

BDOHP Biographical details and index

Donald Paul Montagu Stewart CAPE

Personal Details

Born 6 January 1923; son of late John Scarvell and Olivia Millicent Cape.

Education: Ampleforth College; Brasenose College, Oxford.

Married 1948, Cathune Johnston; four sons one daughter.

Awarded CMG 1977.

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and Chairman of the Anglo-Portuguese Society, 1988-91.

Interview with Mr Donald Paul Montagu Stewart CAPE. Interviewer was Mr Malcolm McBain and it took place on 26 April, 2001.

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McB Well, Mr Cape, I believe you joined the Foreign Service after leaving the Army. You were educated at Ampleforth College, and Brasenose College, Oxford and then went into the Scots Guards. And you entered the Foreign Service in 1946, presumably through one of the Reconstruction examinations.

C Yes indeed. Actually I got a Class B release from the Army so went back to Oxford but was only back a couple of terms. I switched from Classics to PPE as I found there was no way, after being away in the Army, I could remember my Greek. But that was a useful background when I applied for the Reconstruction examination. I put the Foreign Office as my first choice, or rather the Diplomatic Service, as I suppose it was then, partly because my Headmaster years before had said to me 'well, why don't you try for the Diplomatic Service' when I said I thought of the Civil Service as a possible career. Also partly because during the war I had been in the generation who, just after we left university, were asked to come out of the armed services to learn a hard language. In my case, it was Serbo-Croat. And that may have tipped the balance slightly in getting me in with rather a large group of people who applied to get in through the Reconstruction examination.

McB So you did Serbo-Croat as a serving soldier?

C I was demobbed officially, which was what they were doing at that point in 1942. For nearly nine months I went to the School of Slavonic Studies in London to read Serbo-Croat, or to be tutored in Serbo-Croat, with two or three other people. Others went to learn Japanese, Turkish, all sorts of things. And then we were put into the Intelligence Corps and went up to their Depot, where the only useful thing I learnt was how to ride a motorbike. And after sitting on my behind for a couple of months or so, I said I'm getting bored. If nothing can be done with me, can't I go back to my regiment, and I did that. And then after the war I got a Class B release and sat for the exam and got in and was asked by Personnel Department 'do you want to finish your years at Oxford or will you join us immediately?' And I said I think it's time I started earning some money so I'll join you. And then obviously somebody who didn't know what was normal said 'oh, this bloke knows Serbo-Croat, we're going to send him to Belgrade'. He ought to have sent me to Peking and Teddy Youde who came in at the same moment should have been sent to Belgrade. So that

gave me a wonderful start. I arrived with something to contribute.

McB And when you got to Belgrade, was that your first encounter with Yugoslavia?

C Yes it was. I'd learnt about it, obviously, during the War. One had been tutored in Eastern European history by the elder Seton-Watson, amongst others. So that was useful. Immediately, I was able to read the newspapers, and concoct that into dispatches. We then thought that the Yugoslavs were the most forward, most communist of the Eastern European bloc after the Russians. Well, they thought they were. And we thought they were. But we did have a considerable advantage, I think, really because of the war, because of Churchill's decision that we should help Tito, when we sent Fitzroy Maclean and John Henniker and so on to liaise with Tito. John Henniker had, in fact, stayed on in the Embassy for a short time, although he'd left by the time I got there. So that the Yugoslavs did think that we were quite good chaps, on the whole the best of the capitalists. Whereas the American Embassy started every note 'We protest', we were a bit more flexible. Anyway, my time in Belgrade was divided into two periods. The first period was when you thought the Jugs were the opposition, together with the Russians, the leading boys in the Russian pact, and one was writing describing all the efforts being made to push communism forward in the country and the problems of life there. And then suddenly, and we did get inklings, one or two of which I've mentioned, of what was going to happen, there was the great day when Tito was expelled from the COMINFORM and we suddenly discovered that according to the Russians he was a bad boy, and that his Assistant Minister, Velebit, was an English spy.

McB That is interesting. So from an early stage we were on close speaking terms. Did the business about the return of Mihailovic's people to the Communists impinge on your dealings?

C Yes, it did slightly. As soon as I joined the Foreign Office, I was put into the Southern Department while waiting to be sent to Belgrade. In fact there was rather a question of how to get me there at that point. There were a succession of notes coming from the Yugoslavs asking for a return of people who were accused of war crimes by them. And the procedure was that those Notes would be sent straight away to our Research Department, who came up with anything that they could dig out of the files. 'Oh yes, he is said to have been in such and such a place and our Mission too reported that there had been atrocities in that place', that sort of thing. And this was regarded as sufficient prima facie case for instructions to be sent to the military

holding them in prisoner of war camps to hand them over. But there was always a leak and before the instruction arrived, the chap skidaddled out of the camp. So the Yugoslavs got pretty fed up with that, and equally the military weren't happy, and then Fitzroy Maclean was sent out, as you may remember, to try and sort the whole thing out.

McB And did he succeed?

C I think arguably yes. I think what he achieved was to get a rather shorter list and probably set up a rather more rigorous arrangement for examination to make sure there was a prima facie case before chaps were handed over.

McB But we did hand them over, of course?

C We handed over a certain number.

McB We had no choice.

C Equally with the people sent back to Russia. And undoubtedly from S.O.E. experiences and so on there were a number of Russians who were, understandably from their point of view, leading people in clamping down on the resistance in France.

McB One doesn't hear much about them. I suppose it's the Tolstoy case which really...

C I have no sympathy with Tolstoy.

McB Well, that's interesting. That deals with your earliest years.

C Yes, if I could just add a little bit. I still have, and certainly Chatham House still has, the exchange of letters, the published letters, between the Yugoslavs and the Russian Communist Party which culminated in the split, and I think, my view in looking at those letters, is that the really crucial thing was that the Yugoslavs were not going to have Yugoslavs recruited to work for the communists, for the Russian Secret Service, keeping tabs on Yugoslav leaders and really running the place. They were going to run their own show. One hint that something was happening that we got beforehand, was on the occasion when my Ambassador, Charles Peake, was talking with Alex Bebler, who was the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the

Danube Conference which was going to take place in Belgrade, and Bebler said 'Oh the Russians are impossible', and then regretted having said that. Charles Peake pricked up his ears. And the other lead that we got beforehand was from the Swiss Ambassador, Zellweger, who spotted two Yugoslav Ministers who lived close to him, Hebrang and Zujovic, being arrested. And that was very extraordinary and of course we immediately thought they were going to be accused by the Yugoslavs of being English spies, and yet when the letters were published we discovered they had been arrested because they were Russian agents who were criticising Tito to the Russians. May I add another bit? A member of our Embassy in Bucharest was down visiting us, a man called Bennett, and I remember sitting round a swimming pool and him saying 'Tito isn't in good odour with the Russians. He'll have to come to heel or else he'll get the sack'. When we disagreed, he said 'Oh, you don't understand communism, you don't understand the Russians'. And we said 'You don't understand Yugoslavia.' The actual news came through during a Swiss National Day party. Somebody telephoned from Prague I think it was, to say the COMINFORM is publishing a document describing Tito as a heretic. And so the cocktail party vanished, we all went home to our radios and in twenty-four hours there was nothing on the Yugoslav radio, whereas the rest of the world's radios were agog with this news. And then the following evening, it must have been the Pope's birthday or something or other, anyway the Holy See did have a Chargé d'Affaires there, who was actually an American, and the news came through that there was going to be an important announcement, so I shot off back to my flat, to my radio. I think an American colleague came with me and certainly one or two others. We turned the radio on and then we heard an important announcement from the Yugoslav Central Committee beginning, 'Takozvani COMINFORM' (the so-called COMINFORM), and I said 'Splendid, open the champagne, they are going to fight.' And that was a wonderful moment.

McB That was a very early split, wasn't it? A very early Declaration of Independence.

