

## **SIR RODRIC (QUENTIN) BRAITHWAITE (b. 1932)**

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## **INTERVIEW WITH SIR RODRIC BRAITHWAITE ON 28 JANUARY 1998**

**JWH:** Sir Rodric, you did your military service in 1950-52 when you must have been aged about 18 to 20, and then in the next three years, I suppose, you went to university where you studied Russian and French. Your military service was as an NCO in military intelligence in Vienna. Did that influence either your choice of studies, or indeed your choice of a career?

**RQB:** No, it didn't, because for a variety of reasons I had already decided before I went into the army that I wanted to do Russian at university. I wanted to go into the Intelligence Corps because I thought it would be more interesting than going into other bits of the Army. I ended up in Vienna by pure chance, needless to say.

Vienna in 1951-52 was at the height of the Harry Lime period. The Western sectors in Vienna were an island in the Russian zone. The Korean War had started six months earlier. The first letter I wrote back to my mother from Vienna said "I have come to Vienna which is a very nice place. Everybody in this small unit of 13 people fears that if the Russians move we will be shipped off to Siberia." It was that sort of time. For the first part of my time there I was listening to Russian military communications, which we, of course, did not understand since none of us spoke the language. And then after that I went on to interviewing people who had escaped from Eastern Europe, and making recommendations about whether they should be given visas or not, which was the most responsible job I ever had, because it was a job where you were deciding people's fates. But I learnt an awful lot of East European history that way which was subsequently very useful. That was four years before the Russians finally pulled out of Austria. Although our officers at the time told us that Russia would never pull out, because they had never pulled out of anywhere and Austria was vital for their empire. That was one of the many misjudgements about Russia I heard in the course of my career.

**JWH:** Wasn't the Austrian Treaty Khrushchev's decision?

**RQB:** I am not sure. Soviet policy making over Germany and Austria was very complicated. But I think that after Stalin died they cut their losses. Austria was actually of no use to them. The real issue was Germany. They cut their forward positions, which is what Gorbachev subsequently did in spades.

**JWH:** And indeed we thought at the time that Austria was a bait: a sprat to catch a mackerel. They wanted something that would favour them as an agreement on Germany.

**RQB:** Well, why not. I mean, you use your bargaining chips as you can.

**JWH:** Your own first posts abroad after University were Djakarta and then Warsaw. followed by the Foreign Office Desk on Eastern Europe. and then Moscow. Apart from Djakarta, that makes it look as if you were meant to be a budding specialist on the Soviet Union and Communist East Europe. Was that the career plan?

**RQB:** I don't know that career planning in the Foreign Office was very highly developed either then. or indeed I suspect, now. When I joined I was not sent off to learn a hard language as it was assumed I knew one, having done Russian. I think they were also slightly nervous about my political altitudes at that time. So that is no doubt why they first put me into Cultural Relations Department. and then shipped me off to Djakarta. However, I got back on track and. indeed, most of my career was spent dealing with East-West relations, political and military affairs and other aspects of European policy and Russia.

**JWH:** Quite, and that gives us plenty to work on. However, your first contact, at any rate, with Moscow was doing commercial work. commercial promotion in the middle of the sixties and that must have been very different from commercial work now. Now you have been back to Russia often since. Is there any historical interest in the contrast between the Embassy's role, or commercial promotion role, then and now?

**RQB:** Yes, of course there is. The huge difference is that when we arrived in Moscow in 1988 we arrived in an embassy which had very, very recently become able to operate as a normal embassy. that is to say, conducting business with people at all levels, having normal contacts, indeed, warm personal contacts, with lots of Russians who would invite you to their houses and come to your house. With the huge advantage, in addition, that because this was such a recent phenomenon the Embassy in Moscow had none of the hangers-on that embassies in other countries have, the sort of people that you always have to invite to the Queen's Birthday Party. If anybody came up to me and said "The previous Ambassador always used to invite me to dinner," I knew that I had no need to invite him to dinner because he was probably a representative of what they called the 'organs', i.e. the KGB.

It was a very, very good period and, of course, totally different from what it had been in the 1960s. In those days Russians were rightly afraid to have too much to do with diplomats. Any Russians who were not afraid probably had some connection with the 'organs'; or they were imprudent and about to suffer an unpleasant surprise when the organs caught up with them. So you did not necessarily want to be all that friendly with them.

I think another way of describing the contrast between the 1960s and the 1980s is to talk a bit about what it was like in Poland when I was there, which was 1959 to 1961. Everybody now forgets that in the first years. Gomulka's Poland was a very open country indeed. It was the only communist country where you could talk to people, including communists, including party officials, and senior figures, about what it was like to live in a communist country. It was, of course, a very good place for learning a lot about relationships in Eastern Europe, about the Russians, and it was very pleasant because we had lots of Polish friends. Most of them did not realise that the secret police, what I was calling the 'organs', were still active. They thought that they had been wholly demoralised by the arrival of Gomulka. That, of course, was not true. And so in Poland I had lots of contact with the police because they were always following me around. Because I was a bachelor I was always going around at all hours of the day and night with all sorts of different people. that was something which it would have made no sense to do in Moscow. In Poland, at that time, you could be reasonably sure that if you did not make a fool of yourself you could get away with being pretty free. You could be reasonably sure that they had decided that it was politically stupid actually to entrap people. It was bad for their relations with the West. Of course if you entrapped yourself they took advantage of it, which was fair enough. In Moscow you could never be sure of that. The stories about people being drugged, or whatever, are true stories. And even if they did not catch you they could and did run an unpleasant campaign against you in the press. So it was a completely different set-up in the sixties.

In the eighties, of course particularly after the coup in 1991, but even in 1988, the secret police were far less active, far less effective, and Russians were ceasing to be afraid of them. And that was a crucial change that took place then, in about 1988 when we arrived.

**JWH:** Thank you. that is a very helpful look forward. Could I go back for a moment or two to the sixties? You actually witnessed the fall of Khrushchev and you subsequently, or at some point, interpreted between Mr Wilson and Mr Kosygin. that is quite interesting. Was

there any change in the British attitude when Labour and Harold Wilson came to power in '64?

**RQB:** Well, first of all you said I witnessed the fall of Khrushchev. Of course, in those days nobody witnessed the fall of Khrushchev if they were a foreigner. We heard about it on the BBC although we were living in Moscow. that was actually a rather good day because we heard first of all that Khrushchev had fallen; secondly that Harold Wilson had won an election; and thirdly that the Chinese had just exploded their first nuclear weapon. It was about the 14th of October 1964. So, as I say, we did not actually observe the fall of Khrushchev and we did not know, needless to say, what it signified. We knew very little about his successors.

I don't think the arrival of Harold Wilson made a huge difference. Harold Wilson had his own connections with Eastern Europe and Russia, but the truth of the matter is that for most of recent history, and perhaps for longer than that. the substance of Anglo-Russian or Anglo-Soviet relations has always been very thin. As a bilateral relationship neither country has actually cared very much about the other. We cared about the Soviet Union as a huge potential threat. But the policy issues which that gave rise to were mainly conducted within the NATO Alliance and within our relations with the Americans. Most of our dealings with the Russians directly were over things like who was going to throw out whose spy first. things which are not actually the mainstream of normal, bilateral, international relations. An awful lot of both Mr Macmillan's handling of Russia and Harold Wilson's handling of Russia was not all that far removed from gesture politics, because there was very little bilateral substance. They came to Russia and the gestures were quite often useful, but it was not they who negotiated the big agreements. Macmillan did sign them, the Test-Ban Treaty and things like that. But it was the Americans who negotiated them.

Harold Wilson was the first politician with whom I had a reasonably intimate relationship. He came out to Moscow twice in 1966. On both occasions I was involved with him for a variety of reasons, partly because a college friend of mine worked on his staff. The second time he asked me to be his interpreter.

That was a very interesting occasion. Wilson and I and Kosygin and the Russian interpreter met in one of the Soviet Government villas on the Lenin hills. Harold Wilson, at the request of the Americans, wanted to get the Russians to persuade the Vietnamese not to put on trial

the American pilots that had been shot down over North Vietnam in the summer of 1966. The meeting lasted about an hour, and contained almost no substance. I did not do the interpreting, because I am not an interpreter. So I got the Russian interpreter, Sukhodriev, to do it both ways. He did it brilliantly.

**JWH:** But you were monitoring him? You knew enough to tell him that he was wrong.

**RQB:** Of course, if the worst had absolutely come to the worst I could do a halting interpretation. But interpretation is a special skill.

Kosygin gave two answers to Harold Wilson's request that the Russians should intervene with the Vietnamese; or rather the first was a question. Kosygin asked: "What were the American pilots doing over North Vietnam", since there had been no declaration of war. Secondly, he said: "You may not believe this, but it is no good you thinking that we have any influence over the North Vietnamese because we don't. If they want to put the pilots on trial, they will." And that really exhausted the hour. Now when we got back to the Embassy Harold Wilson, a man with the reputation of having an outstanding memory, asked me if I could write a record of the meeting. Well, Kosygin had not let me take notes. So I had to, in effect, make it up. By the time I made it lip it came to five or six pages. I showed them to Wilson. Wilson said "That is a brilliant recall of what happened". I knew it wasn't, so I realised that his memory was actually not all that better than my memory. Then he said, "Mark it Top Secret and give it to my staff. We will not give it to the Foreign Office ". Then he went into a press conference where he said that, "The exchanges that I have just had with the Soviet Prime Minister have been more far-ranging and more profound, perhaps, than any exchanges with a Soviet Prime Minister and his foreign counterpart ". Well, I mean, that was not true actually. My theory was that the reason that he made the record Top Secret, and would not let the Foreign Office have it was that it would have been seen not to be quite true. Now that may be being unduly suspicious, but I was young at the time and rather easily shocked.

Having said that, I think I should add just a couple more words about Harold Wilson. Harold Wilson was a very nice man. He was also amazingly indiscreet, both in some of the things he said to me about my senior colleagues at the Foreign Office. and in some of the things he said in the presence of journalists about foreign politicians. They were things which if they had been reported would have got him into serious trouble. But because at that time he was

still on good terms with the press, they were not reported. One can't imagine that happening a couple of decades later, though I have seen other Prime Ministers also being surprisingly indiscreet. Harold Wilson wasn't a very successful Prime Minister at the end. But he has been unduly maligned especially as a person. I think he was a decent person.

