

BDOHP Biographical details and index

John (Henry Gladstone) LEAHY

Personal Details

Born 7 February 1928; son of late William Henry Gladstone and Ethel Leahy.

Married 1954, Elizabeth Anne Pitchford; two sons two daughters.

Awarded CMG 1973, KCMG 1981.

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This is an interview with Sir John Leahy on the 21st of August 2001 and the interviewer is Charles Cullimore, also a former member of the service. Copyright: Sir John Leahy.

CC John, I wonder if I could start by asking you if you would like to say something about the reasons which led you, or made you, decide to join the diplomatic service, foreign service in those days, in the first place?

JL Well, I have to say that my original interest in joining the Foreign Service was pretty accidental. In my last year at Cambridge I had a discussion with my tutor about a career. We discussed all manner of things and having concluded that I was not really cut out to be an academic, an army officer, a cleric or a businessman and eliminated practically every other possibility, he asked 'Have you ever thought about the foreign service?' I said, 'No', and he said, 'You ought to, it's got some attractions, it's good for travel, you'd see the world, they take all sorts of funny people.' And that's what started me off. I should perhaps add that I had no family connections with the diplomatic profession, no ambassadors on the family tree. Anyway, in due course I took the written qualifying exam and passed. But then a complication intervened: quite unexpectedly I was awarded a postgraduate scholarship at Yale university. It was too good an opportunity to miss and I soon discovered that I could extend my National Service deferment for the purpose. There was a problem, however, with the Civil Service Commission, who said that if I went ahead with it I would have to withdraw from the rest of the competition. Which I did and sailed off to Yale. I had a marvellous year there and took an MA in International Relations. When I came back a year later I started my National Service in the RAF and soon found myself involved in a fairly intensive officer-training course. In the middle of this I had time off to go to London and retake the qualifying exam for the Foreign Service. However this time I failed it.

By then I was becoming quite attached to the idea of entering the Foreign Service and was really disappointed. It came as quite a surprise, therefore, when a month or two later I was invited by the Civil Service Commission to return for an interview, the main purpose of which it soon became clear was to get to the bottom of why I had done so badly the second time. This was followed shortly after by a letter informing me that I had been 'deemed' to have passed the qualifying exam and could take part in the rest of the competition. Apparently this was a sort of test case, for thereafter no-one who had passed the qualifying exam once would be made to sit it again. The upshot was that I got through, somewhat luckily it has to be said.

CC So you started by creating a precedent right at the beginning?

JL Yes, but not knowingly. After finishing my two years National Service, I joined the Foreign Office in December 1952. I met the Head of Personnel Department briefly and was told I was going to join the Central Department early in the New Year. In the intervening weeks I was to brush up my French at a language school in Tours, staying as a paying guest with a French family. Unlike some other new entrants I was not chosen to learn one of the so-called hard languages, such as Chinese, Japanese or Arabic. Probably by that time in the year all the available places in those courses had been filled. Anyway, it meant that in career terms I was to become what used to be called a generalist or jack-of-all trades. It was possibly for this reason too that throughout my career I rarely completed a full tour of duty before being moved on to something else. As a matter of interest I also spent more time on home postings in London than nearly all my colleagues. That may just have been the luck of the draw, of course, but it is a fact that I never had two consecutive postings abroad.

CC That's fairly unusual.

JL It is unusual, yes.

CC So then you had your first desk job and very quickly, I think, you were asked to join the Private Office of the Minister of State as Assistant PS to the Minister. How did that come about because it must be unusual if not unique to move into a private office as soon as that?

JL Well, you may be right, and I certainly don't know why I was chosen. I had been in Central Department only just short of six months, where I was the desk officer dealing with what was then called the Soviet Zone of Germany or GDR. Out of the blue came a message from Personnel Department telling me to report for an interview with Mr Selwyn Lloyd, the Minister of State, as a potential Assistant Private Secretary. He had two private secretaries and this was the junior job. In the course of the few minutes I had with him he asked me why I wanted to be his private secretary. I was too nervous to say that I had not asked for the job and in any case before I could reply he quickly added that in my shoes he would not want to do it! Anyway, I did get the job, which was mainly concerned with organising his appointments and making sure that he received the right papers on time from Foreign Office Departments. I was also his bag carrier and general dogsbody.

CC It must have given you a very good overview of the work of quite a large part of the Office very early on.

JL Yes it did and it was a very sharp learning curve, because being still pretty wet behind

the ears I knew next to nothing about the organisation of the Foreign Office, let alone the ways of Whitehall. Nor had I met any of the senior people, and I had to get to know them fast and at least appear confident in dealing with them. Before long things were complicated further, when the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, had to go off to Boston for an operation and Selwyn Lloyd was left to hold the fort. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, assumed formal responsibility for the Foreign Office, except for a short time when he himself was recovering from a stroke. But Selwyn had to do all the hard grind, with the disadvantage that the PM could not resist having his say on all sorts of matters which normally he would have left to Anthony Eden, some of which were quite trivial. For example, I remember a solemn note from the great man landing on my desk saying something to the effect that he had often noticed in Foreign Office papers that the Foreign Office was prepared to do this and prepared to do that, whereas in his experience the Foreign Office was often willing but never prepared. I may say that to this day I try to avoid falling into the same trap and am apt to correct other people when they misuse the word!

CC I seem to remember that myself actually.

JL There was one other thing about Churchill at that time which may be just worth mentioning. Selwyn Lloyd used to attend Cabinet Meetings and he did not hide the fact that, with the Prime Minister still recovering from a stroke, it was difficult to get through all the business on the agenda. It seems that Churchill wasted a lot of time reminiscing during the meetings and his ministerial colleagues were too much in awe of him to stop him. I often waited outside the Cabinet Room for Selwyn Lloyd to emerge so that I could take his papers off him before he went off to lunch and debrief him on how things had gone. On several occasions, I remember, he reported that an item of particular interest to us in the Foreign Office had not been

reached.

CC: I wonder if I can ask what Selwyn Lloyd was like to work for as a person, as a boss, as a Minister.