C It was very very important. Since then I've talked, met and been introduced to a friend of a wartime friend who was actually with Maclean's lot but had been sent into Eastern Serbia, which tended to be a bit pro-Mihailovic, and was present at the first contact between the Russians and the Yugoslavs when the Russian armies came through. I mean the first contact at a senior level anyway. He was, for some reason, outside the room, and first of all the Yugoslav came out after talking to the Russians, and he said 'My God, we thought you Brits were pretty awful, but these Russians are

much worse.’ And then the Russian came out and said, ‘God, how you’ve put up with these Yugoslavs all these years, I don’t know.’ Unfortunately that’s only a story I heard in the last ten years. It would have contributed. And Dugald Stewart, who ended up as Ambassador in Yugoslavia, and was there at the time of the break, drafted what I thought was a very percipient telegram, saying, you know, this is terribly important, watch the Chinese.

McB What year would that have been?

C Well this was in ‘48, well ahead. He was then shot off to Berlin because the Berlin airlift was starting and the crisis was on.

McB Oh yes, right, so that dates it, early in 1948.

C 28th of June, a date that is stuck in my memory. There was another date. Fortunately I had an extremely kind Ambassador and Head of Chancery, because I was getting married in England on the 14th of July and I was, nevertheless, allowed to go on leave, a week or so after the break. So that really is my main Belgrade memory.

McB So leaving Belgrade behind, you returned to the Foreign Office in 1949 and were there for a fairly short time.

C For a couple of years

McB Were you doing anything of particular interest at that time?

C Not really. I was looking after the Social bit of Economic and Social, because Economic tended to be looked after by Economic Relations Department, although I did have a certain amount of reading and writing briefs and I was Secretary of the IOC, which was the International Organisations Committee in Whitehall, which cleared briefs for ECOSOC meetings for UN Economic and Social Affairs and I went to the Economic and Social Council Meeting in New York, I suppose in 1950, but can’t be quite sure of that. Actually what made life easier was that at that moment the Russians were not going to UN meetings because of the Chinese representation question, so we didn’t have to have tirades from Vizhinsky and so on.

McB Can you explain the reason for that?

C Well, because they said that it was nonsense that people in Taiwan should represent China because we'd recognised Peking or wherever it was, I think it was Peking by then, but the Americans hadn't and virtually nobody else had, so there was a majority in the UN to continue to seat the Nationalist Chinese.

McB And the Russians didn't like that.

C And the Russians made a protest and said - 'Right, what goes on in the UN is illegal and we'll have no part in it and in our absence nothing can happen'. But of course it did. And in fact it was rather convenient because they weren't there when the Korean War blew up, and so the UN was able to pass resolutions which never would have got through had the Russians been there.

McB Yes, so there was UN backing for the resistance to the North Koreans?

C In fact I think the Armed Forces and the Americans were officially a UN force. And they were mandated by the UN.

McB Well, perhaps we should move on from there to Lisbon, 1951 to 1955, when you were dealing with the so-called Dictator, Salazar.

C Yes, that's right. And I had a bachelor Ambassador, Nigel Ronald, who I think had many things in common with Salazar. For example, they both went round turning lights off. But he knew how to deal with the Portuguese, which was his last post. The Portuguese had for years, for centuries, had to deal with bigger Powers who were trying to bully them, and there was a story we used to tell, which I think was more or less true, of how they dealt with it. You'd send them a Note asking something or other, and a week or two later, in fact every week we had a sort of progress report of our subjects which were with the Portuguese waiting for an answer, and where they'd got to. And after a week or two you'd enquire 'oh yes, yes, it's being studied in the Department', 'Oh yes, it's gone up to the Under Secretary', 'It's with the Minister' 'It's with Dr. Salazar', you know, this was as the months go by. 'I'm so sorry we've lost the papers, could you send us?'

McB They were well-practised.

C They were well-practised. And he was equally well-practised because he had a

close relationship with the Secretary-General of the Ministry.

McB Who, Nigel Roland?

C Nigel Roland did, yes. And on one occasion he was summoned to the Secretary General and confronted with a letter from Buckingham Palace which had been sent to somebody who had written to them, addressed to 'Lisbon, Spain'. So Nigel said, oh dear, I'm sorry, odder things have happened and people do remember the Armada set out from Lisbon'. But he wrote to the King's Private Secretary, who he had been at school with, and a letter came back apologising profusely and saying 'I can tell you what happened, but it's really no excuse. We did employ a lot of temporary staff and we had some rather odd things happen. For example, there was a letter which went to Lambeth Palace addressed to Mr. Cantuar.' And the Ambassador took this down and the Secretary General knew enough about England to be placated.

McB It just shows there were dreadful things happening in 1950 as well.

C But the chap I dealt with was, I suppose I was a Second Secretary by then, and he was a First Secretary, was a man called Franco Nogueira, who later on became Foreign Minister himself and then retired after Salazar, after the change of the regime. He came to this country and I saw him again when I was Chairman of the Anglo-Portuguese Society. And his No. 2, who was an attaché only, turned up as Portuguese Ambassador in London at the time when I was Chairman and when the Portuguese President came over and we had a big do at Windsor. So that was nice. But the particular bit that I remember was while we were negotiating about modifications to the Nyasaland/Mozambique frontier. We wanted some territory which would enable an important trunk road running along the Highlands to be entirely British territory, and in exchange for that, we were prepared to allow them to have the Median Line on Lake Nyasa because the frontier had been just on the Portuguese shore. And then there was another one between the Angolan and the Northern Rhodesian frontier. They were very pleasant years and they were quite interesting things we were dealing with.

McB And then after that you were off to Singapore

C I was sent off to Singapore. First Secretary Economic, replacing Dr Benham, who had been the Economic Adviser to the Commissioner General immediately after the war and he was the person who had written the standard textbook on economics,

whereas I had had less than a year at Oxford studying economics. And I also replaced Dr. Clyde, who was the rice adviser to the Commissioner General, who was then a great expert on rice.

McB Did you have anything to do with the Commissioner General?

C Well I met...there were two Commissioners-General. He was, after all, the Head of the Organisation, although we didn't see an awful lot of Malcolm MacDonald. I saw much more of him later when I was Ambassador in Vientiane. But, no, because I was sent up to Saigon because the Ambassador there had got excited that rice was going to run out in the south, so I was sent up to have a look at the situation and make a report. And I saw Malcolm MacDonald at a party before I went and when I came back. I think that was about all. His successor, Rob Scott, of course, was very much more of a regular Foreign Office chap.

McB Yes that's right. MacDonald was really a politician.

C Yes, an extremely good one.

McB As Economic Adviser, was the Commissioner-General doing anything on the economic front?

C Not really. By then he was a sort of co-ordinating body and I mean one of the things I used to do when there were Colombo Plan meetings, there were two actually while I was there, was to pad out the British delegation, I was added to them. That took me to New Zealand on the first occasion, and the second occasion was actually in Singapore, but my main job was to hold the hands of the representatives from the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, Sarawak and Borneo, North Borneo. And they would produce material to go into their Malayan Singapore Federation section of the British Territories Report. I pulled it together and prepared a chapter to go into the Colombo Plan Report.

McB Of course, we forget that they were still Colonial Territories.

C They were, very much so

McB So you were in really quite a unique position.

C Well we were. The Commissioner-General had been Commissioner-General, or still was for South-East Asia. As you remember he was sent out to try and get things moving again when the Japanese were removed.

McB To bring them to independence.

C Well in our case, but I mean his remit was much wider. It ran from Pakistan to the Philippines. And north, you know. Malcolm MacDonald, as I later came to know, was highly involved in the whole Indo-Chinese business. And close friends with the Lao Royal Family. And I used to go round looking at Colombo Plan projects. I went to Burma and Indonesia as well as within our territories.

McB Was there actually any sort of economic significance about Singapore at that stage?

C The Chinese in Singapore were regarded as rather backward Chinese by the people from the Mainland, but they were streets ahead of anybody else.

McB There was no industry there. It was not a financial centre, it was simply a port, with warehouses, wasn't it?

C It was a centre of commerce and there certainly were financial institutions there, so it was already a subject of jealousy by Malays and Indonesians and so on, because of the Chinese.

McB Because they were working so much harder?

C Yes, they were making money and there were some pretty rich Chinese around.

McB Did you come across Lee Kuan Yew, Harry Lee as he was then called?