**JWH:** Thank you. One more quick question about Moscow. It was quite new to me, you said somewhere, that during that time the KGB had "Tried to burn the Embassy". Is that quite true?

**RQB:** Yes, it is quite true. It happened in the Autumn of 1964, and Russians who knew about that sort of thing were still speaking about it when we got back at the end of the 1980s. There was a fire in the east wing at the Embassy one evening. The Ambassador, Humphrey Trevelyan, was called out of a performance by the English Opera Group to go back and see what was going on. By the time I got there, which was after the opera was over, the place was surrounded by alleged Soviet firemen, directed by alleged senior firemen. It was pretty obvious that some of these people were not firemen at all. They wanted to get into that bit of the Embassy to see what was going on, so they set it on fire which was quite a good way. It did not succeed because they did not discover anything. The KGB mounted a similar operation against the American Embassy even while I was there this last time. It was a recognised, obviously rather a good, technique for breaking into an embassy which was ostensibly foreign territory.

**JWH:** Indeed, thank you. Now I understand. Then you had a complete change of scene in as much as your next posting was Rome, and here you were entirely back on political work, I think. Indeed you remarked that you were preparing our second bid to enter the European Community. I was little surprised at the idea that the Labour government, which was still in power until 1970, was actively preparing a bid to enter the Community.

**RQB:** Absolutely, they were. They made a major attempt to get in in 1967. Harold Wilson and George Brown travelled around all the capitals of the then European of Six in order to put their case. They came to Rome while I was there, which was why I got involved. I was dealing with that issue with the Italian Foreign Ministry, so it was quite an active affair. That was the time of General de Gaulle's second veto. He vetoed that attempt, as he had vetoed our first attempt to join the European Community in 1963. And so that was actually the

second occasion on which I had dealings with Wilson, and the only occasion when I had dealings with George Brown.

**JWH:** I see. I should not have forgotten that. I had associated the trips round Europe with the renegotiation which was a later episode.

**RQB:** I was involved in the renegotiation as well, but that was six years later. It was after the Labour Party went into opposition in 1970 that the anti-marketeters in the Labour Party began to acquire the great influence that they subsequently exercised. It is a characteristic of both parties, that whatever they say at any given period of history, they both of them have a substantially anti-European wing. It depends on the internal politics of the party which wing is dominant at any given time. The people who are advocating this or that believe they are speaking for the British people. But they certainly are not. If they are speaking for anybody it is for the fanatics in the Constituency parties in both cases.

**JWH:** Thank you. That clarifies that. As regards the internal Italian political scene and the danger of Italian Communism which seems to have preoccupied the Foreign Office a bit, what was your view of that on the spot?

**RQB:** My view was that the Foreign Office grossly exaggerated the threat. Of course, it was difficult to argue in an entirely convincing, overwhelming way that Italian communists were not the same as Russian communists. But of course they weren't. What people kept on forgetting was that Communism in Eastern Europe was a product of the position that the Soviet Army found itself in in 1945. The Czechs would probably not have become Communist otherwise. The Red Army did not get to Italy, so it was a completely different phenomenon; it was an indigenous phenomenon, and by the time I got to Rome it was a rapidly changing phenomenon. Even while I was in Moscow, before that, the Russians were getting very restive at the unorthodox things the Italian Communists were saying. So the question was whether at that point, 1967-8-9, the Italian political situation would evolve to the point where the Christian Democrats would decide that it was to their advantage to enter into an alliance with the Communists or not. I thought that they were perfectly capable of doing that despite their allegedly anti-Communist posture. What the Christian democrats were really interested in was power, and if the Communists would help them stay in power they would swallow most of their scruples. That is of course what they subsequently did. Of course nobody in London agreed with these arguments, partly because nobody in

Washington agreed with them. Kissinger started getting frightfully excited about Italian Communism in the mid-1970s. But in my view at the time his fear of Italian Communism was an exaggeration. Of course, hindsight is always a great help but it is nice that my foresight and my hindsight in this instance coincide. They don't always.

**JWH:** Did you frequently have the feeling that London, the Foreign Office, did not really give enough weight to the views of the man on the spot at a post abroad?

**RQB:** Of course, that is inevitable in any system. In any system the policy is made at headquarters, whether it is a business organisation, a country or the Foreign Office. Policy is made in the light of what is politically possible in the capital concerned, in the light of a whole lot of considerations which the man on the spot either does not know, does not care about, or thinks are wholly inappropriate. I never found anything wrong with that. First of all the man on the spot is not always right, even on the substance. Secondly, he is not responsible for the policy in the end. A lot of our policies were driven by domestic considerations which I did not sympathise with, or driven by the need to be friendly with our allies, which could be irrelevant as far as the substance is concerned, but that is the reality. Ambassadors who send increasingly testy telegrams from their capital, from their post, to their foreign ministry and then get cross when nobody takes any notice of them, are being rather silly. What happens is that very quickly is that the Foreign Office, or the foreign ministry, says: "Oh Christ, not another telegram from that man". It seems to me a mistake for an ambassador to get himself into that situation. If he can send telegrams like that and win, that's fine. But you have to do it very rarely. Otherwise you bore people.

**JWH:** That doubtless reflects your subsequent experience at the centre, and indeed your very next posting was back to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in Western Organisations Department, which I believe, if I remember rightly, dealt with all the major inter-European bodies which were not actually part of the European Community; bodies such as NATO and Western European Union. Is this experience relevant now; when Britain is very keen on maximum cooperation with the other members of the Community, but not so keen on putting everything under the Brussels umbrella?

**RQB:** Well, I'd like to come back to that if I may. I'd like to just pursue further that thought about head offices and agents, which as I say is replicated in all sorts of organisations and institutions. My favourite example of a clash between an Ambassador and London is not

quite relevant. But it is too good a story to miss. It happened after the first British presidency of the European Community when I was in Brussels, dealing with the European Community. We were extremely proud of the way we had run the Presidency. We had set out to show those foreigners how much better we were at running things than they were, and how we were practical and they were merely theoretical. We irritated the pants off lots of people in consequence. After the Presidency was over, the Foreign Office sent telegrams to our Ambassadors in the Community countries asking them to report on the local reaction to the late British Presidency. Oliver Wright, then in Bonn, sent a telegram back which began "If I were asked to sum up in two words the reaction of the Germans to the ending of the British presidency, they would be 'good riddance'". He then went on to say some disobliging things about the way we had conducted the Presidency. He concluded that, whatever the state of the political relationship, the relationship between our two countries was very good because we had our splendid British Army of the Rhine and our Queen had just visited them. He concluded with a flourish in German: 'Glanz und Gloria dem Britischen Reich'. Of course, that irritated the pants off Jim Callaghan, as you can imagine. I don't know what form it took but Oliver was rebuked for being less than respectful. But his main point was right of course.

Sorry. However, you then asked me about working in the Western Organisations Department where I was the Assistant dealing with the NATO side. That was an extremely interesting experience. By the time I had left it I had done it for four years, with a gap in Oxford for a year, and we were dealing with, first of all, the approach to the European Security Conference. The European Security Conference was something that the Russians had been advocating for years and we had been opposing on two grounds, first of all anything that is proposed by the Russians must be bad; and secondly, that if we go into a conference with the Russians, they are so much cleverer than we are that they will steal our trousers and so that we had better not. I thought that too was an exaggerated fear, to put it mildly. I thought that this conference would do us no harm, and probably would do us any good and there was not any particular reason why we should avoid it. That was a wrong judgement because that ended up in Helsinki Conference, definitely not what I thought. Through the so called third basket on human rights, the West put pressure on the domestic politics of Russia and other Warsaw Pact countries which did help, in possibly a significant way, to bring about the break up of the Soviet system. I had definitely not predicted that. I was right that the Conference was not a danger, but I was wrong in not seeing that actually it was an opportunity.

I had a particular responsibility for Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions, the proposals for cutting conventional forces in Europe. Again, I thought that we were unduly fearful of entering into negotiations on this subject. There was every reason to suppose that Russians were at least as fearful as we were, because their military problem in Europe was, of course, much more difficult than we gave them credit for. Not only did they have to face up to what was quite a competent alliance, but they also had to deal with the prospect that, if they got into a scrap with us, there would be risings in Poland on their lines of communications. So they were very worried about reducing their forces. But of course, you could never get the Ministry of Defence to accept that because the Ministry of Defence concentrates only on capabilities and not on intentions. That is what all defence ministries are paid to do. But it leads to misjudgements. Another anecdotal example. I gave a seminar on MBFR at the National Defence College, which no longer exists. I was saying roughly what I have just said. An RAF Group Captain, who had just come back from Germany, said "But do you realise that the Russians have now set up an air-portable brigade? They could fly it into Frankfurt airport. They could put up a perimeter around the airport. We simply don't have the force that would be needed to dislodge them?" And I replied, "Well, I don't know what the facts are. But they are not going to do that". He said "How do you know they are not going to do that?". I said "I don't *know* that they are not going to do that. But I bet they won't". It is actually a real dilemma, the clash, the conflict between the judgement of intentions and the judgement of capabilities, but you can get yourself into absurd positions if you are not careful.

The third thing was not primarily my business, it was Michael Alexander's, who was responsible in Western Organisations Department for nuclear matters, but I was involved in it. When I arrived in the department at the end of the summer of 1969 we were just starting some very secret talks with the Germans and the Americans in order to work out what our policy was for the tactical use of nuclear weapons in Europe. I was amazed to discover that we had something like 7,000 tactical nuclear warheads stored in Europe and nobody had worked out what they were there for. So we then went into an agonising discussion of the circumstances in which one might use these things. We tried to go beyond the cliché that they were a necessary rung in the ladder of escalation, which tells you nothing, to work out what the cliché might mean in practice.