JL: I found him a bit quirky to start with. I also think he began to wonder whether he had been right to take me on. For example he had a buzzer on his desk which he used to summon either the senior Private Secretary, Tony Duff (one buzz), or me (two buzzes). The trouble was he sometimes got it wrong. When this happened and I went in to see him he would tell me pretty sharply to get out and I would leave the room with my tail between my legs. I remember another occasion when he summoned me to decypher some manuscript comments he had previously scribbled in his illegible writing on a document he was taking to a meeting. When I failed to make it out he muttered that I was paid to read his writing, he wasn't! All good clean fun you might think, but I found it rather disconcerting. Anyway, in due course I came to terms with his schoolboy sense of humour and we got on all right.

Looking back, I suppose the biggest advantage of the experience was that it helped me to witness the decision-making process at first hand and to see how political factors affected it. I used to spend quite a lot of time in the House of Commons when Parliament was sitting and I got to know a number of Selwyn's political associates (I say associates rather than friends because he was not a mainstream Tory and did not have many political friends). Once or twice I thought to myself that it would be nice to be one of them, but I soon came to the conclusion that while it was interesting to observe the political processes close at hand I would not have made a good politician myself.

CC: Then after this very wide and useful experience early on I think your first posting overseas was Singapore.

JL: Yes, at the beginning of 1955 I had my first overseas posting as a Third Secretary in the Commissioner-General's Office in Singapore. That was a few months after Anne and I got married. I had a pretty interesting job in the CGO. The Commissioner-General was Malcolm MacDonald. I was the Foreign Office representative on the Joint Intelligence Staff (Far East), an inter-services outfit, where I soon learnt another lesson I never forgot: namely that it is sometimes necessary to make up one's mind and take a decision more quickly than one would like and on the basis of incomplete or inadequate information. Rightly or wrongly, the Foreign Office had acquired a reputation, which for all I know may endure to this day, for hedging its bets. On the one hand this, on the other hand that. One day my RN colleague in the JIS asked me whether it would be safe, given the volatile political situation at that time in Vietnam, for one of their frigates to make a planned goodwill visit to Saigon in two months' time. For planning purposes he said they needed to know without delay. I undertook to make some urgent inquiries, which I did. But all I could tell him next morning was, you guessed it, we really cannot say for certain, maybe it will be all right, maybe no. He practically exploded. "For God's sake, John, yes or no, we've got to give clear advice to our planning staff now". It obviously mattered less to him whether it was the right advice or the wrong advice, it just had to be definite advice. I could see his point and I think there are times when the best you can do is to make an educated guess and run the risk of getting things wrong.

CC: Can you remember what the educated guess was on this occasion?

JL: I think it was to go ahead, but after all this time I can't say for sure. Another classic situation is when you are somewhere where an election is about to take place: it's very easy in reporting to headquarters to hedge your bets and say it's "too close to call" etc. But I believe you should add that, close as it may be, your best guess is that this or that party is going to win. If it turns out you are wrong, your masters in London should not hold it against you.

CC: Absolutely, I think that's quite right.

JL: Our tour in Singapore was cut short when my wife had the misfortune to fall victim to polio and we had to return to the UK. I should say here that I have never forgotten how sympathetically Personnel Department treated us in this crisis. I now had a brief spell, just over a year, in the Western Department...

CC: Western Department was covering which countries?

JL If I remember aright, it covered France, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, together with the WEU (Western European Union). I seem to recall that Spain, Portugal and Italy were dealt with by a separate Southern European Department. I had a rather boring job to do with WEU. But after a year, in August 1958, I was posted as Second Secretary (Commercial) to Paris. It was a fascinating time to be in France, coinciding as it did with the recall of General de Gaulle from his retreat in Colombey-Les-Deux-Eglises and the transition under his leadership from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic. I cannot say, however, that I was altogether fascinated by my particular job. A major part of it was the compiling of long monthly reports on the state of the French

economy. Not too bad, you might say, but the thing was I was never sure whether anyone ever read them, because I hardly ever received any feedback. It all seemed rather humdrum and statistical to me. In strictly financial terms the French economy was in a fragile state and another of my duties was daily monitoring of the official gold and foreign exchange reserves. France ranked a good deal lower than Britain in the economic pecking order then. For some time we in Britain had been in the habit of treating France as a poor relation and we used to tut-tut about its political instability, the constant changes of government etc. In fact these changes didn't have much effect on the rest of France, because they basically involved redealing the same pack of cards. The same Ministers kept playing musical chairs. Meanwhile everyone else got on with things and thanks to the introduction of a comprehensive national plan, the development of skilled and professional management cadres and extensive capital investment in basic infrastructure, the French economy was being steadily modernised. So much so, I might add, that ten years later when we returned to Paris for a second posting we found the French looking down their noses at us. There really had been a transformation.

CC That's very interesting. Did you get an insight into how those fundamental decisions about the development of the French infrastructure were taken? If governments were changing all the time who was it who was taking these decisions?

JL Mainly the highly skilled technocrats who graduated from the "grandes écoles" and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration. They filled senior positions in the French Civil Service and the big state-run corporations and provided continuity while the politicians were playing their games.

CC Yes, a continuity in policy and management.

JL Our two stints in Paris and interacting with the French both personally and professionally provided some useful diplomatic training. One small example. On an occasion early on when I had been asked by someone in the Quai D'Orsay to go and see him I was struck by the fact that he began by asking me what it was I wanted. This was repeated with other people on other occasions and I eventually twigged that in accordance with General de Gaulle's long-held belief that France should never be "demandeur" in dealing with the Anglo-Saxons, in case that was taken as a sign of weakness, it was thought good tactics to let us make the running. Furthermore if during the subsequent conversation you could not agree on an important point and reached an impasse it was advisable to stop talking and hold your peace, on the basis that whoever spoke first to break the embarrassing silence was likely to make some sort of concession.

CC Good. So you learned some more lessons in Paris and then I think you came back again to the Foreign Office.

JL Yes, we went back in 1962, after completing four years in Paris, which as things turned out was the only time that we completed a full tour overseas. Once more to the JIS, this time JIS (London). I've got nothing in particular to say about that, except that in continuing a close association with the intelligence world and its practitioners I acquired some useful insights and personal contacts that came in handy at various stages of my career. After three years of it, in September 1965 we went off to Tehran, where I was appointed Head of Chancery. It was a marvellous posting. If ever people ask me now which of our various postings we enjoyed the most, Tehran always figures very high on the list.

CC Yes, that doesn't surprise me at all.

