisting commercial and allied pressures from bidders dealing with the Tunnel and dealing with the pressures of safety against speed and that sort of thing but it was very rewarding because there were rarely any problems between us and the French. The biggest problem, which now seems to have disappeared, was carriage of arms by French policemen on this side.

JJ But security generally, I suppose, has perhaps become an even more serious aspect of the Channel Tunnel.

RB Less than we thought. We did spend a lot of time negotiating a special security protocol because we were very concerned about security problems. As it turned out Al Qua'eda and others concentrated on other things but we were actually much more worried about security back in 1985 than we were about rabies.

JJ And then climate change became a very important subject, not just in the UK but it is a global problem now.

RB We were helped a lot by the fact that Mrs T took it seriously. She was obliged to take environment questions seriously back in 1986 when she went on a visit to Norway at the time of the acid rain problem.

JJ Britain was blamed for it.

RB Because the prevailing winds took pollution from our power stations to Norway. She just didn't believe it and we tried to give her a proper brief when she was on a visit to Norway when they had an equally impressive lady prime minister and she said, 'No I don't need a brief.' She was given a real ear-bending and she must have said to herself, I must look into this, and she gave an undertaking that if, having looked at the science when she got back, and she is a chemist, if she was convinced then she would do something. Of course we had the

brief all ready, it was just that for once she hadn't read it beforehand, but to her credit, when she saw that it was pretty convincing, then she acted. This made her more conscious of the environment. When Nicholas Ridley was made her Environment Secretary, the biggest chain smoker in the Cabinet, he was very close to Mrs T and that was a good thing as well because that meant she was keeping an eye on things. So when climate change started to be taken seriously in about 1988 she was quite disposed to look at it. In fact I had more difficulty getting the Foreign Office to take it seriously than I did No. 10. And we were helped there because Crispin Tickell had just come back from a sabbatical at Harvard where he had written about the effects of climate change and she had read that.

So when the Americans in conjunction, you remember, with that terrible drought in the mid-West, in I think 1987, first realised that something was happening, and we had realised that because of the hole in the ozone layer we had already started to do something about the CFCs Mrs Thatcher was actually quite open to doing something and the Americans took the initiative by setting up the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). I have to say that I hadn't fully foreseen how important this was going to be. Fortunately the head of the environment section in the Department was at a meeting when the IPCC was setting up the committee and they decided they would set up one to draft a framework convention to do with climate change. Nobody seemed very interested in chairing it. So my colleague put down a marker for us and he said we really think you should do this so I took on the co-chairmanship of this...

JJ With whom?

RB With Canada and Malta, the Maltese because they had a professor who was rather active, and the Americans didn't entirely trust the Canadians whom they regarded as a bit soft and wet although my fellow co-chairman was an absolutely super Francophone foreign ministry lawyer, and the Americans wanted us to do the co-chairmanship. That took up a great deal of my last 18 months in the Department but it was satisfying because Mrs T was interested. They set up a cabinet official committee to deal with this and the chairman went on to become the cabinet secretary, Richard Wilson, and he and I hit it off very well. So Mrs T was encouraging us to play a role. As I said, the Foreign Office were not always terribly

good at pursuing things that were not purely political, and they were a bit slow to realise that this was something where Britain, which had been attacked as the dirty man of Europe, could actually play a positive role and indeed I got a lot of satisfaction, we did the outline of the framework conventions, if you like, which was then taken off to Rio 2 years later and my colleague from the DOE...

JJ A few years ago, wasn't it?