There was naturally a conflict between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. The Foreign Office believed that you had to have a credible ladder of escalation and that that would mean that you had to let at least one of these things off between the Russians' conventional attack and you going fully nuclear. That would probably be enough to make the point, though you might perhaps let off three of them. The Ministry of Defence, of course, said that there was no point in having weapons unless you had a military doctrine for using them. Between us we concluded that a suitable military target might be a Soviet tank army in Germany. If it started lumbering forward you would 'nuke' it. The question was: how many weapons did you need to do that? At that time we were talking about introducing the Lance missile, which was phased out, if you remember, in the early '80s and was replaced by Pershings. At that time it was new and it could lob a nuclear warhead about 70 miles. This seemed to be a very good thing for zapping tank armies with. Then the question was: how many of these things should we buy from the Americans? Well, we said, the Foreign Office said that you did not need very many to make your point about the nuclear ladder. I cannot remember what the figure was, but if it was 50 I would be very surprised, probably nearer 20. The MOD said that, to be sure of taking out a tank army, you needed say 60. Then you needed to have insurance against 60 of them not working, from mechanical failure, so you needed another 60. And then, because the Russians might take out 60 of your weapons before you managed to fire them, you needed another 60. So they produced a figure of 180. Our figure was 20 (I do not remember the exact figures, but that was the order of magnitude). Of course the inevitable result was that we split the difference so the number of these things which we had was the wrong number in any circumstances.

I also got involved in NATO Council meetings. That was very interesting because it was the first time I had seen multilateral diplomacy at work. And I formed a view then, which I never subsequently abandoned. The practice, the day to day practice, of multilateral diplomacy is extremely tedious. You spend endless hours and nights negotiating texts which, the more you negotiate them the less comprehensible they are, anyhow to normal human beings. In the course of negotiation like that, words acquire meanings which they do not have in the outside world. So you produced these texts, which often ended up as NATO communiqués, which no normal person could understand. And which nobody else could understand either, unless they knew the negotiating history. The activity had a certain value because it was part of the process, as it were, of bonding the members of the alliance together. Every now and again it produced genuine shifts of policy. But it was an extremely inefficient way of doing it in terms of the amount of effort that you put into it. And, of

course, one of the minor irritations was that there were always people round the negotiating table, often Dutchmen, who would keep on telling you that you had misunderstood the nuance of a particular English word. They may have been right, because they spoke very good English, but it was occasionally rather irritating.

**JWH:** If I may interject, I have heard it said about the political co-operation of the nine members of the Community, as it was then, that this was indeed extremely tedious. Frequently the people with most to say were the people who had least weighty things to say but that it was essential and it was worthwhile. It was a grind but it had produced worthwhile results and this is perhaps a feature of all diplomacy involving a lot of people round a table which we shall have to continue to grind at, and get used to, and make worthwhile in all sorts of fora particularly, perhaps, in the European Community?

**RQB:** Well, I was the second British representative in political co-operation after Michael Butler, the so-called "European Correspondent". I have to say that I think that the importance and value of political co-operation was always grossly exaggerated, particularly by the Foreign Office. The important things that were going on in the Community were tough negotiations about the price of pig meat, because they actually did affect ordinary people's livings. What went on in the economic field was really important, because you could make or break people's livelihoods. The political co-operation was mostly hot air. The sort of documents that were produced were the sort of things a desk officer in the Foreign Office would produce very quickly and had about as much effect on the real world. I think that the reason why the Foreign Office, in particular, liked political co-operation was that no other Whitehall department was involved in it, because the subject matter was one that they were used to, and because you did not spend all your time arguing about tedious, legal, economic details. Ministers liked it for the same reason. They loved political co-operation and hated the tedious grind of ordinary Council meetings in Brussels. Here too the process had some positive value because of its bonding effect. But if you want to see an example of where it was positively, positively damaging, look at the history of the discussions in the European Union during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Dreadful mistakes were made because people were more concerned to get agreement amongst themselves than they were to address the problems, and because small countries who were not prepared to take responsibility had as large a voice as large countries. That led to some really appalling misjudgements. There is the famous statement by Monsieur Poos, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg at the end of 1991, when he said "Now is Europe's hour". The Europeans in

effect told the Americans to get stuffed because they were going to sort this out on their own continent. That is an example of the process driving the substance in a really damaging way. Though I have no objection in principle to European foreign policy cooperation I remain very sceptical about its practicability.

There is another point which represents a genuine problem in the European context, and that is the problem of language. I first came across it in the spring of 1973, that is to say before we became full members, but after the treaties had been signed and ratified. Brian Fall and I (I was the 'Correspondent'. and he was the expert on the Soviet Union and the European Security Conference) were due to attend a meeting in Luxembourg of the Political Co-operation body. There was huge debate in the Foreign Office before we went as to whether we should speak French or not. At that time the convention of political co-operation was that only French was spoken, and that there were no interpreters. There were those in the Foreign Office who said that we must show these bastards that things had changed. English was as good a language as French, and so they told us to speak English. My view was that English would achieve its own level without us having to try particularly. It was not worth having a row. And, in fact, Brian Fall and I spoke French at the meeting itself. In the coffee break the German came up and said to us that he was very glad to see that we had only spoken French, because he was under instructions immediately to switch to German if we used English. At which point of course the whole thing would have come to a grinding halt because there were no interpreters and not many people speak German.

This language thing may sound absurd. In fact, in the Community it is not absurd. Most of the economic business I was talking about is negotiated between people who know about farming and don't speak Greek, or whatever the language is. So you have to have interpreters particularly since the results then go into national legislation. It is a very difficult, a very expensive question to deal with. But it is not a trivial one.

**JWH:** We have been talking about the Community already and after you left Western Organisations Department you did indeed go straight into, very much into, the Community. You became head of European Integration Department, but with the addition in brackets 'External'. What is the significance of that?

**RQB:** Well, these names are full of significance. Mr Callaghan objected to the name "European Integration Department" because he was not about to integrate into Europe.

Secondly, there were two departments: EID (External) and EID (Internal). EID (External) when I joined it was supposed to be more fun because you dealt with a wider variety of subjects and did not spend all your time arguing about the price of pig meat. But then within two and a half months of me becoming head of the Department the Labour Government got into power with a mandate to renegotiate our terms of accession. At that point the burden switched from the external very much to the internal, which dealt with the Common Agricultural Policy, the financial arrangements, the fishing policy and all the many things that the British did not like. So the action switched to that Department, which was headed by John Fretwell. The period of renegotiation leading up to the Referendum, which took place in 1975, was very intensive and very interesting. I was involved in it but not so centrally involved as John and, of course, Michael Butler.

The reason why it was such an interesting period was that almost all the constitutional conventions that exist in our system were violated in one way or another. The Cabinet were split and remained split. Ministers and their senior officials in various Departments totally disagreed with one another. And the consequence was that almost everybody, therefore, pursued whichever policy, pro or contra, he liked. There was the notorious division between Peter Shore, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and Roy Denman, who was the Deputy Secretary responsible for Europe and had been in the negotiating team for our entrance. They were just pursuing opposite, opposing policies. Something similar, though not quite to the same extent, was true in the Ministry of Agriculture. Harold Wilson never revealed his hand as to whether he wanted us to go in or stay out. Even Jim Callaghan thought that the unity of the Party was more important. But you got a really remarkable situation where in the Foreign Office we were writing papers for Jim Callaghan to put, as his own papers, to the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party. That is to say the difference between party politics and Whitehall was becoming almost erased. The Foreign Office was running a black propaganda campaign to promote a 'Yes' answer in the referendum. Christopher Soames was one of the two British Commissioners in Brussels. He was therefore meant to have nothing to do with domestic politics. But he was very actively organising another, less secret, propaganda campaign. Very, very little of this got written down in documents, official documents, for obvious reasons. Historians will find it very difficult to get right. And that is where people's diaries and so on are going to be very important when they finally emerge. But it was a fascinating and possibly unique period in our history. In the end the British people voted in the way which I suspect they usually will

vote which is in favour of common sense, even if - as in the case of the European Community - they don't like it.

**JWH:** By about two thirds to one third.

**RQB:** Something like that, yes.

**JWH:** It would be interesting to pursue that. But we ought to go back to your career because there is a lot of very interesting stuff. However, remaining with the Community, you then went to Brussels, indeed, to be Head of Chancery in the office of our Permanent Representative, our major mission, and working to the Commission and, of course, primarily to London. Most of the senior staff of the Mission were probably from other Ministries. What was the role of the Foreign Office contingent in the Mission as opposed to the specialists from other Ministries?

**RQB:** Well, there was one characteristic of the Mission in Brussels which is not true of somewhat similar posts abroad where there is a mixture, such as the NATO Mission or the Embassy in Washington, for that matter, and that is that at the end of the day, because of the way business that is conducted in Brussels, all work has to flow to and through the Ambassador. It is the Ambassador who conducts business vis á vis the Commission, vis á vis the other Missions.

**JWH:** That is to say the actual permanent representative himself.

**RQB:** The Permanent Representative himself. Obviously, a lot of business is conducted at all levels. But at the end, when there is a negotiation or confrontation, and for the weekly meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, everybody is briefing the same man. Whitehall Departments post their own people to UK Rep. They may think that this means that they can use their own people to pursue a departmental line without consulting the ambassador, the Foreign Office. or even the Cabinet Office. But the loyalties of the people in Brussels, unless he is an amazingly bad Ambassador which he never is, end up by being with their immediate boss, so that in the end the policy comes together. That does not mean to say that it is Foreign Office policy. Very often it is not Foreign Office policy. But it does come together. And that policy is represented by one man and that has a disciplining effect. I am somewhat exaggerating, but the basic proposition is right.

There is another disciplining effect. The Foreign Office, on the whole, controlled the flow of telegrams. Other departments could send their own instructions to their own people. But such instructions did not carry the same force.

Thirdly, the Foreign Office made a very particular point of being absolutely close to the Cabinet Office, which is where disputes in Whitehall got sorted out, so that the Foreign Office had plenty of ways of influencing and controlling the execution of policy, if not always the policy itself.