JL I had the luck to have a first-rate ambassador and mentor in Denis Wright. He was (is) a man of very high standards in everything, and as his Head of Chancery I was able to learn a lot from him. In particular I admired, and tried to emulate, his rigorous intellectual honesty in the reporting of people and events. He never fudged things and in judging the behaviour of those around him, be they Iranians he dealt with or members of his staff, he was unwavering in his non-nonsense attitude.

The question is often asked: "OK, you were there as Head of Chancery, reporting on events in Iran, why didn't you foresee the overthrow of the Shah?"

CC I was going to put it slightly differently, actually. Did you have any kind of a glimmering of an idea that that might be going to happen, and if not, why not?

JL The honest answer is 'No.' I have thought about this a lot and make no excuses. Remember we are talking about a period more than ten years earlier. At the time we thought, and reported to London, that there was always a chance the Shah would be assassinated by a fanatic who would be put a bullet through him on some public occasion, although even that would be difficult given the way he was protected. We also speculated about what would happen over the succession etc. if and when he did die in that way. On the other hand we never gave serious thought to the possibility of a coup or a revolution, because the potential revolutionaries, whether they were the communist-led Tudeh Party, the mullahs preaching sedition in the mosques, the merchants in the bazaar or would-be militant students, were weak and divided. The Shah's secret

police, SAVAK, was large and all-pervasive and clamped down on any active opposition. So a coup did not present itself as a serious possibility and the Shah's position seemed solid. I might add that the Shah himself, with all the apparatus of intelligence and repression in the form of Savak at his command, could not at that stage foresee his own downfall.

CC Quite. There's also the problem, especially where it's a pretty totalitarian type of regime, that you are the mission which is accredited to that government and if the forces of opposition are really seeking to overthrow the government it is rather difficult to have any contact with them. If you don't have the contact it is really quite difficult to assess what they are really like.

JL You are absolutely right. Also, while there were certainly disaffected people, there were no obvious contenders to take over power. Later, when we went to South Africa we were faced by a similar situation. But there we were more active in seeking out and dealing with people who were more clearly opposed to the regime.

CC Perhaps that is something we might talk about later on when we are talking about South Africa. So after that really very fascinating time, and also very enjoyable from what you said, in Tehran, then you went back to London for three years.

JL Yes, we went back in September 1968, very reluctantly, I might add, because we were enjoying ourselves so much in Iran and in particular the opportunity to travel the country in our Land Rover. I did a short stint, six months I think it was, as an area officer in Personnel Department, followed by eighteen months as Head of E&O Department, or PSD (Personnel Services Department), as it was renamed. It dealt with conditions of service and pay and

allowances. It was not exciting work, but it helped me to realise how misplaced were the 'we and they' attitudes which often infected relations between those involved in administration on the one hand and in the operational side of the service on the other. After all, we and they were interchangeable. A prime example of this occurred in January 1971, when to my great surprise I was moved to be Head of News Department. I was nervous too because I was being catapulted from what was essentially a backroom job to a highly exposed one. As things turned out, I look back on those two and a half years as Head of News Department as the best years I had in the Foreign Office.

CC But when you say that it was the best time you had in the Foreign Office are you including your overseas postings in that or do you mean the jobs in London?

JL I mean London, because nothing really compares with being a head of a mission.

CC That's why I was a bit surprised.

JL Being Head of News Department was fast moving and eventful, and at times exciting. I found the heightened sense of running a risk of knocking over the occasional hurdle, and the stimulation of the flow of adrenaline that went with it, was positively invigorating. Some of the time I had to live on my wits. I was lucky because I had a marvellous boss in Sir Alec Home, unlike my predecessor, poor chap, who suffered under George Brown. He told me he had been fired at least three times by him, but luckily George had not been able to remember it the next morning!

CC How much guidance did you get and how much interface was there with Sir Alec?

JL I saw him constantly, on a daily basis I would say, and sat in on important policy meetings in his office. I also attended the PUS's morning meetings. The press offices of most government departments were, and still are, manned by members of the Civil Service Information Service and tend to be on the periphery. News Department was never staffed that way. It was staffed by mainstream members of the Service and therefore we were colleagues, not outsiders. I think that is a great advantage, when it comes to seeking the understanding and co-operation of other members of the Office. I was lucky too in that I was there at a time when the press and television, both British and foreign, still took a great deal of interest in what Britain was doing in the world, compared that is to the amount of space they devote to it these days. We still felt we were pretty much at the centre of things.

Alec Home was a man who inspired loyalty and gave it back. I would have gone to the ends of the earth with him, and, in the literal sense of accompanying him on his travels, that is just what I did. One or two little episodes stick in my mind and illustrate what I mean. For example, in October 1972 he went to China and, amongst other things, had two set-piece meetings with Chou en Lai, the Prime minister. There was enormous interest in these discussions in the large press corps who had come with us and I briefed them in the normal way after each session. Knowing something of Chinese sensitivities where the press was concerned I was in fact rather cautious in what I said and several journalists complained about my reticence. But that was nothing compared with the complaints heaped upon me by the Chinese, when they saw what was reported in the wire services. At the start of the second meeting Chou en Lai was clearly very angry. He said words to the effect, 'I want to begin, Sir Alec, by asking what does your press

officer think he's up to, he seems to be giving the press a full version of our proceedings. There is no point in our having meetings of this sort if we are going to have the whole thing done in public. Perhaps I should have my own press officer here to give our version of what is going on.'

I felt acutely embarrassed and wished the ground could swallow me up. But Sir Alec was not at all flummoxed and said straightaway 'I wouldn't worry about him, nobody pays too much attention to what he says.' Not only was he not angry with me, he did not pretend to be either, and instead defused an awkward situation with a joke. He did something similar on an earlier occasion, in September 1971, when HMG expelled no less than 105 Russian officials from Britain for spying activities. As soon as the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires had been handed the "marching orders" I gave a press conference in News Department. It was pure theatre. I explained that 90 officials currently in London were being expelled and 15 others temporarily out of the country would not be allowed back. Someone said he could not hear properly and asked me to confirm the figure of 19. I repeated that it was 90 and there was a gasp round the room and a rush for the telephones we had set aside for the journalists' use. It was, of course, really big news worldwide. Next day Alec Home went off to New York to attend the UN General Assembly and I travelled with him. He had an appointment, which had been fixed some time before, to see the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, soon after our arrival and we wondered whether Gromyko would cancel it. But he didn't. He saw us in the Soviet UN mission and though his reception was glacially calm it was clear he was also very angry. Once again Sir Alec tried to lift the tension with a little pleasantry: almost his first words were something like, "Well, Andrei, what's on your mind?" It did not exactly break the ice! Nor did it improve Gromyko's attitude when Alec subsequently told him that all this spying was obviously the work of the KGB and he imagined he could not control them.