RB Sorry, 3 years later, and the framework convention as it emerged was almost the same as we had done in the committee. Now, there's a funny story here linked with the difficulty of getting the Foreign Office to take it seriously. We had to decide whether we wanted to encourage this convention. The Americans were a bit in two minds about it because in all intellectual honesty we couldn't pursue something which we might thereafter not later sign up to, and I argued the best way of ensuring that is to make sure the draft is right. Anyway this decision went to Cabinet and Crispin, who was then the UK Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York and wasn't therefore in touch with the way things were going, was strongly against the convention as he said it would tie our hands. And Mrs T was still listening to him. What the cabinet had to decide was whether we went ahead with the convention and made it or not. Nicholas Ridley was really very, very strongly in favour, the cabinet official committee recommended this, Geoffrey Howe was not convinced and what was set up was that Mrs T would open the discussion and give the floor to Geoffrey Howe...

JJ Who was Foreign Secretary?

RB Foreign Secretary, this was shortly before he resigned, and he would plead in favour, Nicholas Ridley would come in straight away with his full support, the Treasury at that time were sceptical but neutral, Nigel Lawson wasn't very interested but they weren't going to oppose it, but right up to the day before Geoffrey Howe wasn't convinced and I had a meeting with him and Crispin, and Crispin was still arguing against, he said we don't need to do this. I was annoyed because he didn't know what was happening in the margins, if you like, and I thought I had convinced Geoffrey Howe but then in the middle of the morning Richard Wilson rings up after the cabinet saying, 'What went wrong?' I said, 'Well you tell me what

happened'. He said that Mrs T gave the floor to Geoffrey Howe and he didn't say anything. So Nicholas Ridley didn't say anything, so no decision was taken. And Richard Wilson said, 'Can you, if I write the minutes so that it doesn't say a decision was taken, can you persuade Geoffrey Howe to re-open it.' I said, 'Well, I'll try.' When I got off the phone there was Nicholas Ridley pacing up and down outside Geoffrey Howe's office, smoking like mad and he said, 'If I can persuade Geoffrey will you keep at it,' we had got to know each other well and I said, 'But you have got to do the political thing, I can't.' So it went back to Cabinet and Richard said to me afterwards, he said, 'You are the only person I've come across who has managed to change a Cabinet decision without even being at the meeting.' I mention this because it is the sort of thing, I think, that made Mrs T impatient with Geoffrey Howe. I remember also during the Westland affair...

JJ But on this particular issue why did Geoffrey Howe not speak?

RB Because he wasn't convinced.

JJ But he didn't want to say, 'No.'

RB No. But on the Westland affair, Geoffrey Howe agonised over a weekend because he agreed with Michael Heseltine. He agonised over whether to intervene and then didn't. I think it was this sort of hesitation that ultimately meant that Mrs T became fed up with him. He was always reading things and agonising.

JJ Perhaps this is why he didn't become prime minister. He didn't have the ...

RB I have a theory, perhaps I will bring it up later but I will just mention now, having had so much to do with politicians, that it is something physical. It struck me for the first time when I met Rab Butler in Geneva in 1964. I think he had just not become prime minister when Alec Douglas Home did, and I thought the moment I met him, I thought I can see why this man never became prime minister. I had exactly the same feeling when I first met Roy Jenkins, it is almost physical, and I had it again with Geoffrey Howe.

JJ And with Douglas Hurd, possibly? He withdrew his candidature on the second round at the crucial time, didn't he?

RB Yes, but I never thought he was a seriously strong candidate. No, Douglas I knew from the time he was in the Office.

JJ Was there anything else that you had to deal with as head of Maritime, Aviation and Environment Department?

RB What was important then, and this is relevant to our time together in Strasbourg, is that I had an awful lot to do with other government departments, probably more than any other official at my level and this was very important both to get the Foreign Office to understand that there are people outside when they are actually running aspects of the country, but also important in convincing these departments that the Foreign Office reputation for snobbery and not understanding the concerns of ordinary departments are not fully justified. I did put a lot of effort into improving relations.

JJ Were there any significant maritime matters that you had to deal with?

RB Not really because the maritime part of the department was very good and politically I didn't have ... the only maritime thing was negotiating with the French over the Channel Islands' fish. It was actually easier working with the French than working with Jersey. That was my one failure when I left. But as you can see it was quite a testing subject, great fun.