C Not personally. One was very conscious of stories about him and so on. He was regarded slightly as a baddy at that point, together with Lim Chin Siong, who was a baddy. But the Chief Minister was Marshall, who was a Eurasian. But, of course, the Commissioner-General's Organisation was a huge organisation and I remember our Head of Chancery saying 'oh, this is a sign of the future, the job of the Foreign

Office is just going to be the travel agent and administrator for all these other people, funnies and whatnot'. There were lots of different sorts of funnies and a great military establishment.

McB Yes it was an astoundingly top-heavy military establishment, wasn't it?

C One of the jobs I had to do was evacuation plans for these territories. And the one occasion that I had to deal with anything, a telegram came in from Andrew Gilchrist, who had moved to Indonesia, saying 'The Embassy's surrounded, the Embassy's on fire', which I sort of burst into a Service Meeting saying this telegram had come in, get your ships ready and your aeroplanes....

McB What year was that?

C Well I was there from '55 to '57 and quite when that happened I have to go to diaries to find out. It wasn't at the very beginning but it might have been probably before Suez because I was there at the time of Suez.

McB Yes, so that must have had quite an impact.

C Oh it had. As in England I think. You got people crossing the street not to speak to somebody who was taking the opposite point of view to them. I remember, I can't remember what his name was, but there was a leader writer for the Straits Times, who had I think come from the News Chronicle, or whatever it was called at that time, I forget, who was critical as a great many people were of Government policy, so a lot of people were cold-shouldering him.

McB Yes, it aroused great passion. Now SEATO Economic Committee Meetings?

C Yes, well that was not really frightfully important but SEATO had been set up and it had an Economic Committee inevitably and that met in the first place in Bangkok, and we used to go up there to it together with whoever came out from London, and actually somebody in the Bangkok Embassy. And I also went to Karachi for a meeting there, where again a chap from the Treasury came to be a leader of our delegation and probably the second secretary in the commercial section or economic section was with us. He later became the High Commissioner. I don't remember his name.

McB But of course India was not part of that organisation was it?

C No it was Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and

McB Laos?

C No Laos and Cambodia under the Geneva Agreement were supposed to be neutral. But one of the points of SEATO was to be able to defend that, well really to defend Thailand, but to stop what was the matchbox effect.

McB The domino..

C The domino effect. The domino theory.

McB So leaving Singapore behind in 1957 you went to the FCO Atomic Energy Department and had quite a long stint.

C About two and half years all told, I suppose. Or nearly three. It was called Atomic Energy and Disarmament Department at the time. And then it was split, and our section was bumped up into being a Department. And the chap who'd been head of the section became Head of Department and then Gill Brown, who later became Ambassador in Norway, did the military side and I did the peaceful uses side. And we also had tacked on Scientific Relations which has now become a separate department. And peaceful uses. This was the time when we thought we were the leader of peaceful uses because Calder Hall had come on stream and the Americans weren't really into it at that time, or not so much so. But we were very dependent upon the Americans trying to get back into the position where they could give us military information which had been stopped completely of course. And therefore we had to mind our p's and q's with them and in particular there was the idea of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and the safeguard system to be set up under a new International Atomic Energy Agency, whose job was going to be to check and control that material and information, really material provided to countries to help them develop nuclear power or nuclear uses, wasn't diverted to be used for military purposes. And that was the so-called safeguard system. While I was there the initial conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency took place in Vienna, which I went to and which I was on. I was the Foreign Office chap working there under someone who was leader. The Governor of the body that was set up was a chap from the Atomic Energy Office, a very small office...

McB What in London?

C Yes, in London. But working to and closely with the UK Atomic Energy Authority. By then Roger Makins was the head of it. And one of the side effects of our dependence on the Americans, or our keeping on the right side of them, was that we supported the Senator that they put up to be the first Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency. That was Senator Sterling Cole, whom we supported against the Swede, who would probably have been the better bet and in fact took it over later, and whom the Russians were backing. And the interesting coincidence was that while we were in Vienna for this conference, the news of Sputnik appeared. And the Americans went away and hid. And everybody went up to the Russian delegate, Emelyanov, who was a very eminent scientist, and congratulated him.

McB Did we?

C Oh yes.

McB Why were we having to be so careful with the Americans?

C Well, because during the war (World War II) we decided for good military reasons that we and the Americans should work very closely together to develop the nuclear bomb and the actual hardware work was done in the States. We sent over people, scientists, to take part in the work.

McB Because we were in advance of them?

C No, I don't think we were in advance of them but we were pretty far ahead, I mean, on the theoretical side. But then immediately after the war the McMahon Act was passed by, I think I'm right in calling it the McMahon Act, by the American Congress, Senate, I think, forbidding the transmission of any nuclear information or material to other countries, including Britain. And then Atlee decided on having our own nuclear energy programme, producing our own bomb, and when we had got sufficiently far to have our fission bombs exploded in Australia, nuclear tests in Australia, a case could be made by our friends in the States that we should be taken off the list of those people to be given no information and that there should be exchanges of information with us, of which we would obviously be the greater

recipient. The negotiations about that were still not concluded at the time that I was in the Atomic Energy Department. So that's why we were particularly determined not to put a foot wrong with the Americans.

McB I had understood that there had been a secret agreement between Churchill and Roosevelt concerning the transfer of British ...

C Well, there was, yes, yes.

McB What was it called, the Manhattan Project?

C Yes, yes, the Manhattan Project. But that was secret, I think, and Congress had not signed up to it and it was overturned by Congress.

McB By Congress? Ah, I see.

C They passed the McMahon Act without really being aware of it I think. And I'm not even sure how far Truman was aware of it.

McB Probably not.

C Possibly not. But there is an extremely good history which I had to read when I was in Atomic Energy Department. Possibly I read it afterwards, when I... I think on reflection that it was after retirement when I actually read it. There was a lady, probably who had been employed in the Atomic Energy Authority, who was commissioned to write the history of the British Atomic Energy effort up to probably about the time, certainly after the first nuclear test in Australia. Actually I read that, now that I come to think of it, probably it hadn't been written when I was in Atomic Energy Department. After retirement I was employed for a short time to do the Atomic Energy papers for the Public Records Office, vetting in Records Department. And the other military sort of thing that was going on at that time of course was our first hydrogen bomb test on Christmas Island. That was handled by Gill Brown and the Head of the Department who came under Denis Greenhill. I was concerned because of the health aspects, remember there was all that fuss about the health risks of the nuclear tests, which would create radiation and would have genetic and other somatic effects. I was the Foreign Office link on that with the Medical Research Council people, who produced a fairly major report on it, at that time. We were flooded with PQs from, particularly the Opposition, about our nuclear programme and

nuclear tests, and so on, and the H-bomb tests and particularly about the health side of it. And I would have to prepare the supplementaries to the main reply on that aspect. Of course, as one sees constantly on these, well foot and mouth, every form of health scare and scientific scare, the scientists if they are reasonable scientists, will never say there is no risk. What you learned very quickly was that what you had to say was 'well the amount of radiation released from these is a great deal less than the extra radiation you receive if you live in a granite house in Cornwall', that sort of thing. I remember briefing a Minister for the House of Lords debate, which may have been slightly exaggerated, saying that 'My Lords, if you move up and sit up at the top of this House, rather than at the bottom, you will get a greater amount of radiation than from the nuclear test.'

McB Yes, it's curious the way these scares and fashions emerge as they do time and time again. You went to Bogota after that, and you were living at 8,600 feet.

C Yes.

McB So how much radiation were you getting there?

C It's a question I didn't ask. But what you were definitely getting was less oxygen. And you did lose your temper remarkably quickly. And the people up there, there was an enormous difference between the Indian population living up there in the Altplano, who were "triste", they were sad, they were violent and so on, and the Negro population of Columbia, down on the Atlantic seaboard or the Pacific who were gay and dancing all the time.

McB Have I leapt ahead?

C No I don't think you've leapt ahead. My job there was definitely our least favourite post. There were scenic aspects of it from which we benefited, going to the Eastern Plains, and so on, going down the Atlantic Railway, which was almost the only major railway project in the modern age. There was no rail link from Bogota to the coast and while we were there they were building one. We actually went down. They organised a trip for us diplomats down it, but that was really just being a tourist. And apart from looking after various ministerial and other MPs' visits, preparing for the Duke of Edinburgh's visit, I don't think there was an awful lot of importance.