One more occasion I should mention to illustrate how forgiving he could be when somebody made a mistake and why I thought so much of him. During an official visit to Egypt he took time off to visit the pyramids. On coming out from inside he was confronted by Peter Snow, who was then working for ITN, with a camera crew and a camel, and he was invited to pose in front of this camel, which he did. He was then asked whether he would mind having his picture taken on the camel's back and Alec at once consented to do so and, what is more, don an Arab head-dress they had thoughtfully brought with them. Now the point of this story is that I had an inkling he might be waylaid by a camera crew, but omitted to warn him in time. His photo was all over the British papers the next day and he was criticised for making himself a laughing stock - and I must say he did look very funny - and for demeaning the serious conduct of diplomacy. But once again Alec just shrugged it off. I remember him saying, 'What are we going to do?' But he didn't dwell on it or blame me for not protecting him when I confessed to him. The milk had been spilt, it was no good crying over it.

CC That's very interesting. One hears an awful lot now about 'spin' and managing the news and all that kind of thing, do you actually think that it's all that different now or do you think that although the word might not have been invented there was a good deal of that happening in your day.

JL: Sir Alec was not interested in managing the news. That made the job of being his Head of News Department all the more interesting and at times worrying. Everyone remembers the matchbox episode when he was Prime Minister. I can remember another occasion myself. He went to Rhodesia in November 1971 and concluded an agreement with Ian Smith, the one that was subsequently invalidated by the Pearce Commission. On his return to London Alec reported

to the House of Commons in the usual way and gave a press conference. During the press conference a journalist asked him whether the agreement that he had negotiated with Ian Smith really did conform to all of the guiding five principles and in particular, the fourth. He began his reply by saying that he would be grateful if someone could remind him what the fourth principle was, because he could not remember offhand. That really was quite a gaffe, but not a single journalist reported it, because they liked the man and knew he was not a spinner. I remember other similar occasions when he got things badly wrong and was allowed to get away with it, but it would take too long to recount them.

One of the lessons I've learnt in dealing with the press that if you can meet them halfway, if you can help them as much as you can, and also explain frankly to them when you can't answer a question and why, you can establish a certain degree of mutual trust. Not total trust, perhaps, because there is always going to be some innate tension between "them and us". What is futile is to think you can get away with 'no comment'. That leaves them free to draw their own conclusions from your reticence and write whatever they like. I always felt as Head of News Department that if a journalist had checked a report with us but had not been persuaded to change it, that was a pity; but if he had not checked it for fear of spoiling a good story, that was unprofessional and warranted a complaint. Of course, you get to know the journalists individually and it does not take long to separate the serious-minded from the hacks. Over the two and a half years I did the job I made a lot of friends among them and came to understand the constraints under which they had to work and their professional skills as well. This was another thing that helped me later in my career: I was much more confident in dealing with the press in one or two quite tricky situations when I was the head of mission in South Africa and Australia.

CC: Bearing in mind that Sir Alec had previously been Prime Minister, did you ever sense he felt any frustration that here he was now back again doing a job that he'd done before?

JL: I don't think so. Actually I believe he enjoyed his time at the FCO best of all. He may not have felt totally at ease with foreigners, but he loved the job.

CC: So, after this tremendous two and a half years in News Department it was off to Paris again and a very different France from the one that you'd been in before.

JL: Yes, it was indeed a very different France. A much more self-confident and prosperous France. And, as I said earlier, many people, particularly among the politicians and press, tended to be condescending towards Britain, the "sick man of Europe".

CC: Did the fact that we had now become partners within the European Community make any difference to our relations?

JL: It had removed a major bone of contention which had for long engaged the attention of the press in both countries and had helped to reduce the level of tension between our two governments. But I can't say it made a tremendous difference to the lives of us as diplomats or members of the Embassy. In theory I had a plum job, as Head of Chancery, Paris, but in practice I was more of a manager than anything else, because there were some bright young men in Chancery, and elsewhere in the Embassy, all champing at the bit and keen to show their paces, and I had to make special efforts to reserve to myself any original work in the political field. There were of course many compensations both in and out of the office and I had not got much

to complain about really. In any case before the end of our first two-year tour things took a fairly dramatic turn for us, because out of the blue I was posted on secondment to the Northern Ireland Office, Belfast, to take up a new appointment as Head of Public Relations and Political Affairs. Although it involved promotion I was not exactly over the moon. I asked Personnel Department whether they realised I was of Irish extraction from south of the border and there might be complications arising from this. They maintained that this was one of the reasons that I had been chosen. I don't think that really was the case, I think I was thought of because of my News Department background. For some time the Army in Northern Ireland had been running their own press and information activities, including some "dirty tricks" operations, and these had got out of hand and become public. This had much embarrassed the Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, and he was determined to bring the army press office under political control. So he created a new overlord job and appointed me to it. At the same time I was given political affairs as a separate responsibility with the specific role of keeping in touch with Northern Ireland politicians. The Northern Ireland Office itself was distinctly sui generis. It was split between London and Belfast, and some staff remained in London and some in Belfast, although there was a good deal of toing and froing between the two. I was based in Belfast but found myself frequently going to London for meetings. Our numbers were quite small and we were drawn mainly from the Home Office, Ministry of Defence and the FCO. To someone used to the orderly and predictable ways of the FCO the NIO was run along highly unconventional and improvised lines. The Permanent Secretary, Sir Frank Cooper, was a buccaneering character and a totally unconventional Civil Servant.

CC Where had he come from?