JJ But after that you were posted abroad again to Dakar, Senegal in 1990 as ambassador, which must have been fun having your own embassy. But why do we have an embassy in Dakar?

RB Well, we don't have it just for Senegal, we have it because there are other countries and you have to....

JJ Which were?

RB Mali, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. Senegal was obviously the most important because at the time when I went there there were only three democracies in Africa and Senegal was one of them...

JJ But why did that matter?

RB Because we had the policy, and we still have, we certainly did then, of encouraging the growth of democracy in black Africa. The early 1990's were when many of these countries, Portuguese colonies for example, were emerging from the military dictatorships which followed Salazar. These countries themselves were subjugated and democracy was coming. We had the first free election in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau so we and the French had a theoretical common policy of encouraging democracy. In the absence of ministerial visits my job was to get to know the leaders of the opposition before the elections, talk to them and give them a slightly wider world view.

JJ In line with the Foreign Office's keenness on targets, what targets did we have for Senegal and the others? Was it trading reasons, or was it an extra vote at the UN or...

RB Well, that was relevant because these countries were likely to be members of the Security Council. Cape Verde was whilst I was there, so I would get telegrams addressed to all ambassadors accredited to the 15 Security Council members saying please let your foreign minister know, if possible this afternoon, such and such. The problem with Dakar and Cape Verde was that there were only three flights a week going there so going to lobby the Cape Verdians was difficult. But the investment I put into getting to know the leader of the opposition before the elections paid off in spades. He won the election and Cape Verde became a member of the Security Council. Lobbying became much easier because I had taken him seriously before the election. I think if I hadn't covered 5 countries it wouldn't have been a worthwhile job and probably not worth having an embassy. The thing about Senegal was that they are another country like us: they tend to punch above their weight, and they flatter themselves that they are the Francophone counterpart of Nigeria despite being about one tenth the size. Whilst I was there they had the chairmanship of the Islamic

conference so they were important, particularly during the Gulf crisis. But it was mainly just encouraging them. Obviously there wasn't much trading business and just a little aid.

JJ Senegal's star had faded somewhat by that period and the Ivory Coast's star had risen.

RB Senegal's star has risen again because they had a peaceful change of government. Incidentally, I was at the time the only foreign ambassador who had a regular relationship with the man who has now become president so it's a question of cultivating people at the right time. In Mali before the revolution which overthrew their dictatorship, I was on first name terms with the man who became president. I felt that one could make a certain amount of bricks without much straw.

JJ And they had good cultural relations as well with France and with other...

RB Yes, but they didn't like to put all their eggs in one basket and they quite welcomed the fact that the British Ambassador did visit on a regular basis...

JJ Did the French have a lot still tied up in Senegal, financially or economically?

RB Yes.

JJ It was still part of the Franc zone at that time...

RB Yes, very much so and the French resisted to the last to the idea of devaluation of the CFA Franc, though I remember before I went to Dakar I went to Paris for two days, with the encouragement of the Embassy, to call on people in Paris who ran their policy towards Africa. This was revolutionary, had never happened before, and I remember going to see the senior bloke in their ODA, ministry of co-operation in charge of Francophone west Africa and he said, 'Do you know, in Senegal we have more, we pay and supply and subsidise more teachers now than we did thirty years ago, it is about time we started to withdraw a little.' The other thing that gave me a challenge was the French and the Americans they talk to each other but they don't understand each other. I spent a lot of time trying to explain the French

to the American Ambassador and vice versa, but...

JJ The Americans were there were they? What was their interest? Was it militarily strategic?

RB Yes, and also making sure that Senegal stayed a democracy.

JJ So to your final post as Permanent Representative of UK to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. How was that?