McB No it sounds jolly interesting, but presumably we had no major political or

economic interests there?

C Well we had minor economic interests there. We had both Shell and BP who were exploring.

McB Oh were they? Off the coast?

C No, no.

McB Inland?

C Inland. They still are. As far as I know, Shell still has.. and of course Shell are enormous in Venezuela, and Casabe was the place where they were in Columbia which I visited. And BP were just starting down in an area where they are very active now. And in fact the lady who came out with us to help with the children and then became an anthropologist, stayed on there, and wrote quite a lot about BP operating in areas where there are native tribes and the environmental problems and also, of course, where you get the drug runners.

McB Kidnapping?

C Well even when we were there, kidnapping was a worry. It wasn't my immediate successor, he was my immediate successor but two, Philip Ziegler, he was wounded and his wife was killed in our house.

McB Really, by..?

C By robbers. They'd only been there a short time and didn't know that if you found thieves in your house you went away until they were finished. He tried to chase them and that was disastrous.

McB That does sound a bit violent. Do you think that is a consequence of the altitude?

C Possibly, to some extent. Now, of course, violence had a political origin, the so-called Bogotazo in 1948, I think it was, the Liberals had come to power, and the Conservatives were trying to get rid of them, and there was a sort of primitive revolt and a great deal of blood-letting and this went on. I mean the story that was told

when I was there was that a bus carrying the Conservatoire, a musical group, through the mountains, was held up by gangsters, who said 'what are you?' and they said 'Conservatoire', at which point as they were a Liberal gang, they were all butchered. You didn't leave your children on the street to get on the school bus, you waited with them, until the school bus arrived, because there was kidnapping.

McB Yes, it doesn't really sound terribly pleasant.

C It wasn't. La violencia, it was known as. Well, of course, the Bay of Pigs happened when we were there. But that was more an American worry than ours.

McB Yes, presumably you were not involved?

C No, just rather shaken onlookers.

McB So in 1962 you moved to the Vatican and what was your rank there?

C Well I was First Secretary because the tradition, which I think is still maintained, is that the Minister as he then was, now Ambassador, was never a Catholic. Ideally he should have been a practising Anglican as he does represent the Queen. The First Secretary - it was a tiny mission - was always a Catholic, who was supposed to know the ropes. And then there was an Attaché who was a local resident, also a Catholic, who looked after every day requests for Audiences and things from tourists. And a Secretary, an Archivist, an Accountant, whatever, and then the Embassy to the Quirinal actually handled our diplomatic bags and sending our telegrams and things. It was a tiny mission and one had two functions above, one was to be in liaison with the Vatican. The Legation had been established in 1914 because of a fear that the Vatican would use its influence on behalf of the Central Powers, Catholic Austro-Hungary, and their allies, against Protestant England, atheist France and Orthodox Russia. There was still the second thing above all about British Colonies where you had a large Catholic population. The only time, we ever actually broke off diplomatic relations, we withdrew our Minister, was in 1929, over Malta.

McB What was the issue then?

C Well the issue there was that the Church had said that under penalty of excommunication - the then Catholic Archbishop had said, you may not vote for Mintoff's Party.

McB In 1929?

C Yes, in 1929. Mintoff went on for a long time. I remember Lord Carrington talking about the Maltese Cross which he had to bear.

McB But that was a different kind of Maltese Cross wasn't it?

C Well, it was still Mintoff. His problem was with Malta and the Italians. However, you kept in touch with the Vatican, we didn't obviously have a Concordat, so they didn't strictly speaking have to consult us about appointments, but we fed them an enormous amount of IRD material. The theory is that the Vatican knows everything that is going on in the world. They have a small diplomatic service and they do their best no doubt, and they were avid takers of IRD material. Also there was a White Father, whom one knew, that one actually gave IRD material to, who was the closest person in the world to Nyerere, so if you wanted to try and get a message across to Nyerere, or influence him, that was a possible channel. We still had quite a bit of red around the globe in those days and the Catholic Church was of importance. The other thing that we had to do was to arrange private Audiences for important people who came. And I used to take people in and, where necessary, translate for them, to Pope John, and after he died, when he was succeeded by Pope Paul. I never actually had the Queen while I was there, just missed her, but I did take Harold Wilson who was very conscious of the fact that he had a Catholic majority in his constituency. Oh well, a number of other people, ranging from the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet and also, because we were the only Resident Commonwealth Mission, I remember taking in the Australian Minister of Immigration and translating for him, for Pope John. When he came out, he said 'I'm so glad you were able to translate for me because I don't understand Italian.' I said, 'well actually he was speaking French with an Italian accent.'

McB Yes, I was going to ask you about language. Did they both speak French?

C Paul spoke quite a bit of English. John's English was very very rudimentary and he used French. I don't think I ever used Italian, I don't remember. I mean Italian is a very easy language, and I'd come to it from Portuguese and Spanish, so it was no problem. The problem I found actually was when listening, because we used to go to the ceremonies at the Vatican a great deal, particularly during the Vatican Council, of course. I wouldn't really remember or notice when the Pope switched

from Latin, which he would probably start in, into Italian. Latin spoken with an Italian accent and Italian sound very similar.

McB What was your impression of Harold Wilson?

C Well, I didn't really have much chance to have an impression of him. A question arose, and was slightly difficult, of what present he should bring for the Pope. And the advice from the Legation was 'why not bring a walking stick, because he's known as Johnny Walker.' But he didn't, he brought his own memoirs. He was very solicitous of his wife, which was nice.

McB But you spent five years there?

C I spent five years. I was able to stay for the whole of the Vatican Council which we followed, I followed, rather closely. The Times correspondent was frightfully aware of the fact that during the First Vatican Council, the Times correspondent's despatches were a source of great mirth among the British clerics because they were so inaccurate. He was determined that this wasn't going to happen to him, so he organised, together with The Tablet correspondent, a little group, you could almost call it a dining club. There were the two of them and I think an American and a French correspondent and they co-opted me, as Press Attaché as well as everything else, into this, and we used to meet during the Council Meetings, once a week, for dinner, for supper, very often in our house, and would get somebody, either a bishop or one of the "periti", one of the experts of the Council, to discuss with us developments. But the only sort of developments, things in the Council that were really of particular interest to the Government or the Foreign Office, were what position it took on nuclear weapons and what position it took on birth control. And birth control was removed from the Council by Pope Paul so anything we did about that was rather more a personal attitude, a personal bit of lobbying than on behalf of the Foreign Office. Then I was also there when Archbishop Ramsey came, which was the first official visit of an Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury to Rome.

McB Have you got any comments to make about that?

C No. It was a great occasion. I think it went successfully and it was my first real brush, or acquaintance with Ian Paisley, who came out to make a protest. First of all when the Archbishop was at the Anglican Church and then when he and the Pope were together at St. Paul's. As usual Ian Paisley waited until he'd got all the

television cameras focused on him and then opened his tunic to reveal 'Ramsey, traitor to the Protestant Martyrs'. I've had a lot to do with him since then. I've come across him at various occasions and his son, too, because when I retired, for fifteen years I ran the London end of Anglo-Irish Encounter.

McB Do you think that that emerged from your time at the Vatican?

C Not actually. The fact that I was asked to do that was largely an 'old boy' business. David Goodall, whom we had known well, and as you may know was at No. 10 under Mrs Thatcher, at the time when Airey Neave was assassinated. Over a whisky one evening she said we must do something about Ireland. And then David came into that, that really resulted in the Anglo Irish Agreement, with Fitzgerald, and then Anglo-Irish Encounter was set up. In my view it was something that the two Governments could do to show that they were really friends and not be too provocative to Ian Paisley. So all we were allowed to do was to hold conferences. It was also part of the strategy of going around the Northern Ireland problem by creating better links between Britain and Ireland.

McB What is Anglo-Irish Encounter? It sounds as though it might be a magazine.