JL The Ministry of Defence. It caused much amusement that when he was a Squadron Leader in the RAF during the war he apparently had a certain Flight Lieutenant Merlyn Rees under his command, and now their positions were reversed. And I am not sure that Merlyn Rees ever quite forgot it, for he certainly allowed Frank to do his own thing. Frank manipulated the senior members of the staff with great dexterity and you soon found that whatever you may have been posted to do, or whatever your formal title was, if he thought you were good at writing speeches you wrote speeches. Conversely, if he thought you were bad at doing something he would take you off it. It was all very personal and he kept direct control over what went on, including the conduct of some back-stairs contacts that were taking place at that time with the provisional IRA with a view to achieving a cease-fire. All very stimulating, but at times confusing too. For his part, Merlyn Rees was a lovely man to work for. First of all he was a very nice person. He cared deeply about Northern Ireland and what he wanted to achieve there. He was also particularly good to work for because he felt the need for advice and made it clear he wanted to know what you thought. He was always having discussions and arguments with his fellow Ministers and senior officials, often over a whisky or two in the evening. In fact we had very long evenings with him sometimes and would only get home in the early hours. He wasn't perhaps as decisive as he should have been, and sometimes he tended to wring his hands over the latest ghastly incident. Unlike his successor, Roy Mason, who came direct from being Minister of Defence. He liked to take decisions with a snap of his fingers. Shortly after his arrival he called us senior officials in and said words to the effect, 'I've just come from the Ministry of Defence and when I pressed buttons there things happened. I shall expect the same in the Northern Ireland Office. I'm not interested in hearing what you think, I want action.' This approach was not to my liking, but, happily, I did not have very long with him.

Northern Ireland was a real challenge. Despite what people say, it is no longer primarily a religious struggle, except perhaps in the minds of bigots like Paisley and his followers, who maintain their virulently anti-Papist stance. It is much more a tribal conflict, a clash of tribal loyalties, between those who wave the Union Jack and those who hold aloft the Irish tricolour. A roughly similar situation is to be found in Cyprus today, with its partitioning. The larger part of the island is in the hands of a people who feel an affinity with Greece and look to it to protect their interests; they also speak a form of Greek and are Orthodox Christians. Northern Cypriots look to Turkey as their champion; they are Turkish-speaking and Muslims. Religious differences add to the problem, but the other causes of the conflict arouse more passions. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants live together in the country districts without too much difficulty. It's only in towns like Belfast and Londonderry, where ghettos have grown up over the years in which Protestants and Catholics live separate lives behind high walls, that the worst violence occurs. In these ghettos children have been brought up from an early age to think of the people on the other side of the wall as dirty, wicked people, devils incarnate, enemies. They grow up in total ignorance of what the boys and girls of a similar age on the other side of the wall are really doing and thinking.

CC Partly because of a segregated education system?

JL Yes, and there is a straight projection from ignorance to fear and then to hatred. What you don't know you fear and what you fear you hate. When I was there the majority of state schools were still segregated, in contrast to the private schools, which were much fewer in number. Merlyn Rees tried to extend integrated schooling, but the Catholic bishops would not agree and insisted that Catholic children should continue to go to separate schools. I am not sure how far

things may have improved today, but until there is widespread integrated schooling I don't see how there can be lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I would go further - and this is something I was never able to say when I was working for HMG - but deep down I believe that one day partition must be ended and Northern Ireland integrated with the rest of the island. The problem is how we get to that point: it is simple to state it in a few words, in practice it remains fiendishly difficult.

CC The real problem, the great tragedy, is that actually the activities of the IRA over the last years have put that day back by about 50 years. Without that I think it might have happened rather sooner.

JL As a personal post-script, I would say that I was too closely concerned in my job with the daily violence to say that I enjoyed our stay there. It was not that I felt in any real danger, although I was involved in a slightly hair-raising shooting incident on one occasion. It was the sense of hopelessness in having to react to one awful incident after another that I found depressing. Anne enjoyed it more than I did, and yet she too came face to face with the violent side of things. She volunteered to take art classes in Crumlin Road gaol for young offenders awaiting trial for various violent crimes. Despite everything, I am glad we went to Northern Ireland and I still feel strongly about what happens there. Perhaps one of the saddest things in retrospect - and remember that we later served in South Africa - is that, while at a critical moment in its history South Africa had two men of the calibre of Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk, who had the will and the courage to bury the hatchet after years of bitter opposition, Northern Ireland has not produced leaders of that quality in recent times.

In January 1977 I returned to the Foreign Office as Assistant Under-Secretary for Information and Cultural Affairs. Two things from that time stick in my mind. One was that I had a fairly difficult relationship with the Foreign Secretary, David Owen. Mind you I wasn't the only one. He was intent, amongst other things, on reducing the amount of money allocated to the BBC World Service and the British Council. In particular he thought many of the BBC's vernacular services should be dropped. I was in the middle of the argument and sought to find an agreed way forward in negotiation with the Director General of the BBC Overseas Services at Bush House. It was, of course, a deal, a compromise. When this was presented to David Owen, he blew his top. I was summoned to a meeting with him in his office in the House of Commons. The only other person present was his Private Secretary, George Walden. David Owen laid into me and accused me of wilfully disobeying his instructions, undermining his authority and betraying him. Shortly after delivering this tirade and without really giving me a chance to explain matters he swept out of the room. I went back to the Foreign Office with my tail between my legs. I couldn't get hold of George Walden until much later that evening. When I eventually did, I asked him what he thought I should do now. He laughed and said, "Don't get too fussed, remember that when you asked DO whether he wanted you to start all over again he told you that he was fed up with the whole thing and you could do what you damn well liked.' Similar problems arose with the British Council, where I sat on the Board as an alternate member for the PUS, although I did not have as bad a time with David Owen over it. I should add that not long afterwards David Owen agreed to my appointment as Ambassador in South Africa, which was hardly a punishment. Perhaps he thought differently! Not long after he lost office in the May 1979 election, he came to South Africa to give a lecture in Johannesburg. He and his wife, Debbie, stayed with us and he had already mellowed a lot. He talked about his time in the FCO and admitted that if he had it over again he would play his cards differently.

The other thing worth mentioning from this time are the constant representations I received from the Iranian Ambassador, Parviz Radji, about the broadcasts of the Persian service of the BBC. He complained about the content and tone of what was being said and about the amount of time devoted to the pronouncements of the Ayatollah Khomeini from his refuge in France. The Shah demanded that we should order the BBC to amend their ways. I happened to know Parviz Radji well from my days in Tehran and he understood well enough that I was speaking the truth when I said that we could not tell the BBC what to do. But until his dying day the Shah was not convinced and blamed the BBC Persian Service for undermining his regime.