RB I couldn't have had a nicer final posting. Early on in my career I thought I might like to end up as ambassador in Vienna or The Hague or somewhere like that but before I knew I was going to Strasbourg, which happened at fairly short notice for reasons you will remember, I had realised that in this day and age being in a relatively important country, being a bilateral ambassador was a bit frustrating, there is a limit to what you can do. Having done a lot of multilateral diplomacy I encouraged the Office to think of a final posting in a multilateral job because I could see that the individual can do much more, you have your instructions of course but the individual can do quite a lot in how he carries them out. What I hadn't realised when I was told I was going to Strasbourg was I hadn't really followed the Council of Europe very much. What I hadn't realised was the current political importance of bringing in the new democracies of central and eastern Europe and of course the challenge of Russia, the increasing importance of human rights and so on. And the other thing that I didn't know until I arrived, literally, was that there was going to be a Summit within weeks of my arrival. The Council of Europe's first Summit: you remember how important that was in setting or in confirming what the Council of Europe was doing in central and eastern Europe and setting its path for the next 3 years. As you recall I was thrown in at the deep end straight away. I think I managed to influence the outcome not least thanks to the Lord Chancellor (Lord Mackay of Clashfern) on the single court, if you remember. So I thought, from the moment I arrived realising that the job was more important and more fun than I expected, it suited me down to the ground. Of course I had an extremely good number two to help me!

JJ It did appear at some point that the British government was not paying enough attention to the Council of Europe and I think it was recognised that as it got into the doldrums. But then the Berlin wall fell down and they really did have a major task in bringing democracy and the rule of law and human rights to those countries which had been under the Soviet yoke. So that was quite a challenge for the future when you arrived as it had been 2 or 3 years beforehand, and particularly Russia, a major candidate for Council of Europe membership.

RB I could never quite understand why the Foreign Office and particularly ministers didn't attach more importance to the Council of Europe because of the role it played when I arrived and was already starting to play with the new countries. You remember when I arrived the big issue was whether Romania should join and that of course presenting in microcosm many of the same arguments that we would have with Russia. London attached a lot of importance to getting things right but ministers then seemed not to get as much involved as they might have done. The Lord Chancellor, as you remember, on the question of the single Court of Human Rights did, but Foreign Office ministers seemed not to jump. The other thing that puzzles me was that at a time when the Tory party was split on Europe on the EU question you would have thought that a body like the Council of Europe would have been more interesting to take seriously.

JJ But is there not a great deal of connection, serious communication, between the Council of Europe and the EU in Brussels?

RB There certainly wasn't. We tried to improve that but there was a sort of smug contempt in Brussels for the Council of Europe and the Secretariat quite rightly often felt that as soon as we develop a good idea the EU pinches it.

JJ You mentioned Romania and I seem to recall that while the Council of Europe was discussing this Douglas Hurd, then Foreign Secretary, went to Bucharest and actually promised the head of government that we would back their candidature and that was the end of the argument, effectively, regardless of what was still going on with the Romanian secret police and so on.

RB Yes, that visit took place just before I went to Strasbourg and when I saw Douglas Hurd just before I left London he did apologise. He said he shouldn't have done it. He said you are now going to be sent contradictory instructions, and that sort of thing.

JJ Of course the British government was unpopular for another reason and that was that we brought into the annual discussions on the Council of Europe budget the concept of zero real growth, which caused a lot of pain to the Secretariat.