In addition the Permanent Representative did actually have a veto in the end over who Departments sent out to be part of the Mission in Brussels. On two occasions Donald Maitland and I vetoed candidates who had been put forward by home departments. This caused a tremendous amount of upset and anger. In one case the man was clearly inadequate for the job. We insisted that there should be a proper competition. The original candidate lost the competition and we got a very good bloke instead. On another occasion we had a run in with the Treasury who tried to impose someone on us. We refused and I was told by the Treasury "Well, you needn't think we going to send another man as good as that person we were going to send", and I said, "Well that's your business if you want to send a second rate person". Well, of course they did not. They sent a very good person.

And so although, rightly, the Foreign Office does not dominate the substance of the policy, the Foreign Office's position in the process remains very strong and it actually worked in Brussels. I thought you did end up with something quite like a unified team.

**JWH:** There was probably quite enough there, just running this show and administering it, to keep you busy? You must also have been involved in the policy? Were there any striking things in your time?

**RQB:** Well, the answer is that being the manager of this operation was quite time-consuming. There is a lot of welfare, just making people happier. A lot of the home Civil Servants had never served abroad before. Even in an ordinary embassy you always get upsets and people go off their heads and so on. So you have to deal with that. There were no policy issues for which I was directly responsible. But, particularly after I had been there for a certain length of time and got closer to the Ambassador, I was asked for my advice on lots

of things. Particularly during the British Presidency, I did get to chairing meetings and negotiating things. Mostly not very glamorous ones, like the Commission's personnel policy, whether they were taking enough Brits or not. Of course, one got involved in the argument about things like the British financial contribution which was a major issue, where we were all, I was, very passionate. Some of the richer countries of Europe, who were huge beneficiaries in addition, kept on lecturing us about how we should accept the rules of the club. I used to get involved in quite serious arguments with those people. It paid off when I went back to the Foreign Office again and was dealing with those matters.

**JWH:** Could I ask one question about a particular thing? I have a prejudice deriving from the thought that the fisheries policy was negotiated in some haste after our joining had been agreed, but before we were full members with a full voice, when it might have been more gentlemanly of the other members to wait until we were in. considering what a large proportion of the Community's fishery waters were going to come in with us. Am I quite wrong about that, or am I right?

**RQB:** You are only wrong about one thing. That is that the Community is not a gentlemanly organisation and so none of those considerations applied. Everybody is out to get what they can. I think that it was a major tactical error on the part of the Continentals to rub our noses in a number of things. It is true that if we had been sensible and joined the Community earlier a lot of these policies would not have happened. Whatever they now say, the Continentals are actually quite glad that we did not join earlier, for that very reason. It is quite true that the fisheries policy was rushed through just in time for it to be impossible for us to influence it. There has been a lot of grief ever since. The people who were most in favour of rushing it through were the Dutch who were also most in favour of us getting into the Community.

The financial arrangements were quite clearly inequitable. If they have not got it already Churchill College should get hold of Con O'Neill's history of the negotiations. It deals with all these matters with great authority. O'Neill was the man who led the official team for our entry negotiations in 1971. He says in his history, which was written in 1972, "We are going to have to renegotiate the financial arrangement." He says on the fisheries policy that it is a bad policy but fishermen are all equally unreasonable and so what do you expect. It is a long time since I read it, but that is roughly the thrust of it. Crispin Tickell, who was the Principal Private Secretary of the chief ministerial negotiator under Heath, Lord Rippon and

subsequently became chef de cabinet to Roy Jenkins when Jenkins was President of the Commission, once complained to me about how badly the British were behaving. I said "Well if you impose a Versailles peace on somebody, you must expect them to behave badly". Crispin was not amused. But we had twice been rejected and were desperate to get in, our negotiating position was not very strong, and we were taken advantage of. And that was a great mistake by the Continentals: it is a silly thing to screw people you want to be partners with. Of course that was not the only reason why we behaved badly in the Community. There are all sorts of reasons and some of them are because we are what we are. But we were not helped, by the way the negotiations were conducted by people who were in a stronger position than we were.

**JWH:** One more question, if I may, about the Community at present. Was there not a first attempt at monetary union by about 1980, which must have arisen during your time?

**RQB:** Well, the answer is no, it didn't arise during my time. I cannot remember the exact dates. It did arise in 1980, no, earlier than that. They committed themselves in the early 1970s to "Economic and Monetary Union by 1980" at a summit meeting which, I cannot remember, was either in Rome or in The Hague, or perhaps it was dealt with at both. One of the Summits was just before we joined the Community and Edward Heath was at it. That was not the first time the Six committed themselves to Economic and Monetary Union because there had been the Werner plan earlier. I cannot remember the date but in the '60s, well before we joined. So this is a plan that has been attempted on a number of occasions. And it has not worked on a number of occasions. The issue was discussed by officials when I was in Downing Street after my return from Moscow. Personally I have no emotional hang-ups about economic and monetary union. I think the sovereignty argument is grossly exaggerated. If everybody wants an economic and monetary union, that is fine by me. I just think that the technicalities and the politics of it are extremely difficult. The worst possible thing that could happen now is if the attempt to set up an economic and monetary union fails. The fall-out and the chaos risks being extremely unpleasant. If it succeeds there will also be some difficult consequences. We have embarked on a risky path. But as we have done so, I hope that it works.

**JWH:** It is very tempting to ask you to expand that, but I should not at the moment. Returning to your career, you then returned from Brussels and became head of the Planning Staff. The Planning Staff is a department only set up somewhat later than the post-war

period in which we joined the Service. I believe that they worked really only in issues specified to them, but apart from helping in emergencies, of course, which was another main reason why they were set up.

**RQB:** No, not at all.

**JWH:** Well, could I just ask you, then, what were the main issues you were either asked to deal with or arose and what you want to say about them.

**RQB:** Well, first of all, the Planning Staff was set up in what became its present form in the late '50s. Michael Palliser was the first head and at that time it worked very closely with the MOD and dealt with politico-military matters, mostly. I am not sure of the details of that period. You will have to ask somebody who was there. It then became a purely Foreign Office thing and there was always an issue, and there will always be an issue, about what on earth it was for. I was lucky that the Permanent Secretary when I was doing it was Michael Palliser who had done it himself, and he told me on one occasion that he regarded it as a 'gather ye rosebuds' job. That is to say you should squeeze everything you could out of it as you saw fit.

Other Foreign Ministries have planning staffs that are the personal staffs of the Minister. That is true in the United States; it is true in Germany and it is true in France. These often operate as an alternative, mini-Foreign Ministry and very often they are much more the source of new policy, and even the execution of new policy, than the Ministry is itself. That has never happened in the Foreign Office, partly because the Foreign Office bureaucracy is determined that it should not happen, and is very well placed to ensure that it does not happen. So the Foreign Office Planning Staff is a small and rather junior body within the Foreign Office. When I first joined it I told the very small staff of four or five people that the Planning Staff was rather like a irregular force operating ahead of the main army, out of uniform and doing pretty much what it liked. And that is fine and it can be useful. But if it starts being irritating to the main force the first thing they will do is put regular officers in charge of it. And if that does not work they will take it out into the forest and shoot it. So you have to be a bit careful. You work out how to sell your wares to people who think they know at least as much as you do about the subject. Very often they do, actually. Just being original for its own sake is, of course, a waste of time.

So what we did, first of all we got involved in speech writing. Lots of planners hate that, but it does mean you get close to the Minister and you can feed a bit of policy into your speech without anybody noticing.

Occasionally we did take on the heavyweights like the European bit of the Foreign Office. At that time the issue was Mrs Thatcher wanted to get her money back and the main body of the Eurocracy at the Foreign Office was deeply shocked about that. I think she was right on the substance but her style was wrong. She alienated people quite unnecessarily but the objective was the right one and in the end we more or less achieved it. I tried to argue that with the European parts of the Foreign Office. Of course they simply did not listen to me, because they did not need to. We also argued about politico-military matters, also without much success.

But, for example, when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, South Asia Department in the Foreign Office was simply not equipped to deal with the crisis. So it was handed over to us to deal with and for five or six weeks we were the sort of executive arm of the Deputy Secretaries, and so on, who were dealing with it. That was very interesting. The same thing happened during the Falkland crisis after I left when Christopher Mallaby was in charge of it. In fact to an even greater extent. So that the Planning Staff was acting as a sort of air-portable brigade, or perhaps, because it is so small, something like an SAS Squadron. And that is a useful function. I mean, I don't want to underestimate the other function of producing alternative ideas but one must not exaggerate. You have to be very good; you have to have a very powerful intelligence and ability to advocate before people will listen to you when you are starting from such a weak base. Perhaps the most successful of all the Heads of the Planning Staff in this respect was Robert Cooper.

What I did make sure, and this has not always happened since, is that nobody could tell me what to do. Various attempts were made to produce great circulars for the PUS saying what the functions of the Planning Staff were, and setting up a Planning Committee and Deputy Secretaries, a whole huge bureaucracy which was, I thought, a complete waste of time. It just meant more paper was generated for a lot of elderly gents who usually did not have time to read it. It is much better, if you are going to have a Planning Staff, for it to be really as independent as it thinks it can get away with, which is not very far.

**JWH:** During that time the Government changed from Labour, Mr Callaghan, to Conservative, Mrs Thatcher, and you have just mentioned that the Soviet Union came to the fore invading Afghanistan and you were involved. What happened? Presumably the whole government was interested? So what happened there as far as the Planning Staff was concerned?

**RQB:** Well, we were rather involved in all that. Firstly, just again on the role of the Planning Staff: I joined it in the fag end of the Labour Government when David Owen was Foreign Secretary. David Owen was at war with the Foreign Office at the time, as he was with many people and institutions, and he wanted the Planning Staff to perform the role which it does in other Foreign Ministries. He wanted it to be a sort of subversive force within the Foreign Office, really to enable him to impose his will. I was very, very reluctant to get in that position. I managed to avoid it for the two and a half months that we overlapped.