After the General Election in May I had to wait to have my appointment to South Africa confirmed by the new government. A complicating factor, which I only learnt about later, was that the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was taken with the idea of sending Ted Heath as Ambassador to Washington and another political appointee to South Africa. Happily for me, when Ted Heath turned Washington down she decided that it would be embarrassing to have the only political appointment in South Africa. So my appointment was confirmed and off we went in July 1979, just as the Lusaka Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference was starting. That conference was dominated by Rhodesia. Lord Carrington's clear instructions to me were to make it my priority to keep a close eye on what the South Africans were up to over Rhodesia because they were unhappy about HMG's intention to hold a constitutional conference in London and would try to torpedo it if they could. I must try to stop them doing anything silly. I soon had a vivid illustration of what he meant. I had only been in Pretoria a day or two when the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, whom I had only met briefly, telephoned me late at night to say that he had some ominous news. He had heard from General Peter Walls, the head of the Rhodesian

Security Forces, that the Rhodesian government had been so incensed by wild accusations made against them at the conference by Julius Nyrere, President of Tanzania, that he (Pik) thought they were likely to organise some sort of punitive raid on Lusaka. There was nothing he himself could do to stop it and had nothing more he could tell me. So, having put the telephone down, I rushed off to the office at about midnight, driving the official Rolls Royce myself (something I had never done before), and with the help of the duty cypher clerk sent off a flash telegram to Tony Duff in Lusaka - he was a member of the CHOGM delegation. I said I didn't know how to evaluate the message, but obviously I had to pass it on. In fact nothing happened, no raid took place and I was later told by Tony Duff that a quite different version of events had come from Peter Walls, who insisted that it was the South Africans who had pressed the Rhodesians to take some sort of action in revenge for what Nyrere was alleged to have said. After that I was naturally inclined to take anything Pik Botha said to me with a large pinch of salt. Certainly Rhodesia dominated my life in South Africa for the first 6 to 9 months and the South African government did find it very difficult to come to terms with what they saw happening north of their border. I remember that when the election took place in February 1980 I had asked for, and been given, some hours notice before the result was announced in order to inform the South African Government and give them time to prepare themselves for what was likely to be unpalatable news and, I hoped, thereby avoid an intemperate reaction from them. After telling Pik Botha what the score was on the telephone, I received a call from an obviously furious Prime Minister, P. W. Botha, who said that since the election had clearly not been fair as a result of all the intimidation that had taken place he assumed we were going to declare the result null and void. When I disillusioned him on this he snorted down the telephone that if that was our decision we would live to regret it, and so unfortunately would South Africa. His subsequent public comments were not quite as bad, but still very negative.

After that I could turn my attention to another long-lasting sore, Namibia, or South West Africa as the South Africans still called it, and, of course, to internal developments. The first chinks in the armour of apartheid were becoming apparent and the beginnings of a realisation amongst leading members of the government, including P W Botha, that the policy was not working as it was intended and was probably not workable at all. The so-called independent homelands or "bantustans", which were the core of the system, were not viable and their status was not recognised outside South Africa, and in the townships like Soweto there was much unrest. The Chief of the Armed Forces and later Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan, began to speak openly about the need to win the hearts and minds of the blacks and P. W. Botha himself said publicly it was a question of "adapt or die". But it has to be said that despite these glimmerings of change and worries about the future it was still unthinkable to both those men, and others too, that the whites would ever relinquish control. Give ground, yes, but relinquish control, never. I should perhaps add that F W De Klerk showed no signs that I could detect at the time of his later Damascus-like conversion.

CC What position did he have at the time?

JL He held several second rank Ministerial posts during my time, including I think Transport. He also became head of the Transvaal Branch of the governing National Party, which was an important and influential position in the party's affairs. I thought of him as a careful, middle of the road sort of man, who liked to tread cautiously and watch where he was putting his feet. A moderate conservative would perhaps describe him best, certainly not a great reformer or risk taker. As we know, he later became someone who took enormous risks, and all credit to him.

CC Did you have contacts with the ANC at the time?

JL We had no contacts with the ANC as such. It was a banned organisation and any activists were underground. But we were able to keep in touch discreetly with leading members of the community in the black townships, such as Soweto and Crossroads. One of our people in the Consulate-General in Johannesburg worked full-time at that. We also gave them quite a lot of practical support of various kinds, film shows, libraries etc. Most whites normally only had dealings with blacks as menials in the workplace or domestic servants at home. They needed special permission to visit a black township; as diplomats we could ignore that. Contacts with leading white opponents of the regime, like Helen Suzman, were relatively easy. In this context, I remember a remarkable man called Beyers Naude, an Afrikaner and a Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. He had showed enormous courage in turning his back on his volk and becoming an outspoken critic of the apartheid regime, and for his trouble was detained indefinitely under house arrest. I telephoned him and asked him if he would like me to visit him. He said yes and along I went in the Rolls Royce with the flag flying. He liked that. I remember being struck by the fact that he expressed no bitterness at his treatment. So one could in various small ways give moral support to those being oppressed, but in truth it did not amount to much. Nelson Mandela was on Robben Island and very few people had access to him. His wife, Winnie, was kept out of circulation under detention in a remote township in the Free State.

All the time we were in South Africa we could not but be aware of the highly charged political atmosphere. We couldn't go anywhere without getting into a discussion or an argument, even on purely social occasions. With the government we had a somewhat prickly relationship,

even though the British Government showed more understanding of their position than most other governments. For example, I got into trouble with them several times over things I said in speeches, which they did not like. When I came to say goodbye at the end of my tour to P W Botha, after minimal preliminary courtesies he said to me with a wintry smile on his face, 'Ambassador, we haven't always liked the things you have said, but at least you have said them out loud and not behind our backs'. I think it was meant as a back-handed compliment. Did we enjoy our time in South Africa? That's not the word I would use. We were there at a bad time really, there were glimmerings, as I say, of hope and transition, but it wasn't a good time. It was a country which cried out to be enjoyed. Beautiful scenery and most attractive people of all races and colours. But the injustices of the system hit one in the eyes all the time; it was such a manifestly unfair society as to be offensive. Were we glad to be there for all that? Absolutely, emphatically yes, we would not have missed it for anything. And I envy my successors of today, who in the new South Africa can really enjoy themselves.

CC Talking of the actual job, it must have been very satisfying to engage in real discussion with key Ministers and officials in the South African administration? Or was that not possible, was it too confrontational?