RB That wasn't necessarily a bad thing because the Secretariat had become a bit sclerotic and hadn't adapted to... the then Secretary General (Mme Catherine Lalumière) had done quite well in identifying the role of the Council after the fall of the Berlin wall but the Secretariat hadn't really adapted to that and there were parts of the Secretariat, as you remember, that still, particularly Culture, wanted to carry on as if none of this was happening. They were never going to get extra staff therefore they needed to do a bit more to reorient themselves. The concept of zero real growth was very new to them, we found it rather difficult to get them to understand what to do about it, and every time they hoped that we wouldn't win the argument. There was that famous case, I think after you had left, when Tarschys, the Secretary General, thought that he could bribe the German government into abandoning zero real growth (ZRG) by saying that he would push for German as the third language. Of course they double-crossed him, as they were bound to, and the Secretariat was slow to see that ZRG was a policy which was going to continue. What was difficult after you left was when it was quite clear that having 2 years of some success we were not going to achieve it. There had to be some flexibility. I argued to London that if I was just told ZRG and that was it then I would be ignored and everyone else would decide on something else, but if I showed some flexibility I could win some things. But David Davis, then Europe minister, wrote on the submission, 'No, only ZRG'. The result was that we didn't get ZRG. It will be interesting to see if he becomes leader of the Tory party, and what attitude he will take to compromise in negotiations. I accepted ZRG as a policy without too much difficulty but I was terribly disappointed that it took such a long time. It only happened after you left, but the Secretariat had started to reorganise and I think it was only with the arrival of Schwimmen that they started to... but it did show me that if you want to negotiate something you have to have some flexibility.

JJ It was a shame, wasn't it, that rarely did we send a senior Foreign Office minister to the committee of ministers' meetings, twice a year meetings, and indeed to come and address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council which was at least a very important forum for the MPs. They knew a lot about what was going on in parts of Europe that we didn't know too much about, the old Soviet countries and so on, and the Assembly would have provided a good political platform for British ministers' ideas.

RB The parliamentary delegations were extremely influential in Strasbourg, as you remember, but they didn't seem to carry much weight with the government at home in persuading them of things they should take notice of. Also it meant that people in London or in our posts, didn't always understand the differences, that there wasn't just the Council of Europe, it was governments, the Secretariat and the Assembly. The Embassy in Moscow couldn't understand why we just didn't tell the parliamentarians what to do. This is how you teach the Russians democracy!

JJ But, talking of Russia, the Secretariat had always promoted the view that once a country had joined the Council of Europe having already committed itself to human rights in particular, to the rule of law, then the battle was more or less over, but that couldn't be true of Russia and possibly isn't with some of the other countries.

RB You remember that we managed to set up a monitoring system, precisely because of this. This is one of the few times where I had problems with London. One of them was their concern that once Russia was in the Council of Europe we should keep her up to standard. But you can't just apply a monitoring system to one or two countries and it came to the point when London was almost willing to abandon any monitoring system rather than have it apply to the older countries. In the end we reached a compromise.

JJ Although it was one of the older countries, the Netherlands, who promoted it.

RB But there was an inconsistency of approach...

JJ So is it your view that Europe cannot really do without the Council of Europe, that it is an important part of the multilateral structure in which...

RB I think it is indispensable for two reasons. One as it always has been because of human rights; and whatever the Union does in terms of this famous charter of human rights the only place where it is judiciable is Strasbourg. That is absolutely important. The other crisis I had arose when Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, got so fed up with the run of decisions against Britain in the European Court of Human Rights that he actually proposed that we should withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights. The attitude in the Foreign Office was not of robust defence but of sheer panic and they were actually trying to get us to threaten other member states and the Court that if they didn't change their ways we would leave.

JJ There was this idea that came out from London that human rights were relative to different countries' cultural practices and backgrounds, as opposed to absolute human rights. How was that resolved, or has it been resolved while you were there?

RB What I tried to do was get this concept more generally instilled and particularly when choosing the judges to try to with the Parliament, and get the Assembly to understand this concept because it was part of the us and them thing, we wanted the judges to recognise that there were certain aspects of our culture and history which were taken into account but we were not...

JJ You said 'our'...

RB British, we didn't like it when, because we have a history of spanking children, we didn't like it when the others said that was bad and taking into account spanking your children, I am exaggerating but this is part of the point, but we, the older countries, were very reluctant when the new countries say well you have to take into account that we only have a recent history and can't expect..., you have to take into account we can't change overnight and it showed up this unwillingness in Britain, and to some extent also in France, to recognise that what is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander.