And then we had Lord Carrington who was, of course, a totally different kettle of fish. We all admired him immensely. His main interest in the Planning Staff was that we should write speeches that had at least three quotations in them so as that people who were listening to them, this is what he said, would think that he occasionally read a book. But the Russian thing did come up because, of course, Mrs Thatcher was coming to power, and a year later Reagan came to power, with a view of the Soviet menace, a very exaggerated view in my opinion. And the first thing we did was write the papers for the incoming Government. These are the briefing papers which Whitehall prepares during an election campaign for the benefit of the new Ministers who come in after the election. In the Foreign Office the Planning Staff co-ordinates and edits these papers. So we saw the whole lot. And I wrote one on the Soviet Union, in which I said among other things that the Soviet Union was a military giant but an economic and political pygmy. But my superiors regarded it as complacent so it was changed.

Then what was very interesting was, a year later, that is to say in the spring of 1980, Michael Alexander, who was Mrs Thatcher's Foreign Office Private Secretary, said to her "You bang on about the Soviet Union all the time. You ought to talk to some people who have actually been there." And she said, "Well who have you got in mind?" and he said "Well, there are people in the Foreign Office". "Foreign Office", she said "what do they know about anything?" He nevertheless persuaded her. She actually came across from No 10 to the

Foreign Secretary's office for a meeting, a gesture that I think was probably unprecedented and never repeated. It was a very small meeting. Apart from Carrington and the Private Secretary there was me and Christopher Mallaby. As we went into the room before she arrived, Carrington asked us if we had had any dealings with her before, and we had not really, so he said, "If you disagree with what she is saying, tell her. And if she won't let you get a word in edgeways, shout her down." She came in and she started ranting away and we started more and more insistently saying "But Prime Minister there is something we would like to say", and she shut up and listened.

Christopher Mallaby had just come back from Moscow and he gave an absolutely brilliant account of the current state of affairs in the Soviet Union. She listened extremely attentively and she said "But if it is like that this thing can't last. It is going to collapse". That was in 1980. So we said "No, Prime Minister, of course it is not going to last but it is not going to go very quickly because there is the KGB and the army, and the party, and a whole lot of people who are going to make sure it does not disappear too quickly". Anyway, we then had two more similar seminars. And then I think she had had enough.

If you look at her memoirs, she of course barely mentions the Foreign Office. But what she does say is "People ask me why I picked on Gorbachev. I had concluded that this is a system which could not be overthrown from outside, it would have to be changed from within by somebody who had emerged through the system and so I was looking out for a likely lad and, when I saw Gorbachev, I recognised him." Now I think that that is actually a very perceptive analysis. Despite all her rhetoric about the Soviet Union she was actually more right about it than some other people. So that was an interesting part of that particular period of my life.

**JWH:** It certainly was, particularly as that was some years before Gorbachev came to power.

**RQB:** That was five years before.

**JWH:** Five years, still it stayed in the memory, clearly. So unless there is more about that period, I would like to move on. We then come to what you called Assistant Under-Secretary for Bits and Pieces: Energy, Air Services, Environment and so on which you thought was a less than satisfactory job, so I wonder if it was a necessary one?

**RQB:** Well, I don't know. The reason why they told me they had given it to me was that they were looking for an Under-Secretary slot for me because they thought it was time I had one and couldn't find one so they gave me this. It was very bitty. It was bits and pieces. The interesting part of it was because it dealt with aviation, it also dealt with aircraft hijacking; because it dealt with aircraft hijacking it dealt with terrorism in general and that was before we had a department of the Foreign Office which dealt with those mailers. And that was interesting because it brought one into contact with the SAS, the military and we saw a lot of them. We went down to see them in Hereford. We exercised with them. There were all sorts of exercises which were conducted both in the field and in the Cabinet Office briefing room. That was interesting because we were setting up something which had not existed. It was just after I started that job, just after the Persian Embassy siege, when it was all very on the front page, as it were. And that was a reasonably creative job. The rest of it was just odds and sods which you could not do anything with much. They were mostly the responsibility of other Whitehall Departments and you were there just to be nice to people - to stop the bureaucrats being unnecessarily nasty to foreigners.

**JWH:** To make sure that there was some Foreign Service input into what they were telling posts .abroad to do, I suppose.

**RQB:** Yes, but as I say it is mostly to stop them being unnecessarily nasty to people, rather than anything more substantive.

**JWH:** It interested me that you then went to be Minister Commercial in Washington, which you describe as an excellent job involving continuous, perhaps rather confrontational, negotiations about many subjects, including many from your preceding bits and pieces job. That was a marvellous job?

**RQB:** Yes, because you were doing the negotiating. You were not simply sitting in on the briefing sessions for other people who were going to do the negotiating. And because it was a completely different aspect of the Special Relationship, because they were almost all contentious affairs where both sides were behaving badly. But the Americans thought we were being particularly bad. I have upstairs, given to me by a young woman in the American bureaucracy, a mug which is called 'Elegant Solutions'. It has 'Elegant Solutions' written on it. She was quite convinced that all American policy was driven only by moral

considerations and all British policy was dishonest in every possible way. And I found that fascinating. We had major issues like the Siberian pipeline issue. The Americans were trying to put sanctions on British firms. They did put sanctions on British firms who had disobeyed their order not to trade with the Russians, and that produced an explosion of wrath from Mrs Thatcher because she had strong views about Russians but even stronger views about people who tried to run things in her own country. So that brought her up against President Reagan.

We had a case, again a fascinating case, when Freddy Laker tried to sue British Airways for putting him out of business and the American Justice Department took the case up on the grounds that British Airways and other European airlines had violated anti-trust law. This was just at the moment when Mrs Thatcher was trying to privatise British Airways so again that produced a great deal of emotion. Again the Americans thought the British were behaving immorally and we won. As we did over the pipeline.

We had endless rows about CoCom. Who was supplying what sensitive equipment to the Russians. Of course, everyone was accusing everyone else of breaking the rules. That was rather exciting. What it also meant was that we were dealing with the whole of the system. Not only the State Department, the Pentagon and the CIA, we spent a lot of time on the Hill. We spent a lot of time talking to the Justice Department. We saw the whole American situation. One learnt, again, an awful lot about how America works, or at least how the American political machine works. That was a very good job. I loved it. My successors increasingly found it boring. I don't whether that was because they did not have the issues to deal with, or for some other reason, and it has since been folded in to the main job of the Minister, the number two.

**JWH:** Is there still a Minister (Economic)?

**RQB:** That is an interesting question. I mean in a rational world the Minister (Commercial) and the Minister (Economic) job would have been combined. That could have been easily done. It was not done because the Treasury were determined to keep that post for themselves and they had it originally because it was all part of managing Sterling with the Dollar.

**JWH:** Defending our poor balance of payments record.

**RQB:** Of course by the time I got there there was no Sterling to defend, really. That job had faded away and they downgraded the post. It had been a Deputy Secretary post but it is still there for a variety of reasons.

**JWH:** Well, your next job back in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was Deputy Secretary for Economic Matters where, again, I think you felt that the lead was always with someone else. Perhaps I should ask you what the biggest issues were and whether you found the G7 Summits a useful exercise.

**RQB:** Well, I mean, the main issues were dealt with by someone else, including inside the Foreign Office, where the Under-Secretary for Europe, who has always been absolutely one of our most able people, monopolises the business. I had two people ostensibly working for me in that position. They were always very courteous but they did not actually let me get in on any of the business, and indeed they were quite right because it was so complicated I did not understand it most of the time. There was no point, I thought, in trying to insert myself where I was not going to make a contribution, although a different person might have been able to do that. So I dealt with a wide range of subjects which were, again, none of them really my responsibility, in the sense that I was not actually doing the negotiating on them. The issues, some of them were again quite boring ones, like the usual problem about what are the commercial services of the Foreign Office for; are they worth anything; should we charge money for them; what is the relationship between them and what the DTI is doing to support British exports, and a whole lot of very long-standing questions. I don't know whether we really made any progress or not, except in one respect. We started inviting British businessmen to the Foreign Office to discuss things with them, and that made the DTI very angry to start with because they thought that the Foreign Office should not trespass on their territory by talking to British businessmen. And one of the things I was very concerned to do was to nail these people when they said our commercial services are no good. I'd say, you know, "Well give me examples. What do you expect and why aren't you getting it?" And, of course, sometimes their expectations were totally unrealistic. They expected us to sell their products. So there was something to be sorted out.

Funnily enough, on all these issues there was a lot of opposition within the Foreign Office. I mean, people in the Commercial bit of the Foreign Office did not like the idea that we were asking businessmen to say whether they thought our services were any good or not. Because sometimes they said they thought they weren't any good. And then the knee-jerk reaction

would be "This businessman does not understand what he is talking about". Nobody understood this businessman was a client and was perfectly entitled to say what you have done was no good. You could learn from that and make it better. And then there was another issue which was, should we charge the businessmen for our services. The businessmen said they had already paid their taxes once and did not see why they should pay them again. The Treasury said "We think you should charge for them. You are giving a service and you should charge for it." And then the people in the Commercial side of the Foreign Office got very unhappy, and I said, "Why are you unhappy" and they said "Well, if we charge for our services, perhaps the businessmen won't want them. It would be too expensive." So I said, "If they don't want to pay what actually is a pretty modest fee, why should we give them the services?" I said to the Treasury that we were prepared to go ahead with this, on the assumption that we could plough back money that we earned into the business, thus improving our Commercial services. They said "You can't do that. No, no, you have to pay it straight to us", so I said "Well nobody then has any incentive to make these charges." I think that the Treasury have accepted that some of it gets ploughed back in, but it was another piece of Treasury intellectual dishonesty.

The Summits were interesting as events which one could observe. The people who made the running, obviously, were the Ministers plus the Treasury Second Permanent Secretaries and people like that. I was involved in negotiations about this and that. For example, our response on Chernobyl. We were at the Tokyo Summit when Chernobyl blew up, and I was involved in drafting the Summit's public response. But it was not continual business. The Treasury would not let anybody near the interesting bits of economic business. The specialist parts of the Foreign Office were making the foreign policy. So I was acting, basically, as part of the secretarial process rather than the policy making process. So it was Grand Tourism rather than substance. I quite enjoyed it. It was a perfectly pleasant way of passing four years. But it was not the most exciting, satisfying thing I ever did.