JL No. I had access to Ministers and they were not unwelcoming, in fact some were personally quite friendly on a superficial level. When you got down to political issues it was a different thing. P W Botha, and to some extent, Pik Botha, suffered from paranoia, they always thought that we Brits were somehow conspiring behind their backs to do them down. They were willing to give credit to Margaret Thatcher for the support that she gave them, the way in which she stood up against those who wanted to impose sanctions on South Africa, but they could not help

wondering whether some of her underlings, including myself, were pedalling a different line behind the scenes.

Then it was back to London again in March 1982 as Deputy Under-Secretary for Africa and the Middle East. I think I am right in saying that it was the first time that the DUS dealing with Africa was not an Arabist. I may be wrong about that, but certainly there hadn't been one for some time. Ironically I had been in the job a little more than a week when I found myself crossing swords with the Israelis. I accompanied Lord Carrington on a visit to Israel and it was an ill-fated visit in more ways than one. From the start, the atmosphere was bad and the Israelis refused his request to visit the West Bank. To demonstrate, therefore, to the Palestinians that we were not ignoring them he instructed me to go instead of him and to call on some of the local mayors. The Israeli police tried to put every obstacle in my way and in one place I had to resort to the ludicrous device of attaching a message to a stone and throwing it over his garden wall! But the worst thing about the visit was that Carrington should never have made it at all, because this was the moment the Argentines invaded the Falkland Islands. 48 hours after we got back he resigned. So it was a pretty dramatic start to my new job. We had more trouble with the Israelis over their invasion of the Lebanon, which coincided more or less with the Falklands war and the help with military hardware we knew from intelligence sources they were giving to the Argentines. Several times I had to summon the Ambassador, Shlomo Argov, to protest at what they were doing. Poor man, in June he was shot in the street on leaving a dinner at in the Dorchester hotel, which I too attended. It left him permanently paralysed.

Thereafter I inevitably spent a lot of time getting to know my new area of responsibility, because I had little experience of the Middle East other than Iran or for that matter Africa outside of

South Africa. So I was a big traveller. There are many stories I could tell, but that would take too long. I visited Libya twice, once to meet Gadhafi to try to persuade him to stop his agents in London from assassinating members of the Libyan opposition on our streets. I can't say I made much impression on him, I am afraid, judging by the subsequent incident, at Easter 1984, when the Libyan Embassy was under siege by the police in St James's Square and WPC Fletcher was killed by a shot from one of the windows. Two other memories stand out for me. I had to go to Lebanon twice, on one occasion to test the ground to see if it would be safe for the Princess Royal to go there for the Save the Children Fund. The Foreign Office had been told by the Palace that nothing would stop her, so they decided to send me on a recce visit to one of the notorious refugee camps she wanted to see. I reported that it was very tense and a potential powder keg, but all credit to her, she went.

CC Just going back for a moment, your meeting with Gadhafi, I don't know how long it lasted, but did you form any sort of impression yourself of what sort of person he really was? At the time he was being portrayed as really a madman, he obviously wasn't.

JL I didn't really have very long with him and of course one of the drawbacks of my not being an Arabist was that I could not speak to him in Arabic and had to have an interpreter. That always makes it more difficult, I think, to size somebody up. He didn't seem to me a madman, he spoke quite calmly and rationally. He listened to what I had to say, but he himself did not say very much and I had the feeling he wasn't paying full attention.

The following month I went on an extraordinary mission to Angola, to Jamba, the jungle base of UNITA in the south-east corner of the country, in order to meet Jonas Savimbi, the leader of

UNITA, and secure the release of sixteen British diamond miners who had been captured by UNITA forces. They had been marched a long way from the mine in the North to Jamba and were suffering from blisters and under-nourishment, but had not otherwise been ill-treated. Savimbi had indicated that he was willing to let them go, but he wanted to extract as much publicity from the situation as he could. He was a great showman and was out for recognition as a serious player on the international scene. It was pure, colourful theatre. In what looked like a kind of big sports stadium there was a long-drawn out ceremony involving dancing, singing, and speechifying from him and me, in front not only of a large audience but also a number of cameramen from major television companies he had specially arranged to be there. I should add that the journey to and from Jamba was quite an adventure too, but I will spare you the details.

As you can see, there was never a dull moment for me. I also had the luck to see quite a lot of the Prime Minister at a time when she was riding the crest of the wave. She once famously said, "The lady is not for turning", but in fact she did change her mind when she had to. She didn't like to do it straightaway, but it was not uncommon for her to take unto herself something she had been told a week or two earlier and had then characterised as nonsense. She had remarkable political courage. There was a hastily called meeting, I remember, at Chequers one Saturday morning when the question was whether the Queen should be to cancel a visit she was starting next day to Amman, where terrorists had just let off some bombs. One or two Ministers, notably Michael Heseltine, the Minister for Defence, Richard Luce, Minister of State, Robert Armstrong, the Cabinet Secretary, Philip Moore, the Queen's Private Secretary, Tony Duff, the Chairman of the JIC, and I myself were present. The PM made it clear she would take it upon herself to make the final decision, but first she wanted to hear what each one of us had to say. The other Ministers pointed out that the government would never be forgiven if anything happened to the

Queen. Margaret Thatcher intervened to say that of course she realised that, she would resign within the hour. Philip Moore made it clear that the argument would have to be a very strong one if the Queen was to be dissuaded from going. The rest of us thought that on balance she should go. Summing up, the PM said that it would be giving in to terrorists if the visit were called off, and she went out of the room to talk to King Hussein on the telephone before finally deciding. It was an impressive performance.

CC And did the visit go ahead?

JL It went ahead, and nothing untoward happened.

CC Right. That's an extremely interesting time that you had. And then you went off to Australia as High Commissioner in October 1984.