JJ There was a danger I suppose of, or perhaps a fear by people like the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, that the new judges would take a political attitude towards cases on which they had to give judgement rather than judicial attitudes, taking into account what was the current view generally in Europe about certain questions, such as corporal punishment but rather more serious things, hanging for example. This was the fear I think which sparked off the debate. The new judges are not behaving sympathetically or they are favouring their own attitudes...

RB And also...

JJ Instead of taking a European view.

RB And what right have they to sit in judgement on us, we have had to sit in judgement on them, this rather British attitude to foreigners..

JJ You mentioned monitoring, I remember that coming in. Was there in the end an assessment of each member state's performance, especially on human rights, and were there any sanctions that were considered possible?

RB No, we fought shy of sanctions though there were assessments. One of the difficulties with this process was that it was hijacked by the Secretariat who wrote a series of incredibly insensitive reports on a number of countries, just from reading handbooks really and we were expected to use them as the basis and that made things worse. But once it started to operate people were fighting shy, not just of sanctions but even making judgements, so I think it was not something that lived up to its hopes.

JJ I was interested to note in connection with this monitoring that I think in today's Financial Times, or was it at the weekend, that the Dutch have begun to propose a similar sort of system for the candidate countries once they have joined the EU so this idea will not go away.

RB But you can't treat... if you invite people to join a club then they have to be treated the same as everyone else.

JJ Observing rules of the club, right. How did the Council of Europe relate with the government departments or your work there?

RB In a sense, as you remember, we were representing other departments in Whitehall just as much as the Foreign Office and because the Council of Europe wasn't regarded as terribly important for the Foreign Office the policy towards the Council of Europe was not always well co-ordinated. My predecessor, as you remember, established the custom of an annual meeting with all government departments who had Council of Europe business to agree on our approach and that I continued. Your successor and I spent a lot of time, meeting, talking to visitors from other government departments of whom there were a number any week and I think that establishment of a common understanding which I was inspired a little bit by my experience as head of MAED, stood us in good stead and meant we had a fairly coherent... we established a very coherent approach in Strasbourg which hadn't existed in London which was very important, particularly on things like human rights and how we applied the priorities which flowed from policies... I couldn't have ended on a happier posting, partly because I also liked Strasbourg and made lots of friends there, it meant that I finished my career with a feeling of some satisfaction.

JJ Before we move on to your general views about that there is one particular issue which I found strange; Whitehall, or DOE, could not understand the move towards development of regional governments which began to pick up speed in the Council of Europe and I found myself left to make our policy on regional development by myself. The Foreign Office was not interested, and I wonder if that had moved on in your time?

RB No, not only did it not move on in my time, after I retired I went to work for Surrey County Council, where I found that the European Union has set up a new body called the Committee of the Regions. Whitehall has really still not come to terms with that either and so it...

JJ We don't have regions!

RB Therefore we don't have a policy, but this is something that is increasing.

JJ So you enjoyed your career and you found it very fruitful, particularly perhaps the multilateral aspects of it...

RB I think I was lucky in that the only unsatisfactory job, and that was the nature of the job, was in Washington. But all the other jobs... I have mixed feelings about Brussels, about the Commission and in fact I was invited, indeed pressed very hard in the Commission to stay on there but I hadn't enjoyed the experience completely, I didn't like the Commission, I didn't like the way you needed sharp elbows and so it was with some pleasure I returned to the FCO not least because they had already selected Delhi for me, a plum job and a complete change.

JJ There is a view that these days with the ability of ministers and prime ministers to hop on a plane to talk to their opposite number round the world that maybe there should be fewer embassies, fewer ambassadors because ministers can talk to ministers and that is OK. On the other hand, multilateral diplomacy seems to be becoming more important. What do you think?