**JWH:** Well, there must be a certain contrast there with what followed because you were our Ambassador in Moscow at the time that the Soviet Union did collapse. What was the Embassy's role in a time of such internal chaos? Are there any aspects of the collapse which you think need to be emphasised, have been neglected by historians?

**RQB:** Well, that last question is a very big question. The first question, what the role was. First of all, our role was to try to report on what was going on in a way that made sense. You

had to judge what was going on and feed that back and we sent endless telegrams and they were, I think, quite appreciated. The second thing we had to do was, of course, to provide a high class hotel for visitors, in a town which did not have any hotels to speak of, and that was very difficult for my wife. Because, first of all the Moscow Embassy is a splendid building but not very well adapted for that purpose. And, of course, because there had not been very much demand the infrastructure both, physical infrastructure of kitchens, and the human infrastructure of people, was inadequate. And so when my wife arrived she had to go to the markets to do the shopping. There was nobody else to do it. She did a quite a lot of the cooking. But that got sorted out. We ended up with a very effective but very bizarre, Heath Robinson arrangement. It worked like a charm but, obviously, was not the basis for a permanent arrangement. There was no money, when we arrived for example, for a social secretary for my wife. In Moscow getting people to parties is a huge business because nobody answers invitations, telephones don't work and so on. In the end we did get somebody to do that. There was no cook. In the end my wife hired a young man from the Australian Embassy whose previous experience had been in an Australian man's club and one of the younger Russian women in the kitchen turned out to have great potentiality, and these two between them actually turned out very good meals. But it was all ad hoc and ramshackle. And we had huge influxes. We had the Prime Minister something like three times. The Foreign Secretary seemed to be there every other day. We had all the Military Chiefs. We had two or three junior Royal visits, but nevertheless extremely time consuming, and quite inappropriately time consuming in terms, particularly, of the results that they produced. So that was the second thing we did.

The third thing we did was, we did have things to negotiate about. We were involved in the negotiations on arms control, conventional forces in Europe, chemical and biological warfare. And I was very often going round either negotiating with the Russian generals about that or talking to Gorbachev's people or whatever. And that was an ongoing continuous issue. And a very interesting one.

We had some economic things to do, and I remember you asked me a question at the beginning. A lot of it while we were there was debt collecting because as the Soviet Union collapsed it stopped paying. It had always had a very good payments record before. When things changed we found ourselves having to help increasingly desperate British firms. Some people I had known when I was doing the commercial job in Moscow in the '60s had traded on faith for 20 or 30 years: they took the transaction costs on their own account

because they knew the Russians would deliver the money by the end of the month. Suddenly the whole basis was shot away and they were desperate. That was rather sad and painful.

What else did we do? Part of the reporting function at the beginning: obviously you can't report unless you know what was going on, and in the '80s and '90s, as opposed to the '60s, you could discover what was going on. You did not only read Pravda and make elegant extracts from it. You could go and talk to generals and senior politicians, or Gorbachev's people and occasionally to Gorbachev, and opposition people and journalists and so on. Just like in a normal Embassy, except that what was going on was far more exciting than goes on mostly in most other countries. So that was very exciting and we travelled a lot and we knew all sorts of people, as wide a range of people in levels of society as we could get to. My wife spoke Russian which made all the difference. In fact she was on the barricades outside the White House on the night of the shooting. But that meant that your judgements were more securely based, because you actually talked to a great many people. Looking back on it, I was taken in every now and again by people who were trying to bamboozle me. But I suppose that is always going to happen.

So that is roughly speaking what went on while we were in Moscow.

**JWH:** Well I feel quite envious. That was certainly more worthwhile than the middle of the Brezhnev era when I was there. My wife learned Russian there but she did not get a chance to use it in that way, I am afraid, and she would be very envious.

You then reached retirement but it was not the end of the line. You became the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Advisor in 1992. So the Prime Minister was already John Major. You have remarked that for the first time you were involved in decisions about life and death. Is that the Gulf War plus Bosnia?

**RQB:** It was Bosnia and the occasional bombing of Saddam, which was something we did and looked as though we were going to go on doing from time to time. Yes, the Permanent Under Secretary asked at the beginning of 1991 if I would like to do that job. I had some doubts about it. It was a double job when my predecessor did it: it was Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister and it was Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. I did not particularly want to be Chairman of the JIC because I did not think, for a whole lot of reasons that I could expand on, that it was bound to be a very interesting job. Other

people found it fascinating. And the Foreign Policy Advisor job, obviously if you get a chance to do it you don't turn it up. I just wondered how substantial it was because, particularly during the reign of Charles Powell, Mrs Thatcher's foreign Office Private Secretary. Charles was very clear about who controlled access to the Prime Minister, and had very strong views of his own on policy. I just wondered how much of a role one could really have as an elderly retired gentleman in such a context. My predecessor, Percy Cradock, who did it for 8 years and was an extremely effective man, had very strong base from which to operate because of his involvement in the negotiations with China and over Hong Kong. He went on a number of special, secret missions in his capacity as Foreign Policy Advisor. How he coped with the Charles Powell problem I do not know. But he loved being chairman of the JIC. He had a much greater belief in the value of secret intelligence than I have.

If you go back to the origins, both jobs in that form came into being as a result of the Falklands War. The JIC was held by the Franks Enquiry not to have read the tea leaves sufficiently well, not to have given adequate warning of what the Argentinians were up to. And one reason was thought to be that the Chairman of the JIC was a Foreign Office chap and therefore biased. You should therefore bring in some independent figure from outside. It is ironic that all the people who did the job thereafter were retired Foreign Office officials. It is also rubbish actually because the people who sit on that committee are all very strong minded, independent minded people and the idea that a Foreign Office official can twist them round his little finger is absurd. So that was a silly idea. But it was part of the witch hunt that followed the Falklands.

The other part of it was that Mrs Thatcher was convinced that she had been misled by a lot of lily-livered, limp-wristed diplomats into not keeping her eye on the ball, and therefore wanted to have an alternative Foreign Office all of her own, a Foreign Policy Advisor. Again, the irony is that she chose first Antony Parsons, who had been our representative at the United Nations during the Falklands war, and then Percy Cradock, both retired Foreign Office gentleman, both of them extremely able, both of them she admired very much. But it is still a bit ironic that what she was doing was looking for alternative advice. That was not true under John Major. John Major got on perfectly well with Douglas Hurd at the Foreign Office. He did not particularly relish confrontation of ideas. He preferred to have good advice and he got excellent advice from Charles Powell's successors who, on the whole, were just as keen as Charles Powell was to preserve their monopoly.

**JWH:** Charles Powell's successors? Who were they?

**RQB:** Stephen Wall and Rod Lyne.

**JWH:** They were the Foreign Policy Advisor?

**RQB:** No, Charles Powell and they were the Foreign Office official who is Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, that is to say the number two Private Secretary to the Prime Minister is always from the Foreign Office. Charles Powell, Stephen Wall, Rod Lyne and now John Holmes.

And we always, for obvious reasons, send some of our very best people across to Downing Street. They are exceptionally good.

**JWH:** Stephen Wall, and Rod Lyne?

**RQB:** L-y-n-e. He followed Stephen Wall. You will hear more about him. He is outstanding, and then John Holmes.

**JWH:** I know John Holmes, if he is the same John Holmes I knew in Moscow.

**RQB:** Yes. he is a Russianist.

So my view was that you did not need an outsider to chair the JIC and you did not need an elderly gent from the Foreign Office as a Foreign Policy Advisor, not under John Major at any rate. If the Prime Minister did want a Foreign Policy Advisor because he wanted alternative advice and liked the clash of opinions, which John Major on the whole didn't, you would not chose a retired Ambassador. You would choose somebody from right outside the establishment. You would infuriate the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office would hate it. The Foreign Office hated it when Anthony Parsons was appointed because they thought they would lose their influence. They also hated it when, on my recommendation, the post was abolished because by then they had decided it was quite a nice place to park elderly Ambassadors. So they were cross on both occasions.

However, that said of course, it was another very good observation post. Although, as I say, I did not find most of what the JIC did particularly interesting, the issue of Bosnia, where some of the intelligence input was important, had some importance. But the whole policy making - "what the hell do we do about this mess?" - was an agonising issue. No one felt that we were managing particularly well and nobody could think of an alternative policy that would do it well. So the whole question of whether or not we should send troops and what they should do when they got there, and so on, was endlessly debated and there were endless meetings with the Prime Minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff, and Uncle Tom Copley. That was very interesting and very unsatisfactory.

The other thing, the bombing of Iraq which happened twice when I was there. The thing about that and to some extent the Bosnian thing is it was the only time in my career I was involved, even marginally, in decision making where people end up being killed. And that actually is rather different. It is quite a shock and I did not all that much like it, but I recognised that somebody has got to do it. On both Iraq and on Bosnia we worked very closely, with the Ministry of Defence and very often the meeting was chaired by Pauline Neville-Jones who was the Foreign Office Deputy Secretary in the Cabinet Office at that time. I always enjoyed contact with the military because they are serious people. On the Iraq bombing things it was a bit like black and white films about the War, when you had to work out what the targets were and the military then had to assure the Prime Minister that there would be no co-lateral damage to speak of which means that the bombs would not miss and kill civilians, which is what airmen always say. And then the thing would happen and the aeroplanes would take off into the night and next morning you would hear how many of them had come back again. In fact, on these two occasions, or perhaps three, they all did come back. But it still is nerve-racking, and then you get the damage reports and see whether the bombs actually did hit the target or not.

The whole business of the military planning for Bosnia, and so on, was also fascinating, again dealing with the military, who were always desperate to be told precisely what it was they were meant to be doing. What is the military objective? Of course, in real life, in a situation like that, it is either difficult or impossible to define a purely military objective and, quite understandably, that makes the soldiers feel rather unhappy. My own view is that the policies that we put together in the summer of 1992 were not unreasonable policies in the circumstances. The British Government has been accused of deviousness, cowardice and a whole lot of things, but in the summer of 1992, firstly, we called the London Conference on Yugoslavia, which everybody came to. Milosevic was there. The whole lot were there, and quite villainous some of them looked. We had no belief that that Conference would solve the problem. What we thought it might do was set up the framework for a negotiation which could remain in being until the various parties concerned decided that they were sick of killing one another and wanted to negotiate, which is the only way, especially a civil war ever comes to an end anyway. And so we rather had in mind something rather like the Palestine peace process - a Security Council Resolution 242, you know, 20 years later you might get a peace. We were not at all naive about that, and we did set up a sort of process which was then subverted for a number of reasons, partly by the principals in Yugoslavia, partly by the Americans. Still we started something which made, I thought, good sense. And the other thing we decided to do was send a battalion of infantry to help get the convoys of food aid through. As the autumn approached that year the stories of the amount of hardship, hunger and death that could occur were horrifying. And I think that was a reasonable thing to do.