C No, it's nothing to do with the other Encounter. It is a body that is funded by the two Governments, but which is independent of them, in theory at least, to hold conferences. Over fifteen years we've probably held forty conferences in all sorts of areas. I think the original thought was that it would be just as in the European Community you had an economic and social committee, not that it has ever achieved very much, this would be the economic and social committee under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But until that was set up there would be this organization. And we were never funded for doing anything other than holding conferences. So what you tried to do was to do something which would possibly start off relationships where things weren't happening. And what has happened more recently is that it has really started to get youth exchanges going rather more solidly because you get a lot of twinning. A lot of schools are more inclined to go to France for exchanges than they are to the south of Ireland.

McB That's probably true for the Irish as well?

C Yes, yes, I think so, because after all there are an enormous lot of Irish over here. But there have been developments and one thing was rather hush-hush and is no

longer. I can't think what it's called, I think The European Studies Project, and this involves, for example, possibly sixth form or more junior classes in Ireland, in the Republic, in Northern Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, in England and Scotland and Wales, and also sometimes with a French or a Belgian school or Dutch school, having an email exchange to study a common subject. They usually started with the Normans or the Vikings, or something that was common, and worked up to more modern, more controversial subjects. And they would exchange essays or conclusions by email.

McB To get them to think about

C To get them to think about ..if you've been to a Catholic school you know that Bloody Mary is Good Mary and there's Bloody Queen Bess. History which is taught, even over here, is a little bit influenced by background. And there was a completely different idea of history being taught in Catholic and in non-Catholic schools in Northern Ireland.

McB I'm sure that that sort of propaganda is responsible for a lot of the troubles. So who attended these conferences?

C Well, an enormous variety of people. We started at the very first conference which was in London, with employment. One didn't normally have any Ministers present at the beginning, but you might have politicians and you'd have businessmen and academics and so on. And then there was one about churches, and you got representatives from the different churches attending, and one about youth and youth exchanges, and then again you had another about education in Europe or for Europe. So that there would be a different clientele for different conferences.

McB And you would aim to invite people from different representative bodies?

C Yes, if it was, for example, one about the environment, what I would normally do would be to go to the right contact in Whitehall and say 'now look, who should we get to this?' And you then approached them saying 'so and so' has recommended you, for the environment. I forget names. I got the bloke who was an academic, in the Gower Street area, who was the guru on the environment at that time. He came and produced a list of people to be invited. And the Irish would be doing the same thing at their end. Of course it was easier for them.

McB Good. Well thank you very much indeed for that. Should we move on to Joint Information Administration Department?

C Yes, well there one's main interest and task was the budget, the Overseas Information Budget which was on the Foreign Office vote. It included the BBC's external services, and the British Council, as well as our own information services and the C.O.I. And this was, again, a matter of juggling figures and trying to get a reasonable figure out of the Treasury in the desk exercise and then overseeing the division of the cake. And the great trick, as in most pots of Government accounting, until now, and at last they are doing something about it, was that if you wanted to save current expenditure, you cut your future capital forecasts. The BBC were always ready to give up or to postpone expenditure on relay stations which was going to be a very mammoth amount in order to save their language services.

McB Yes they were mad keen on their language services. Did you have any faith that they were any good?

C I think it's a little difficult to differentiate between the language services and the World Service. Certainly you became conscious at various points in your life of important people listening to one or the other, but more often probably the World Service.

McB That they listened to?

C Yes. I mean a crucial man in the Lao Foreign Ministry listened daily to the World Service. He would have said to improve his English, but I think he probably had other reasons too. And certainly from the correspondence of people disagreeing with things, the language service was also listened to. And the BBC would always produce figures and letters and things.

McB Was there a Lao language service?

C There wasn't a Lao language service. There is a Thai service and Lao and Thai are very similar.

McB So that was a matter of dealing with the budgets?

C Yes, that was really what it was all about. There were also the day to day

contacts with the BBC and then there were things like our Pavilion for World Fairs and there was, which really ran itself, the visits programme where I got pulled in to host meals. Actually at that time I had two hats, I was also Chairman of the staff side, of the Diplomatic Service. And I remember, on one occasion, writing a minute, slightly facetious, to I suppose the Chief Clerk, or whoever, saying 'could the Head of JIAD inform the Chairman of the staff side if it is proposed to cut such and such a post..' and the answer came back 'we'll have to leave Mr Cape to solve his own problems of schizophrenia.'

McB How about this question of deleting Diplomatic Service posts in order to preserve British Council ones, or vice versa? Did that impinge on your...

C I think that with my Chairman of the staff side... influence on me as Head of IAD I was in a position to say ...because the usual form, and I remember crossing swords with Oliver Wright on this, if the Inspectors said that there should be a cut in the money for a post, the first thing that an Ambassador would usually want to dispense with was his Press Attaché. And I would then be inclined to say well from the point of view of the overseas information budget, this is not necessary. But then probably for manpower reasons or whatever it would go through. But it wasn't really in order to save British Council people. As far as I was concerned anyway.

McB Well how about posts, Diplomatic Service posts versus maintaining a BBC vernacular service.

C Well again you see the trick was, when in doubt, ask the BBC to postpone a bit of their relay programme. Or give them the option. And that's what they'll go for.

McB Did you have any problems in connection with George Brown at this time.

C (laughter) I don't think I should have put that in.

McB Why not?

C I think this is something that the Foreign Office would not want to go public. But I happen to know that Denis Greenhill, who was my Foreign Office Under-Secretary, had a very difficult night with George Brown, who'd had a good many drinks and who wanted to nationalise the BBC because they were causing problems over their reporting on the, I think it was, the Eight-Days War. By the end of the

evening I think he agreed to stop that.

McB Well George Brown caused a great deal of difficulty for a whole lot of people.

C That's right.

McB Let's pass on to Washington where you were from 1970 - 1973. You were Head of I.A.D. before you went, so you went to Washington as a counsellor?

C I went to Washington as a counsellor, thanks I think to Denis Greenhill and the Chief Clerk. I'd worked for Denis Greenhill and for the Chief Clerk as Chairman of the staff side.

McB Which Chief Clerk was it? It wasn't Oliver Wright was it?

C No it was Peter Wilkinson. I went out as Counsellor to look after Latin America, with which Northern Ireland went rather oddly, but actually quite sensibly, and American internal affairs. Then, as a result of an inspection, not too long after I arrived, the American internal was put with the Head of Chancery's job, and instead I was given Europe. Europe political, I would say, as opposed to economic. Of course there was another Counsellor who was doing military intelligence. On Latin America, the only thing that I think was important, or worthwhile mentioning, was the occasion on which I slightly blotted my copybook with Lord Cromer, getting him along with the intention of making a statement in the O.A.S. about British Honduras. Guatemala was trying to get the O.A.S. to put an embargo on British trade or whatever unless we handed over British Honduras. And then they wouldn't call him.

McB O.A.S. Organisation of American States.

C Yes, Organisation of American States, who were having their annual conference in Washington at the time. I also, but then one was just a post box looking after Richard Sykes. At that time he was our man in Havana. Whenever he came to Washington all the American agencies wanted to pump him. But that was Latin America. Northern Ireland was rather more interesting in a way, because it had just about blown up when I was there. We had Bloody Sunday and the Internment and so on and so forth. No, the dirty protests were later. But we used to get letters, of course, and also delegations coming to protest at our treatment of the Catholics in Northern Ireland. I would get deputed to deal with them. I remember with particular

pleasure a delegation from the Ancient Order of Hibernians of Baltimore who came in and wanted to see the Ambassador and I had to receive them. I wanted to take care that they were from Baltimore, so I said 'well, where are you from?' and they explained and then they said 'where are you from?' and I thought and I said that I was born on the Curragh. Shock, horror. What's he doing in this office?

McB And you were a Catholic.

C Yes, well, I think that came out. Because the Embassy had so many high-powered and clever people, I always reckoned that if both my First Secretaries, the Europe and the Latin American one, were there and the Head of Chancery, for whom I might have to depute otherwise, if they were there, there was no job for me to do. So I could take up one of the many demands for speakers around the country and Northern Ireland, of course, was a very frequent subject. One left places like Boston and Los Angeles to the experts. But I remember, for example, there was a demand for somebody to go to speak at the Wisconsin University, which had a reputation for being fairly radical, and we heard that somebody from the Irish Studies Association was also going there, and I was strongly advised 'don't go, he'll eat you up, he'll be a terrible IRA man'. I wanted to go because it was closer to the ski slopes. I went along and met this chap and his wife and said 'why don't you go first' and he went first and as it turned out they became close friends of mine. He was somebody who really knew his Ireland situation and was violently anti-IRA, and anti the Irish-Americans and so on. He talked about how the image of Catholics was, that they were useless and dirty and feckless and lazy and so on. So when my turn came I said that I was born on the Curragh and I am a Catholic, so that makes me 'what was it, feckless?'. Roars of laughter from the audience. So we scored 99 to none. So that was Northern Ireland. American Internal was interesting to follow but not an awful lot that we could do about it. Starting from Kent State killings just before I arrived and ending up with Watergate.