RB One of my favourite French expressions is 'the one does not exclude the other'. Certainly the latter is true. Just about the time I retired, I went to a Wilton Park seminar about multilateral diplomacy and it was one of those, there were about four Wilton Park conferences that I attended, and that was the only one where a consensus, they are not supposed to reach agreement, but a consensus sort of emerged but everybody else there except the British took it as a given, as axiomatic that multilateral diplomacy was getting more important, and apart from myself the other Foreign Office people there were a bit reluctant to recognise this. It is growing and I think it is the one area also, if we are talking about defending our former profession, where you really do need professional diplomats. There is an argument about whether you need so many embassies. One thing I would say is how many times have we noticed when prime ministers in particular, or ministers, particularly in the EU agree on something and then it isn't followed through. If we go back to

the Soames affair, if we had followed de Gaulle's ideas the Quai would almost certainly have sabotaged it. And how often in Europe, I found it when I was working for Roy Jenkins, the European Council agrees things and the ministers who weren't there or weren't consulted make absolutely certain it is not followed through, so if it is a bilateral question you do need someone in the embassy, first of all to set the background so that the British prime minister, foreign secretary or whoever, knows who he is dealing with but then if there is an agreement to make sure it is followed through.

JJ It is the role of the bilateral embassies, these days, to promote British views that have been launched, possibly, in a multilateral context in the EU or in Strasbourg to force them home to those who are going to have to vote on these things at centre stage.

RB Also to know the background that can't be conveyed fully in a brief. I was very struck when, at the second Council of Europe summit just before I retired Tony Blair came out and in the 20 minutes in the car that I had with him he wasn't interested in the Council of Europe but he wanted to know, because he must have heard that I followed French politics very closely, and questioned me mostly about Jospin. You remember that Tony Blair had only been prime minister a few months and he wanted to know what I thought of Jospin and the position of the Socialist Party. That is the sort of thing that, it wasn't terribly relevant to Tony Blair's visit, but if it had been a bilateral embassy that would have been a vital bit of background which couldn't have been given its full flavour in a brief.

JJ Or even found in Whitehall. It's not what you know, it's who you know, in other words...

RB And I think maybe some of our embassies are unnecessarily overstaffed, but you do need someone who understands and feels the flavour of the country which means, incidentally, that people should stay a little bit longer. I have been lucky, the average time of my postings has been 4 years which is unusually long and I think I have done a better job as a result.

JJ How do you think the Diplomatic Service has changed since you first joined it?

RB I think it has become more democratic, more open, less snobbish but it hasn't changed as

much as it should. I think the obsession with old-fashioned narrowly defined political work hasn't changed enough. I found that when I was head of MAED and I found it really in the reluctance to take commercial work in countries where it matters seriously. I think it hasn't changed enough. Its attitude to women has improved a lot. I don't particularly criticise the Office too much for slowness in taking on ethnic minorities because I think minorities have been, apart perhaps from the Indians, slow to apply or to offer good enough candidates. I think also the Administration which I have not criticised so far has been terribly slow in understanding that the world changes. I think you coming from a different stream from me may feel that the office has been very slow to integrate and give full opportunities to what used to be called 'bridging'.

JJ No doubt. There is, it seems to me, in my last few years particularly, there was such an emphasis on management and IT and filling in forms, targeting, setting targets and performance out-turns and all that sort of modern management stuff which is fine for a business, making, or trying to make, money, but that's less applicable to the work, the traditional work of diplomacy.

RB I think the management thing is the wrong emphasis because what struck me as someone I think, I hope you would agree, has always been counted as a good manager that the good managers are not necessarily rewarded and if you look at people occupying the top 5, 6 or 10 posts, none of them has been appointed because they are a good manager, and so you get, historically, unhappy embassies; partly because management on the part of the ambassador or his number 2 has never been regarded as an important criterion so all this stuff on management is the wrong sort of stuff, and who were the worst managers in the Foreign Office? Personnel Department. So we do need to improve management but also we need to reward the good managers so that they are.. that becomes something which is weighed in the balance when you are deciding to send someone to Washington or one of the larger posts. I think also on operational diplomacy one of the things that struck me in my career is that organisational abilities are extremely important. It struck me basically when I was organising the Queen's state visit to Finland, the organisation of ministerial visits and that sort of thing, we had a lot of it in Strasbourg and it is not even on the reporting form that you can organise things, so I think all this stuff about management is designed by bad managers who don't

really understand what good management is, or what you need in terms of operational organisational efficiency.