What the military were worried about, perfectly rightly, was that once you get into a quagmire it is very difficult to get out again. My view about that was that they were absolutely right but that it just fell into the rotten bad luck category. Of course, as with all foreign policy making, a lot of this was driven by domestic political pressures. But the domestic political pressures worked in two ways: there were the people who said, "We must do something about Bosnia", and then there a whole lot of other people who said, "We can see no reason why British soldiers should go and die in this country where the people want to kill one another", And these were equal and opposite pressures on the Prime Minister and on the Government. So I don't think that that initial response was a silly one. I think we got ourselves in to a silly position a couple of years later when British Ministers were going around saying "The main objective of our troops in Bosnia is to ensure that they don't get

hurt", Well, I mean, the best way of ensuring that soldiers don't get hurt is bring them back home as quickly as you can. That was a silly proposition and it annoyed the soldiers themselves.

Another aspect of the whole Bosnian thing was the huge row that broke out between the Europeans and the Americans, between the British and the Americans, which was extremely damaging, and did, at one point, risk doing permanent damage to the North Atlantic Alliance. Of course my view, since I was British, was that the Americans were to blame for the row, because they wanted to lecture us on how we should behave without putting any of their own money on the table. They would tell us what we should do with our troops but they were absolutely unwilling to put any of their own troops there. The Dayton Process happened after I left at the end of 1993. But it worked partly because you finally got somebody involved, in the shape of Richard Holbrooke, who had the willpower and the means to impose a solution. And also I think the Americans had come to the conclusion that, if they didn't get a grip, not only would things go badly wrong in Bosnia but they would risk losing a lot of their European friends. Good luck to them, as it turned out, but one should not forget what happened before that.

All of us who were dealing with the matter in London at the time (1992-1993) were fully aware how horrible the situation in Bosnia was. For many of us, for me at least, it was the worst thing we ever had to deal with. We were terribly frustrated at not being able to do anything beyond getting aid to the victims. We were prevented by our own domestic politics; by the unwillingness of the Americans to put their own troops on the ground, at a time when the European forces in Bosnia, and particularly the French, were suffering casualties; and by our belief that in the end the matter could only be sorted out by the peoples of Bosnia themselves.

With the benefit of hindsight I feel that the performance of all of us during that first period – Americans and Europeans alike – was feeble and pusillanimous, if not shameful. The British were at least as much to blame as the rest. I now think that, given the will, we and the French could have sorted the thing out in the first couple of years, without American assistance. But the will was not there.

Of course everything changed after the massacre at Srebrenica in the summer of 1995: but that was after my time. Srebrenica left us with no option but to take forceful action, and the

whole thing was wrapped up surprisingly quickly. The only foreign ground troops who then saw any action was the Anglo-French brigade, which lifted the siege of Sarajevo. But it was the speed and decisiveness of the American action that stopped the killing, and that was the main thing. The fundamental problems of Bosnia were not solved at Dayton: they were put into cold storage, and in the end will indeed have to be solved by the people of Bosnia themselves. But the end of the war gave them the opportunity to do so.

The other things that I dealt with at that time: I did keep track of what was going on in Hong Kong although I did not have particular views about the policy. I saw both Patten before he went out there, and Percy Cradock when he started to get very angry about the whole thing. My role was primarily in the JIC which was stopping the excitable sinologues who worked for me saying that the People's Liberation Army were about to invade Hong Kong, which I didn't believe. There was intelligence of some kind sloshing about, which I thought was just noise. And also on one occasion Major asked me what I thought about all this and I said I thought that in five years time, that is to say in the year 2002, everybody would be wondering what all the fuss had been about. Because the Chinese would do whatever it was they were going to do, mostly in the light of their own politics in Peking. And both the Governor and the sinologues would turn out to have had almost no influence on the outcome at all.

And I still had quite a lot, of course, to do with Russia. I was continually writing for the Prime Minister about Russia, boring my colleagues in the JIC by pontificating about Russia. And so that was it. At that point I left.

**JWH:** European Union matters which were already, I suppose, dividing the Conservative Party, although it got worse later, didn't come into it much?

**RQB:** Yes, they did. I did get involved in that. I mean the whole Maastricht ratification business, which was when it all turned very nasty, happened not long after I joined the Prime Minister. Although I wasn't very much involved in the detail I was a close observer of what was going on and the pressures he was under. We were having a great meeting with him and others when the news came through about what was happening to the Pound, on Black Wednesday, 15 September 1992. Ironically, what the meeting was about was what should our public response be, on the following Sunday, when the news of the results of the French referendum came through. What should we say if the majority of Frenchmen voted against

Maastricht; what should we say if they voted massively for Maastricht; and what should we say if a tiny majority of them voted for Maastricht, which is, of course what actually happened. And we were busy drafting and redrafting. Of course the whole thing became chaotic. Once Ministers get near a drafting table they start having strong ideas about language and that really confuses things. And so we were in the middle of all this and the Prime Minister kept on nipping out. He was nipping out to talk to the Chancellor about what was happening to the Pound. That was dramatic.

We were occupying the Presidency of the European Union at the time. Major called an emergency European Summit in Birmingham, where the main issue was how we could accommodate the Danes after they had voted "No" at a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty. The Danish 'No' vote was the flapping of the butterfly's wings, which produced all the rest of the upheaval that autumn. If the Danes had not voted 'No' I think Major would have had a much easier time with his own Party, and so on. My reaction when the Danes voted "No" was to say to the Prime Minister, "This will be a blessing in disguise, because the Danes have now opened up the debate and our position in the debate will be perceived as being less out on a limb, because some people are even further out." And he said "If it is a blessing in disguise, it is very well disguised". Of course, he was right because after that all the trouble started.

We then had the Edinburgh Summit. Major was a very good negotiator with foreigners. He did brilliantly at the Yugoslav conference in London and he did brilliantly at the Edinburgh Summit. He got everyone single one of our national objectives out of that Summit. He chaired it with such charm that he got a round of applause from his colleagues at the end of it. Now Mrs Thatcher, great, good lady though she might be, could never, would not have wanted to achieve that. I was an admirer of Major's, in many ways, and that is one of the reasons.

Against this background of continual turmoil on the European Parliamentary Party, which I did not have all that much to do with, once the Maastricht Treaty had been ratified, Whitehall was instructed to produce a medium-term strategy for Britain and the Community. Well, whenever Whitehall is asked to do that it does not produce a medium-term strategy about Britain and the Community, it produces a detailed brief about how to approach the next inter-governmental conference, or whatever the next event is. So there is never any strategy in it at all. It is all tactics. I got myself in on the Cabinet Office Committee that was

discussing this. I was quite unhappy about the way things went because, as I say, the minds were closed. It was a routine Whitehall committee on European affairs but, as usual, they were trying to get Ministers do things that Ministers did not want to do particularly. The paper that they were writing started by saying, "Whereas the French and the Germans are in the Community, Union or whatever it was by then called, for political reasons, we are in it for economic reasons." I said "That's not true. Fundamentally, at the beginning, we are all in it for the same political reason. The Community is a device to stop us killing one another in the future the way we used to kill one another in the past. We have as much political interest in the success of this enterprise as the French and the Germans do", Well, they modified that draft slightly.

They then went on to say, and they were more right than I was, that EMU was coming down the track and we should be on board. Otherwise we'd miss the train again. I argued that EMU was a very complicated thing. The political and economic substance, the reality of it, was very, very complicated and potentially damaging to the domestic politics, not only of Britain, but Italy - all sorts of places. And it could go badly wrong. I said "If you are going to have economic union you are going to have to have political union. It is no good pretending differently. You may like it, you may dislike it. But it is absurd to think the one will work without the other." Then I asked them if they could point to any economic or monetary and political union that had come about in history except as a result of war and conquest. The American Civil War finally sorted out who was in charge of the American currency, amongst other things. Well, they thought that was spitting in church, really. They did not answer the question. And of course, it is coming down the pipeline and we are probably going to get on it, but it does not mean to say it is going to work. As I said earlier, if it does not work I think we are all in bad trouble. I hope it does work therefore. Personally I have nothing against political union, if that is what people want. But one needs to be clear about what one is doing.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister, in addition to having to cope with the Parliamentary fall-out, was also trying to deal with the substance. Of course, the end result was pretty unsatisfactory as you would expect. He was in an impossible position. His objective, which when he came to power was to "put us in the centre of European affairs". That was a perfectly sensible objective. And I think he could have done it if he had been left to get on with it. But he was prevented by his charming colleagues, the people he called bastards. And that is a pity because it did put the whole thing off for another few years.

**JWH:** That is a very interesting apercu indeed and I am very grateful for it. Could I go back to Russia just for a minute, possibly in closing. Do you think we, Western Europe, but particularly Britain, are now more or less on the right lines in our policy vis á vis Russia. Is there any important up-date to be made to your writing in 'Engaging Russia'.