McB Starting with what?

C Well in 1969 there were a number of that was the time of the anti-Vietnam riots and so on. And the police or the civic guard actually killed a couple of students at, I think it was called Kent State, anyway some university. Well I've obviously got the name slightly wrong, but anyway there was. I remember I arrived in the autumn, in mid-September, and the universities were going back and people were wondering what was going to happen now, and suddenly 'nothing's happening, a hush' 'why,

what's happened?' And the real answer was, I think, that the depression had started and the students realised that they wouldn't be able to get jobs unless they worked so that instead of going to anti-Vietnam demonstrations they were studying. At the other end, of course, was Watergate, when you could go down to the State Department with some subject to talk about and really, I mean, they were sitting around watching the television, they couldn't take decisions on anything. It was an awful situation.

McB It's amazing the way the American system fails from time to time?

C Well, it's amazing that it works, actually.

McB I was going to say, it's almost as bad as ours.

C I think it's even worse because the trouble is you get to know who... you negotiate something with the administration, so you have to give way on some points in order to get them to give way on others, and then it's thrown out by the Congress regularly.

McB How about the question of Europe? That must have been a fairly live issue, wasn't it?

C Well, the sort of issues I was dealing with somehow were individual questions, Cyprus, the Icelandic Cod War and so on, because over the years the State Department anyway has always wanted Britain in Europe. And this was a period when at long last Ted Heath was able, because de Gaulle was dead, was able to get us in. And I remember going round having read up my papers and stuff from London and so on, and talking at, I suppose, what are they called, a Foreign Studies Institute, in various parts of the States, and talking about how good it was going to be for America, that we were going to be members of the Common Market, and how one of the things the Common Market was going to do was to have economic and monetary union by 1980. That was the topic at that moment.

McB And you can recall going round talking about that?

C Yes, because I've kept a number of my speeches and I have come across that in my text.

McB It astounds me that people can now allege that it comes as a total surprise, that

it was never revealed. That is completely untrue.

C People keep on saying 'oh, we were told we were going to join the Common Market, nothing else', I mean it's absolute balls. I've still got the White Paper for before we went in in the first place.

McB I think the White Paper was taken in 1978.

C No, no, in 1970 or 71.

McB '68.

C Well the one I've got is either '70 or '71.

McB I think that probably concludes Washington. So your next move was to Brasilia as counsellor.

C And the Ambassador, the new Ambassador, was Derek Dodson. Brasilia was just beginning to function because the President had said he would not hold Cabinet Meetings anywhere else, he would not receive foreign visitors anywhere else, and all Ambassadors who had to make any demarche must be living in Brasilia, etc. So it was beginning to function. Derek Dodson was going to be there, and he was determined that the overseeing of the commercial efforts of the missions in Brazil should be run from Brasilia. This was not very welcome to Robert John who was Consul General in Rio, and who was shortly afterwards removed to Panama. As number two and Counsellor one of my main functions was to try and co-ordinate the commercial work in Rio and Sao Paulo in particular. Any visitor, either banker or more particularly industrialist or somebody who was going to try to sell something, would normally need to talk to a Government Minister in Brazil, the bankers and people in Rio and the industrialists in Sao Paulo. We used to have regular meetings, myself with the two Consuls-General, co-ordinating commercial work and in particular - I've forgotten now what they were called - we used to do periodical reports to the Board of Trade.

McB Market reports?

C No it wasn't market reports. You put order of priority on products for selling them and so on. So we'd meet periodically in Brasilia or Rio or Sao Paulo. Then we

had obviously visitors, bankers, and in particular when I was there, there was a big effort being made to sell steel plants to the Brazilians, against Japanese competition. We'd be taking the people in to meet various Ministers in Brasilia, usually one person or just possibly two, and as we waited to go in a Japanese delegation of about twenty would come out.

McB Of course the Japanese have got quite strong links with Brazil.

C Oh historical links, going back to the days when Japanese went there to settle as farmers. That was the commercial side of things. One also obviously had visitors. David Owen came out as Minister of Health and told us we didn't know what we were talking about when we talked about schools being shut in Brasilia because of the dryness during the dry season. He had the decency to apologise having visited hospitals and seen a number of cases. Princess Alexandra came out to open a British exhibition, an industrial exhibition in Sao Paulo, and came to Brasilia first. That was another occasion when one had this business of scientists, because Dr. Medvei, the Foreign Office medical adviser, was sent out because Buckingham Palace had got worried that there was a case of polio or something and was it safe for her to come. So he came out and went through the normal hoops and then reported that 'yes there was a small chance that she would contract polio, but it was far more dangerous for her to cross the street outside Buckingham Palace.' That did the trick. I was able to do a good deal of travelling because I was also Consul-General for the whole of the north and north-east, and that took me to Manaus and Mato Grosso. I remember calling on the Governor of Mato Grosso and it was all right because there'd been a great football match and if Britain had won I would not have been welcomed. I didn't want us to have lost, but it was a draw. So it was all right.

McB I think you mentioned at some stage German nuclear sales to Brazil?

C Well the Germans were selling nuclear plants, and because I'd been in Atomic Energy Department, I was aware of the problems. I did a large despatch on the matter but I think at the end of the day they may have managed to sell a little bit of equipment. I remember getting a real raspberry when I went down rather as an innocent to ask the Brazilians if they wouldn't join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. You know I got a round robin Despatch, and without thinking too much I went down and they told me just where I got off. 'When you put your nuclear plant under inspection.' So I think that's really Brasilia. Most enjoyable, as you really felt it was going somewhere.

McB You went there after Brasilia had been established as a capital?

C Yes. It had been theoretically the capital for a long time, but it was really beginning to work, and actually the trick was that, if somebody particularly wanted to see a particular minister, to find out when they were flying from Brasilia to Rio or Sao Paulo, and get your chap on the same plane and he could then catch the minister in the waiting room.

McB Not a bad ploy.

C Probably works in a good many parts of the world.

McB Anyhow you went from there to Vientiane.

C We went from there to Vientiane.

McB As Ambassador?

C As Ambassador. I arrived after the Communists had taken over, when they were just installing themselves, and it was really a bad moment. The reason, as you know why we had anybody in Vientiane was because of the Geneva Agreement, to try and keep them neutral, and there really was not much of a job left to do and, in fact, apart from keeping us and our staff alive, and sane, which didn't always work, I had to run down the place and see if we could get a decent return for all the money that had been expended. I remember in particular getting both my German and Australian colleagues quite interested in using our DWS because they were using the ordinary commercial stuff, which meant that their telegrams, even if in cipher, could be looked at. They were both keen on it but both of their headquarters turned it down. They weren't going to have the Brits reading their stuff. But I did get the Germans, it was the West Germans, who had only just started having a mission there, partly to keep tabs on the East Germans, who were there of course in force, so I got them to take over half our Chancery building. I think they have now taken it all over, but I'm not sure. The residence was again a reasonable place to live and had a swimming pool and tennis court. The Australians have now moved into it. I started off calling on communist ministers, many of whom having come out of the caves of Viengsay, didn't really speak anything but Lao, Vietnamese and Russian possibly. Most of the old guard had either been sent to re-education camps or gone across the river but they

had just a modicum of French-speaking civil servants from the old time who would come and help to translate if necessary. The only time I got to call on Kaysone, who of course was running the show, I decided that the best spiel that I could offer was to suggest that they should have a modicum of people who spoke English, because this was very effective and important for communication with the rest of the world and therefore our VSOs who were teaching English were very important. Well, whether he got the message or whether he got it too well, while I was on leave a year or so later, they were all expelled. He was very much a recluse. They had taken over what had been the US Aid Mission, which had a perimeter wall and so on, and the Politburo moved in there and were incommunicado. Only once were the Heads of Mission taken along to call on Kaysone and Souvannavong. We were merely summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a certain time and there we were all put in a bus and taken under strict control to call on Kaysone. But normally he didn't appear at all in public. He was frightened of being assassinated. But even at the Lao New Year celebrations quite often he wouldn't appear at all. We would have to be there at five o'clock in the morning. Eventually the ministers would appear at about half past six.