JJ There used to be on the confidential report form a space where the reporting officer could write a pen picture, this is no longer considered politically correct but in my experience that was, in a way, the most important thing; what is this chap like, what is this woman like as a person to do the job. What do you think about that?

RB I agree 100 per cent and even more because we have now access to personal files and I have accessed my own and what I noticed is from the moment when those pen pictures stopped, Personnel Department's view of me started to depart significantly from what I thought a pen picture of me would have shown... I thought it was absolutely invaluable. In Personnel Department where people change so much they often haven't the slightest idea what this person is like...

JJ You are just a number and a name with a file...

RB And some of the pen pictures that I found on my own personal file in my early and middle career I thought were pretty fair, but once they disappeared I noticed that people no longer seemed to know who I was.

JJ A greater risk of putting a round peg in a square hole?

RB Yes, because if the people move so rapidly in Personnel Department they don't know the people concerned then the pen pictures are absolutely invaluable. Because it is an ability that we have in the Foreign Office to sum people up like that, we do it with the leading personalities in the country...

JJ And we get to know each other very well in the closed atmosphere of an overseas post.

RB On targets, I think they are useful but I mentioned that in Delhi I would establish our overall objectives particularly for our three Deputy High Commissions, but I think the

problem now is twofold, they've gone too far and the amount of time you have to spend on them would be justified if one had the feeling that anyone in London was taking any notice and I thought that in Strasbourg for example we were able to say with some confidence that we had met our targets and if we hadn't it wasn't our fault. There was no evidence that anyone had read these things or took any notice. Sometimes they are quite important: if the Secretariat of the Council of Europe had a few of these aims and objectives rather than not, it might have been better. But I think it has gone too far.

JJ They have been useful, for example where the passport issuing service in our Paris Consulate was pretty appalling, it took three weeks and they've managed to reduce that to a few days but that is because they sat down and discussed the problem and worked out agreed objectives, agreed systems. They have to be agreed.

RB Yes, but then they have to be sensible and be allowed to work and then someone has to take notice of the results.

JJ Did you ever regret not taking another career path perhaps and a more profitable one?

RB No because you don't join the public service if you are in it for the money. I had never really thought... when I was considering alternatives... I always wanted to join the Diplomatic Service and when I was considering alternatives they were all in a similar line. The only thing I nearly did was to become a wine buying trainee with Harveys, because that was a job I had been offered, I hadn't gone into it because of the money. No, looking back, I have no regrets about choosing the career. I don't think there are many people who can say they have enjoyed all of their jobs. Well, it was partly because I had an aptitude for languages and I was looking for a career that would employ that. It was my mother who put the idea into my mind and I wrote to the Foreign Office at the age of 13 or 14 asking about the conditions and so on. I liked the idea of public service, I wanted to travel and use my languages. One of my regrets is the difficulty, you remember this in Strasbourg, the difficulty of getting the Foreign Office to understand what a serious lack of linguistic proficiency there is. If you are in a place like Dakar or Strasbourg well, you have to operate bi-lingually. You can't be like poor Margaret, my PA, and have a three-week refresher course after O-level French 20 years

earlier. But anyway, I...

JJ You did what you wanted to do and...

RB I was happy to retire when I did, even if I had been given another five years I am not sure after Strasbourg I would have wanted it. But also I look back on some junior colleagues with affection.

JJ Good, well, Roger Beetham thank you very much.