**RQB:** Well, from what I remember of that, not particularly. I took the view quite early on that the Soviet system would not last. It was in bad trouble when I was there in the '60s. I did not believe that any country could achieve, I thought most countries would be silly even to try and achieve, the kind of objectives - world domination and so on - that were attributed to the Soviet Union by the West. They could not do it. That was in the '60s and '70s. I thought it would have to change. Its most obvious weakness was the economic one, and the economy was cracking up in the '60s. Gorbachev accelerated the process. I thought throughout most of my time there that there was a risk, he thought there was a risk, and indeed we all thought there was a risk, that he could be overthrown the way Khrushchev was overthrown. We did not, of course, foresee the actual event, but it was an event that we had expected. I mean, when I woke up and heard the news that morning that poor old Gorbachev was sick, I remembered waking up in 1964 and hearing that poor old Khrushchev was sick - same thing. And I had always thought that if that happened, which it could, it would push the process back, but it would be a temporary reverse. The country could not survive unless it went forward, and it, of course, would survive. The irony of the actual coup was that instead of putting the process back it accelerated it forward. And since then the country, under what I think are the objective pressures of the late twentieth century, has been continuing to make progress. It is a different country and its environment is different from what it has ever been. It is a country which is now open to the outside world, which it never used to be. It is a country which has a sort of functioning democracy, which it never used to have. It is a country of highly-educated town-dwellers which it never used to be, and so on and so forth. I mean, fundamental things have changed. That comes out in, I think, in that article of mine which you referred to. So I look on the thing with measured optimism. A lot of people again say that that is complacent and, of course, you can always be wrong. All can say is that I have not been wrong yet and, of course, I hope that I won't be wrong because it is in everybody's interest, both the Russians and ours, that that progress should continue.

I am going off now to talk about NATO enlargement in the House of Commons. I do not think that the people who favour NATO enlargement have thought what they are doing.

There are all sorts of motives. Some of those who argue for enlargement are old-fashioned Cold Warriors.

Some simply want to preserve an institution. There are jobs and contracts at stake. But I believe enlargement could be damaging to NATO itself, as well as to lots of other people. I think that enlargement misses the point. The real question is: How do we bring Russia into the system? It is not a very easy question, but that is the question. To some extent the people pushing for NATO enlargement realise that, hence the Council they have set up with the Russians. Much more up-to-date than that article you quote is one I wrote last year for Prospect Magazine, which has the merit of being only a third or a quarter the length.

**JWH:** 'Engaging Russia' was about half a book, as published, but it is a short book on its own and there is a great deal in it. But I should look out for the article. But we have not gone completely wrong yet is what I take from what you have said, and the Russians have not fallen back, yet, into complete chaos or totalitarianism, and the chaos is perhaps more of a threat than the totalitarianism now.

**RQB:** Yes, totalitarianism certainly would not work for very long. I don't think it is much of a threat. I actually don't think chaos is much of a threat now. I think they conduct their business in a chaotic manner, and with ups and downs. But my feeling is that although there have been some considerable downs as well as ups, the underlying trend is upwards and I can't see why that should change. It is in a lot of people's interest that it should not change. With the example of Yugoslavia in front of one, of course, you can't have too much faith in human reason. On the whole, I think, it is quite striking how little bloodshed there has been in Russia, apart from Chechnya. Less blood has been shed in the collapse of the Soviet Empire than was shed in the collapse of the British Empire, and certainly the French Empire - remember Algeria and the shelling of Hanoi. For that matter, another thing I quote from time to time: if you look at who invaded more countries and killed more foreigners between 1945 and 1991 you have to say it is the Americans. Look at the number of military operations the Americans conducted in other people's countries in that period, compared with the number... The unique contribution the Russians made to all this was that they regularly invaded their allies, which the Americans did not. In terms of the number of military operations and the size of the butcher's bill, I think, the Americans have it.

**JWH:** To do justice to the Americans they were sometimes, as in Korea, taking the lead in a Western defensive action, I would say.

**RQB:** Yes, of course, I was not commenting on the moral quality of any of these interventions, I was just talking about the statistics.

**JWH:** I wonder, if there is time, I would like to ask you one more question; a terribly general question about us and the European Union. You said that certain awkwardnesses arose in these negotiations "because we are what we are". I suppose we are about the only major power in Europe that had never come under Napoleon's thumb and never come under his administrative system. He was a brilliant administrator, as well as a general. So we do have a different administrative and, perhaps, even commercial culture. Is that why we are still not quite comfortable in the European Union, and is that why its policies don't suit us as well as they suit some other powers.

**RQB:** I think there is a long, long answer to that question. The fact is that we have had 1000 years of independent history on our little island. Foreigners have had very little opportunity to interfere with us as we worked out our own way of doing things and that is deeply rooted. In the Continent, anybody who set up a state was liable to have it overthrown in next to no time, and have to write yet another constitution. We have not had to do that and that means we are pretty set in our ways. I think they are perfectly reasonable ways. I think the Continental ways are perfectly reasonable ways. They are different. I think that does make it hard for us, psychologically and emotionally to accept a different, a Roman law, a Catholic approach to various aspects of the conduct business, of politics. Your point about not having been occupied goes back to the fact that we live on an island. We have been very lucky. And I do think that is a difference. What I don't think it is that it makes us any less European than the others. I resent from time to time the usurpation of the geographical expression by what, until quite recently, has been a considerable minority of the people who live in Europe. I think that is a sort of arrogance. There is no way in which you could successfully argue that the English, or British, contribution to European culture is in any way inferior to that of any other European nation.

**JWH:** But we go along with it. We talk about Europe meaning the other side of the Channel, which is all wrong.

**RQB:** I know, well, we should talk about the Continentals, or something. I spend a lot of time arguing with a lot of people, including with a lot of Russians, about whether Russia is European or not. I believe it is because I believe it has made a European contribution to Europe's culture, and it has not made a contribution to Asia's culture. It is just slightly interesting that the two countries on the extreme fringes of Europe are both accused of not being European.

**JWH:** That is perhaps a suitable note to end on. Although if you wish to make any final comment about the Diplomatic Service, or indeed about anything else at all. I hope you will make it.

**RQB:** I am allowed the last word. I have no particular grandiose or pompous comment about the Foreign Service. I enjoyed my time in it very much. I was almost never bored, which is quite a good criterion. It is a very good way of spending one's adult life. Whether I, or the majority of us, made any serious contribution to events, I think is doubtful. We had a few outstanding people, like Michael Butler, who did make a serious contribution. But most of us did not.

We tried to persuade our son not to go into the Foreign Service. I thought he should not go in because I don't think it is particularly good for a son to go into an institution that his father has been in, because he worries, or is liable to, whether he is making the same progress at the same age. My wife also thought he should not because she thinks it is going to be increasingly difficult for young men in the Foreign Service to find wives who are willing to follow them around and do what - actually if you do it, and my wife did it - is a very interesting job, if you are interested in the subject matter and people. But fewer women are going to be willing to do that. He went into the Foreign Service despite that. He is now in Belgrade and is having a whale of a time. He has had far more responsibility than I ever had at his age, so good luck to him.

I think, we have not talked about the CPRS and all that. I think that the Foreign Office had a wrong idea of what it was 20 years ago or so, or longer. The defence at the time of the CPRS, and all that, was that we, the Foreign Office, have a particular professional skill: we understand foreigners and we know about negotiation. The fact is that most of us in our careers have done comparatively little negotiation, far less than the average Whitehall bureaucrat who spends all his life negotiating with other Whitehall Departments. And we did

make ourselves, in those days, look a bit silly, arrogant was the word used. I think we have got over that actually. I think we are much more part of the team, partly because going back to what we were discussing earlier about Brussels, a lot more of us spend more time with home Civil Servants, and have greater recognition of what their merits are. Whether they have a greater recognition of what our merits are I don't know. They always used to be extremely, and with some justification, irritated by the number of medals Foreign Service Officers kept on being given, which they thought were mostly unearned. And they despised us for being superficial. Our best people are not superficial. A very small handful of really good people that we have could compete with anybody, in any walk of life.

**JWH:** Could I very quickly confess something? I have forgotten what CPRS stands for.

**RQB:** What does it stand for? Central Policy Review Staff, I think. A thing set up by Edward Heath.

**JWH:** So you are speaking really of our position in the Government machine and in the minds of all Government Departments? Yes, I see.

**RQB:** The CPRS was an idea which Palliser had, partly. Mig Goulding, who was in the Planning Staff thought it would be a very good idea to have a review of how we conducted, or how we managed our business abroad. He then went to the CPRS and this rather radical investigation was conducted which infuriated lots of people, like Nico Henderson.

**JWH:** Are we talking of the Berrill Report?

**RQB:** Yes, the Berrill Report. It had some very silly things in it and it also had a lot of very, very interesting material in it. But some of the reaction of some of our colleagues was disgraceful. I mean, there were people who cut Mig Goulding dead in the street, wouldn't talk to him, because he was involved in this exercise. The thing that struck me about it, I was head of a department at that time, was I had very good thirty year olds working for me and they were all terrified that the result would be the Foreign Office would be abolished and they would lose their jobs. I said that that was ridiculous, "You don't abolish great institutions. It is almost impossible. And, secondly, you lot are so good that even if it were abolished you would get a job somewhere else inside the government system, dealing with

foreigners." So it was all a question basically of badge engineering. It never even came to that.

**JWH:** I do think that some of the reaction of ourselves and colleagues was over the top. Although the reaction of many of the great and good outside the Service was equally strong and in fact the result was that the good things in the report went down with the bad.

**RQB:** Exactly. That was Berrill's fault because he was a bad politician. He allowed people like my friend Tessa Blackstone to insert language which was useless except to enrage a bull. It had no other practical purpose and that was not the purpose he should have been pursuing. He should have exercised more control over it.

**JWH:** She is now, we hope, a very good Minister.

**RQB:** I think she is. She is enjoying it, certainly. I have asked her because we have kept in touch since then.

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**FOOTNOTE: MESSAGE OF 16 APRIL 2007 TO CHURCHILL COLLEGE ARCHIVIST.**

I have now read through the text. It reads well enough. It is gossipy and superficial. There are no new facts which could not be discovered in the documents. I should have thought it is not of any value to historians. But for the most part it gives an accurate enough picture of what I thought and felt about these things.

I am surprised that John Hutson and I devoted so little attention to the interesting situation in Poland when I was there in 1959-1961. It was a very exciting time. Poland was the only half-way free place in the Warsaw Pact, and we all thought, or at least hoped, that it would be the harbinger of change in Eastern Europe. The Poles talked about "socialism with a human fact" more than twelve years before the Czechs tried it in 1968. It is a period of history now forgotten even by the Poles. But the historian who wants to understand post-war Eastern Europe cannot afford to forget it.