One interesting feature of my stay in Laos was watching Chinese-Russian rivalry. We were sure the Vietnamese had the most important influence on the Lao Communist leadership. We suspected, but had no proof, that Vietnamese troops were stationed in certain areas of Laos to deal with Meo/Hmong and other dissidents (and we later learned on the Cambodian frontier from where they attacked the Khmer Rouge regime). We also noticed that the Lao policy followed Vietnamese changes some months later. But the Russians were the main source of economic and technical assistance, and of tertiary education for the Lao students in the USSR. It was very noticeable how whenever the Soviet ambassador arrived at a reception the satellite ambassadors from East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Cuba flocked to greet him, while the Chinese was isolated and consorted more with us Western and neutral Heads of Mission.

We knew that the Chinese military were present as roadbuilders etc. in the far north of Laos and it was rumoured that the Russian pilots of Lao Aviation's Russian aircraft were not used on flights to Luang Prabang and the north. (On the other hand when Heads of Mission were flown to Viengsay near the north Vietnamese border to visit the caves where the Lao Communist leaders had sheltered from US bombing we were flown in Russian military helicopters.) My French colleague and I used to discuss where the border lay between the Soviet and Chinese zones of influence. When he

heard that I was being transferred to Strasbourg the Chinese Ambassador invited me to drinks and gave me a lecture on how important it was that Western Europe should stand up against the Russians and the threat to us from Soviet submarines in the Atlantic and North Sea.

Another point – while we were in Vientiane, the King who had been given the honorary title of Adviser to the President when forced to abdicate in December 1975, just before my arrival, was moved with his family from his palace in Luang Prabang to virtual imprisonment in Viengsay to remove him from possible contact with Hmong or Thai or other opponents of the Lao regime. We heard of this from our servants who had been told during the “seminars” or “indoctrination” that they, like all Lao, were obliged to attend.

McB What happened subsequently? Do we still have a mission there?

C No. It's run from Bangkok. I believe we now have a Trade Representative stationed there. The Australian mission is quite big. In fact, they built a bridge at Nong Kai. They've got a big aid programme. The French were expelled. We closed down. I was succeeded by John Stewart. When he went, the First Secretary was left, Dobbs I think his name was, first of all as Chargé and then the Office realised that it was more sensible to call him Ambassador, but then he was withdrawn, and it was covered from Bangkok. A sad story. As I said, we had this quite interesting trip up to Viengsay but really diplomatic work was non-existent. As in many communist countries, your invitations to the Queen's Birthday Party for example, had to be sent through Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who decided who would come. And that depended on how you'd voted in the UN or something.

McB Did you get any visits from Malcolm MacDonald in this period?

C Yes, I did. He was out as Chairman, or Director, of the VSO. As a retirement post, after he'd retired from Kenya, he ran that and he was very keen on it, and when he was with us his real interest was in being with the VSOs. So that before they were expelled. And we also had the lady who ran the Save the Children Fund, Alexandra Metcalfe. When she was coming out to visit she wrote to Cathune to ask if she should travel on the top deck of the boat across the Mekong. It was a sampan! And when we took her back, my chauffeur took her back there, took her to the boat across back, she said 'oh tell your chauffeur not to bother to come into Thailand' and then she stopped. 'Oh, I suppose he'd give his bottom dollar to do that.'

McB Well, perhaps we should move finally to Strasbourg. You certainly had a job there all right.

C Yes. Multi-functional really. When I was offered Strasbourg, I was offered Strasbourg or Cuba, and told Cathune and she said 'don't be silly, go for Strasbourg'. I said, 'Oh, I think it'll be just looking after MPs'. Well it was looking after MPs and Ministers but it was also many other things. And of course I claimed that I was found guilty of more abuses of human rights than any other individual because I was constantly appearing before the Court who would say 'Cape, why is there corporal punishment in the Isle of Man!' 'Using the tawse on Scottish school children!' 'Having a higher age of consent for homosexual acts in Northern Ireland!' 'Refusing to allow prisoners to get married!' - What else?

McB Conjugal rights in jails, no doubt.

C Well that hadn't come up at that point but it was one stage before that. The interesting one which happened and came to its conclusion shortly after I arrived. In fact it had already come for the first time to the Committee of Ministers. The rule was that if something, a case had gone to the Committee of Ministers direct from the Commission, usually because one or both of the parties concerned had not agreed to the Court having jurisdiction, then the Committee of Ministers had to take a decision as to whether or not there was a violation. But if it came from the Court, having gone to the Court first, all they had to do was to supervise the execution of the judgement of the Court. In the Irish State case, which had been started by the Irish Government at the time of Internment, Bloody Sunday and so on, and had wound its way through hearings before the Commission, many of them in an Air Force base in Norway in order to protect ...(you may know the whole story). Eventually the Commission had found us guilty of torture in one case and illegal treatment of prisoners in a couple of other cases. The Court said 'no not torture, but inhuman treatment' and this was specifically the case of the use of the sensory deprivation in one internment centre in the early 1970's which had been given up following a report (I'm struggling for the name) by a British judge. There was that and there was another case of inhuman treatment in a particular detention centre which had ceased to exist. So I was able to say that no action was required by the British Government as a result of the Court's decision, because it had already been taken. And my Irish colleague, whom I had known from Vatican days accepted that, so the case was put to bed. But it was the fact that the Irish were able to make a State case against us at that very critical time of

Internment, Bloody Sunday and so on, that gave the Irish Government a let-out at a time when there was a lot of pressure for them actually to militarily intervene on behalf of the Catholics in Northern Ireland. And of course the fact that the case took so many years to settle, that it could be put quietly to bed, was a supreme example of the usefulness of that system.

McB Do you think there's any serious danger of that?

C Had been some serious danger, or is now?

McB Had been.

C Yes, because in fact it came out afterwards that Haughey had sent arms into the North.

McB Really.

C Yes, Charles Haughey. He was convicted of that. And that really would have blown things up.

McB It certainly would.

C The other state case we had which took a lot of time was the case that Cyprus had taken against Turkey because of the Turkish invasion of the North, human rights violations and so on. It was actually my Greek colleague who made lengthy, lengthy speeches, turning everybody off about the horrors of the Turks and so on. The Cypriot was more measured. And that was eventually put to bed by a ploy which actually the German Direction of Human Rights, Golsong, had hatched up, largely to some extent, which I put to the Office and they bought. The Germans were very keen, and the Americans in the background, not to have the Turks driven out of the Council of Europe because of the danger of their importance for NATO. But there was a case, obviously where it had been found to some extent, but because of the rule, this had come from the Commission direct, because neither Turkey nor Cyprus nor Greece had at that point accepted...

McB The European Commission?

C No, the Human Rights Commission. The Strasbourg Human Rights

Commission. When a case came forward it could be from a State or from an individual. It was then decided, 'was this a prima facie case?' It was then examined by the Commission and then either went direct to the Committee of Ministers, or to the Court and to the Committee of Ministers, and if it went direct the Committee of Ministers had to decide whether there was a violation and what should be done about it. And the only prescribed penalty, apart from costs and so on, was publication, because the Commission's Report was confidential until the Committee of Ministers decided. I remember Frank Judd who was the Minister of State in the Foreign Office spent hours on the telephone with his Turkish and Greek opposite numbers, and then on the telephone to us, and eventually got them both to agree that the Report, which had in fact been leaked already to the press, could be published in full and that settled the case. They weren't going to get any more than that, the Greeks anyway. The Turks were eventually persuaded that that was a good way out of putting this case to bed. So that was that case.

McB When you talk about the Committee of Ministers or the Council of Ministers, this is not the same Council of Ministers that sits in Brussels?