JL Yes, and as you will remember, Charles, I got into hot water soon after arriving there. The Australian Government had a few months before established a Royal Commission to inquire into the conduct of the British nuclear tests at Maralinga in the 1950s. It had wide terms of reference and these included the thoroughness or otherwise of the clean-up of radioactive materials afterwards. Its Chairman was Judge James McLelland, otherwise known as "Diamond Jim", a veteran Irish-Australian Labor politician, and a flamboyant character to boot. The British government had agreed to co-operate with the enquiry, but after seeing the degree of anti-British bias and prejudgement of conclusions in the early proceedings it was dragging its feet about making documents available and being represented by counsel. So when I arrived it was all very one-sided. All sorts of lurid allegations about the treatment meted out to the Aborigines at the

time and the sufferings of people carelessly exposed to radiation were going unchallenged in the hearings and making the headlines. A journalist interviewing me a day or two later asked me when the British government was going to join the party. I said I couldn't answer that question, much was bound to depend on how the Commission went about its business. I added that I naturally felt uncomfortable myself about the way in which unsubstantiated allegations were being given extensive publicity and Britain's name was being dragged in the mud. This was widely reported and got under Diamond Jim's skin. He reacted straightaway with a statement of his own. After a few sarcastic remarks about the sheltered life I must have led, he said that if I wanted the Commission to be fully apprised of the British Government's views I should advise it to do what it has not yet deigned to do, be represented before the Commission. As one newspaper put it, he meant we should either put up or shut up. A fair point, I have to say. Anyway, I rang him up and invited him to lunch at the Union Club in Sydney. I began by telling him that we had something in common, Irish ancestry, and I did not want to continue a dogfight with him through the columns of the press. I think he rather liked that. It did not take long, however, before we got on to the nitty gritty, and though in the course of quite a long discussion there was no sudden meeting of minds we parted on good terms. Not long after, a QC was sent from London to attend the Commission's meetings. As Diamond Jim wrote later in his memoirs, "he [i.e. JL] had got the message".

CC Actually I remember that 'phone call very well that you made, I was there at the time and I remember you saying to him that if it had been the 18th century you would have been challenging him to a duel, but as it was the 20th century you were going to invite him to lunch instead.

JL I suppose I ought to mention, Charles, because you were largely responsible, a funny event that occurred the day after I arrived, when you had arranged for me to present my letter of introduction from our Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher to Bob Hawke, the Prime Minister of Australia. He had just announced a general election and it followed that he would be setting off on the campaign trail after the weekend and would not be available for some time. So you had cleverly thought up the idea that I should do the deed at a cricket match in which he was playing on the Saturday. Bob Hawke was a tremendous cricket enthusiast and had been quite a good player in his day: he was playing that day in a scratch office team against the press corps. When we arrived at the ground, we found him standing in front of the pavilion with his pads on waiting to go in to bat. His Private Secretary took us up to him and after a brief introduction I handed him the letter. He didn't read it, but passed it to his Private Secretary, who stuffed it in the back pocket of his white flannels. He then gave me a beer and expressed his sympathies over the terrible bomb attack that had just taken place at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton. And that was that, except for the postscript that when he went in to bat he got hit by the ball in his eye and had to rush off to have it seen to in hospital!

Apart from Maralinga, which was a fairly long-running saga, the other big crisis I had to deal with was the infamous Spycatcher case, in which the British Government came a cropper. We really didn't handle it well and I must accept some of the responsibility, though the major misjudgements about the conduct of the case occurred in London. Basically it was a bad error of judgement to try to prevent publication of a book that made few really damaging revelations and was, anyhow, about to be published elsewhere. What we should have done from the beginning was to concentrate on Peter Wright's breach of his written undertaking of confidentiality, which he sought to justify but could not deny, and to apply to have distrained, or confiscated, any

money he might receive from the sale of the book.

CC But presumably you would need an Australian court ruling to that effect?

JL Yes indeed, but we should have presented it along those lines from the beginning rather than trying to prevent publication.

CC And you think there would have been a good chance of success?

JL Yes, I think so, as a civil action. Anyway, we didn't and the rest is history.

JL On a happier note, we did rather have a big success with the choice of a brand new sail training ship as Britain's present to Australia for its Bicentenary with the Australians. The Young Endeavour, as she came to be called, was built in Lowestoft and sailed out to Australia by a young mixed crew of young Britons and Australians, supervised by a small group of professional sailors. The British government coughed up quite a lot of money for it, more than a million pounds, with quite a lot more coming from the private sector, one man in particular. Just before I left Australia on retirement in early 1988, I had the great honour of handing Young Endeavour over to Bob Hawke in Sydney harbour before some 10,000 spectators and in the presence of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. It was a high note on which to end my career and I shall never forget it.

CC John, it's been a tremendously varied career, even as Foreign Office careers go. I just wondered if you had any thoughts about ways in which the work of the Diplomatic Service had

changed during that time. Any reflections on the general nature of that kind you may have.

JL I suppose I would start with the obvious comment that Britain's role in the world had changed. 1952 was only seven years after the end of the war and even if our empire had all but gone by then we still thought of ourselves as a world power. Not one of the super powers, but the third nuclear and economic power. We still had a large presence overseas, notably East of Suez. By 1988 all that had changed. We had much less clout and fewer pretensions. The Diplomatic Service was smaller than before, but manning a greater number of posts and, as Douglas Hurd once put it, helping the country to "punch above its weight". What he meant by that was that for many years the Service had had to operate against a background of continuing and, it seemed, inevitable national decline. Inevitable that is until Margaret Thatcher came to power and shook the nation up. She made me for one feel proud, for the first time, of the country I was representing.

Other notable changes in my time were the increased importance attached to multilateral diplomacy and to commercial work. I was not an aficionado of either myself. Perhaps I am old fashioned. I have never been a committee man, which you have to be in the UN and EU missions and the like. As for export promotion, I cannot help feeling that the Service went overboard on this because it was the fashionable thing to do. I can see that it can perform a useful function in countries with so-called command economies. But I have serious doubts whether in industrially advanced countries it has much to offer that could not be better done by businessmen doing their own market research and making their own contacts.

I could mention other changes, such as the speeding up of communications - though I retired just

before the introduction of computers in the Office - the longer hours and greater pressures of work, and the role of the modern wife or spouse. But these were happening elsewhere as well and were not peculiar to the DS. One change I do regret is the decline of individualism, not to say eccentricity, of members of our Service. We seem to be fashioned in the same mould and knocked into shape more than in the past, when there were some real characters around.

Which leads me on to what I think is my final point. You will note that in my career I had a mixture of so-called inner and outer circle posts, Singapore, Paris, Iran, South Africa and Australia. There is no doubt that the inner circle is the faster track, but I enjoyed the outer circle more. My main reason for saying that is that I was often left to my own devices. In Australia, for example, the time difference was such that I would sometimes have to take decisions without reference to London. In the time I was in South Africa we only had one ministerial visit the whole time I was there. I don't think for a moment that I am a character of the sort I mentioned just now, but I can see how I might have become one in days gone by.

CC I think that is rather a good note on which to end. Thank you very much.