C No. It is the equivalent. The difference is that the Council of Europe, as you know, was founded well before any of the other institutions, which were largely because of impatience by the French and Germans, in particular, that the Council of Europe didn't have enough powers. The Council of Europe came out of the Hague Congress at which Churchill was the leading light.

McB The date for that was..?

C The date for the Hague Congress was 1946, I think, or it may have been 1948.

McB Well, Churchill was there.

C Yes, well Churchill was in Opposition you see. Churchill had made these speeches during the War, his Zurich speech was in 1946 when he said we must have a Council of Europe, and the Conservatives in Opposition were very much in force at the Hague Congress and wanted to have a Council of Europe, where there would be a Parliamentary Assembly which would have the important powers and the Commission of Human Rights and so on. Labour wasn't keen, being in power, and the compromise was that there would be a Parliamentary Assembly for the first time but that all it could do would be to make recommendations to the Committee of

Ministers, which would decide, representing Governments, and important decisions were by unanimity. Now because Ministers had to go to Strasbourg no more than twice a year the Permanent Representative representing them actually could take decisions by the same rules and majorities as the Ministers themselves. So that when Ministers met they could just have discussions. Whereas in Brussels in the Council of Ministers, the Ambassadors cannot technically take decisions, but what they do if they agree something unanimously, or by the right majorities, it goes on to the next Ministerial meeting which, of course, happens much more frequently, on a separate list that goes through on the nod unless anybody raises a point on them. But that's what the Committee of Ministers was. But just to confuse matters more the European Parliament, which was the Brussels Assembly, actually met in Strasbourg and so we also acted as a hotel for visiting Ministers who were coming to lobby that. And Cathune was a real expert. Douglas Hurd, who had been with us in Rome when he was in the Embassy, before he went into politics, stayed with us about once a month and we would get lunch parties of people he needed to lobby. Some would arrive late because they were in committees, some would have to leave early because they were in committees, so when she got the nod from Douglas she would give the nod to the servants, so they would hold up the next course while he did his spiel and got the reaction.

McB Coming up to date to some extent, there was a letter in The Times a few days ago from a member of the European Parliament saying more or less that it was a waste of time being a member, so ..

C Well he was saying that his job as a member was to stop it doing anything useful. He was a Eurosceptic Conservative and was shot down immediately by two others. He then replied to them and said that they didn't represent the Conservative vote. But I think that being a Conservative MEP must be extremely difficult because they've got at least in our area, probably in yours too, south-east are you?

McB Ours is Caroline Jackson.

C Well you say yours is Caroline Jackson, but I think you'll find that you're thinking about what the situation was before the last election.

McB Oh, perhaps yes.

C You see then we did have one, but now there is this vast area with Party List

MEPs elected by PR, so we have got in this area, a huge area, eleven MEPs, and people who complain that they don't know who their MEP is, well then to some extent it's their own fault, but to some extent they have a choice. If they are Conservative and Eurosceptic, in this area they can write to Nirj Deva, I think his name is, who despite his name is a Conservative Eurosceptic. If they are Conservative Europhile they can write to James Provan, who lives in Horsham and who is a former MEP, is still an MEP but who is a Europhile. If they are Labour they can write to I don't know who, if they are Lib Dem they can write either to Emma Nicholson or Chris Huhne, because we have eleven MEPs.

McB Right, so it's obviously a very much larger area than ...

C It's a huge area now, it runs from the east coast of Kent - I'm not quite sure how far your way it runs - but it certainly includes Oxfordshire and Berkshire, I think, and so on.

McB We're probably south-west.

C You may be south-west.

McB So is it your impression that Strasbourg, the Parliament in Strasbourg, is a satisfactory institution.

C It has been given more and more powers over the years, but it's a difficult question - satisfactory to whom? If you don't want us to be members at all of the EU then the whole thing is a complete waste of time. If you want to be members but think that all the powers should be left with the Governments then you don't really want the Parliament coming into the problem, but if you feel that there should be a more direct democratic input into decision making then the Parliament is getting more powers but it still hasn't got enough. The system of decision-making is complicated enough because the European Commission theoretically has to initiate legislation, and the text is then looked at by the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and there are rather complicated rules. In an increasing number of cases they both have to agree to a text, and if they don't agree then it goes through a Conciliation Committee rather like the Senate and the House of Representatives in Washington.

McB I think you mentioned at some stage that quite a lot of bodies found it worthwhile to establish lobbying groups in Strasbourg. How many?

C More than three thousand, including no doubt your County Council and our County Council.

McB You don't mean three thousand from the UK do you?

C No, no. Overall. An awful lot of them are umbrella groups representing for example, steelmakers, although there you would probably have the British Steel people. We took a group to Brussels recently from the Surrey European Movement and the Chairman of that group used to be in Strasbourg as a lobbyist for, I think, British Telecom. Certainly all our major firms and NFU and so on would have people there.

McB Full-time?

C Full-time. Surrey did have a full-time person and they've now gone in with one or two other County Councils to have a full-time and rather bigger representation. The Committees of the European Parliament, when they are considering legislation, will have hearings rather like Congressional hearings. My son, who runs a wholesale chain of health food shops in County Donegal, and was Chairman of the Irish Healthfoods Association, led a delegation over there a month or so ago, giving evidence on some new regulation that was coming out.

McB Well what was the nature of your instructions from London, from the Foreign Office, while you were Ambassador there? What sort of things...

C To the Council of Europe?

McB To you as Ambassador, in relation to your position there?

C Yes, but I mean I'm differentiating, because I didn't receive instructions so far as the European Parliament was concerned.

McB No lobbying ...?

C That would be done by somebody who would come from Brussels because the Parliament meets in Plenary Session once a month in Strasbourg, but the other two or three weeks, is meeting in Committee Session in Brussels. So following that there

was one man in our Delegation in Brussels whose job it was to liaise and follow the Parliament's proceedings. Now, so far as the Council of Europe is concerned, our Parliamentary Assembly, which only met three times a year, and consisted of to some extent MPs, and to some extent members of the House of Lords, would be given briefing papers by the Foreign Office on subjects that were going to be on that agenda. But before we would have a meeting of the Committee of Ministers, which in my time would be at my level, about once a month, and my deputy's level about once a month, we would get briefing papers on all the subjects that were coming up. We would tell the Foreign Office what the agenda was going to be for the next one, and then those subjects which were of interest to them they would get briefing for, from the Home Office or the DES or whoever. We would also have a constant stream of civil servants coming out for committee meetings. You mention it, and there would be one. There was a committee of policeman, a committee of prison governors, a committee on social questions, youth questions, education, the lot.

McB So you were co-ordinating all that?

C Well, I mean co-ordinating they would come out with their own instructions and would probably come and call and have a word and then tell us afterwards. Maybe one would ask them to lunch with some of their colleagues and so on. But you couldn't possibly try to co-ordinate it when it came up.. came forward. When their reports came up to us then we would have a brief on it.

McB Then you would know more about what was going on there than anybody else in the entire government machinery?

C Overall. Yes. The importance varied according to the subject. The most important subjects were the human rights cases because if we were found guilty of an infraction we would need to change our legislation or administration. When I was there Lord Mackay came out as the Scottish Lord Advocate for the Scottish taxes case. The Attorney General came out for various cases. I remember one in particular which related to bugging. Lord Hailsham came out and the Opposition Shadow Lord Chancellor and the Chief Justice from Northern Ireland for a celebration of so many centenaries of Habeus Corpus, and Lord Hailsham made a lead speech on that. He started by saying that 'I am not the embodiment of the law but that I am a typical example of the separation of powers, because I'm a member of the Executive, I'm Head of our Legal Service and I sit in Parliament, I preside over the House of Lords'. I had three bowler hats in my vestibule. So those are the subjects that mattered most,

because on most other subjects the most you would get was an agreed recommendation. If it was a recommendation to Governments it would need to be agreed. In fact, Mrs Thatcher loved the Social Charter, because you had to sign up to certain bits of it, then you could choose two or three others and you could then ratify it, whereas of course the EU Social Chapter, if you accepted it, you had to accept the lot. So she would always tell the EU what she wanted was something like the Council of Europe Social Charter, none of this Social Chapter nonsense.