

BDOHP INTERVIEW

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Sir Crispin Tickell

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This is Malcolm McBain interviewing Sir Crispin Tickell on Friday, 28 January 1999.

MMcB: “Sir Crispin, your career got off to a flying start with Westminster, Christ Church, Oxford, the Coldstream Guards, then the FCO, or the Foreign Office as it then was, in 1954. You went to The Hague in 1955 and were there for three years, in the Embassy, presumably. What were your impressions of that particular period?”

Sir Crispin: “It was a fraught time because of the beginnings of the European Community. As one of the countries that wanted Britain to join from the beginning, the Netherlands had difficulties with us. At that time the Dutch had a dual Foreign Ministry, one Foreign Minister dealt with the affairs of Indonesia, which then loomed large, and the other dealt with the problems of Europe.”

MMcB: “A bit like the Commonwealth Relations Office.”

Sir Crispin: “Exactly. I remember an occasion when the British were unwise enough to withdraw their representative, Mr Bretherton, from the Messina negotiations that were then in progress to draft the Treaty of Rome. I remember Joseph Luns, one of the Foreign Ministers, looking at our Ambassador in the face and saying simply, ‘You bloody fools, you bloody fools.’

MMcB: “He actually said that?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, he did. A sentiment with which I think all of us in the room concurred, because Sir Anthony Eden, who was then Prime Minister, frankly didn’t understand what was going on. He had illusions of grandeur, and that I suspect was really what led to the withdrawal of Mr Bretherton. I also remember the day on which the British withdrew their observer from the beginnings of economic and monetary union in the late 1970s. It was virtually the same story all over again.”

MMcB: “There was a story which I’ve come across about . . . well, I think it’s Michael Butler’s story, in fact, about how Bretherton . . . no it’s not, it’s Sir Percy Cradock in his book about his career. He recounts the story of Bretherton giving a set speech which ended up saying, ‘Well, good luck to you chaps and goodbye, au revoir, be seeing you again.’ and amazed everybody. I don’t know whether that’s true or not.”

Sir Crispin: “I wasn’t there. I was in Holland.”

MMcB: “Of course. That would have been where, then? In Brussels presumably, or Paris, I can’t remember. Well, anyway, it doesn’t matter. So there were problems . . .”

Sir Crispin: “Well, the Dutch wanted us to come in and thought we were being very imperial and pompous in staying out. By and large I think that the Dutch were right.”

MMcB: “Officials, that is?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes.”

MMcB: “Then, after The Hague you were gaining experience, and off you went to Mexico for three years.”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, doing the economic and commercial job, so my job was to look at the state of the Mexican economy and to promote British exports to Mexico, and British investment in Mexico, which I did for three years.”

MMcB: “What was the size of Mexico City at that stage?”

Sir Crispin: “It was already far too large for the area it occupied. Pollution had already begun. But, if you reflect, that in 1960 roughly, the population of Mexico was about 35 million, when I went back in 1981 as Ambassador, it was just topping 80 million.

MMcB: “Mexico City was then what, in excess of 17 million?”

Sir Crispin: “Nobody knows what the figures were in 1981. It depends how you count them, but certainly around 20 million.”

MMcB: “Then in 1961 you went back to the FCO and the Planning Department. Was that the start of Planning Department?”

Sir Crispin: “There was no independent Planning Staff when I went back. It was a section of a department called Western Organisations Department, of which I later became head, many years later. It was called Western Organisations and Planning Department, and the little planning section within it consisted of three people. I later gave evidence to one of those commissions of enquiry, and said I thought that the planning section should be made independent of any other department. My head of department didn’t agree with me and we had some words on the subject. But my advice was taken, for whatever reason, and we set up a new Planning Staff of which I was the first and only member for about six weeks, before I was joined by Sir Michael Palliser and Sir Robert Wade-Gery.”

MMcB: “Were they senior to you at that stage?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes.”

MMcB: “Three planners, planning!”

Sir Crispin: “But of course we carried out what we’d been doing before, but we did it with independent status.”

MMcB: “Right. So what were you doing?”

Sir Crispin: “Writing long-term policy papers. For example, we wrote papers on future relations with the Soviet Union. I was also joint secretary of a Cabinet Office working group on the shape of the world 10 years ahead. (I maintain my interest in these speculations.) The Planning Staff also wrote a paper about relations with Cuba. We did several papers of a kind that spanned the interests of several departments. There was then a body called the Permanent Under-Secretary’s Steering Committee which considered broad policy issues, and I was secretary of that.”

MMcB: “And how did you pick on subjects?”

Sir Crispin: “I suppose rather as I pick on subjects today in my capacity as Chairman of the Government Panel on Sustainable Development. I just do.”

MMcB: “The best way to do it, really! The only way. No planning for the planners.”

Sir Crispin: “At the moment I am thinking about the Panel’s themes for 1999. This is work I’m doing for the Prime Minister. I don’t know whether he’s going to approve it or whether he isn’t. Normally we choose four subjects a year. I’ve chosen three, and possibly four, and we’ve got to decide whether we go ahead with them or not. It was rather the same with our Planning Staff. Although open to ideas from others, it was usually we who had to think them up. We would say, ‘Here is a problem. Shouldn’t we have an inter-departmental look at it?’”

MMcB: “So really it depended on the political priorities of the time.”

Sir Crispin: “And the willingness of other departments to co-operate. Some didn’t like it at all, they thought we were intruding into their areas. Well, they always do.”

MMcB: “Human nature.”

Sir Crispin: “Human nature.”

MMcB: “Well, that was a fascinating start. And out of that you got a posting to Paris. Was that on promotion or . . .”

Sir Crispin: “I can’t remember. After six weeks as the only member of the Planning Staff, Michael Palliser came in and took over as its Head. I later

took the job that he had had in Paris. He was the First Secretary responsible for internal political matters in the Embassy in Paris, and I followed him. Michael Palliser had this job under Gladwyn Jebb, and I had it under three Ambassadors between 1964 and 1970.”

MMcB: “And did you find that you were able to . . . did you actually have any influence on your ambassadors?”

Sir Crispin: “In what capacity?”

MMcB: “Well, you were political secretary, so you were thinking the deep political thoughts and drafting the papers . . .”

Sir Crispin: “Political secretary really means, in the Paris context, looking after internal French politics, so I had to know the French politicians and to make judgements about what was happening inside France. My principal job was to do internal political reporting. In addition, I took on things which interested me, like politico-military affairs.”

MMcB: “Yes, that would fit into political internal I suppose.”

Sir Crispin: “It did in a way. It meant I sat in on the Anglo-French discussions about joint projects like Concorde or the military projects.”

MMcB: “We were into Concorde in ‘64?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, we were. We nearly cancelled it at one point. So, did I influence the Ambassador? Well, I think I probably did. After all, I drafted most of his internal reporting.”

MMcB: “And how did you, as First Secretary, get to know these important French political figures?”

Sir Crispin: “I suppose I was bold as brass. I simply rang them up or wrote to them, saying could we have a chat, or something or other. Most of them were very willing to see me.”

MMcB: “And they were, were they?”

Sir Crispin: “Oh yes. I never had any problem. Although I was only a First Secretary at the time, they were always friendly and forthcoming. For example, the person who was always very kind to me from the beginning, was Pierre Mendes France. When I left in 1970, he gave a farewell lunch for me. Even today I still know, however slightly, most of the people in French politics. I survived three Ambassadors which meant of course that I represented continuity. Of course I also got involved in Anglo-French relations generally at the time, particularly as I had a close relationship with Christopher Soames.”

MMcB: “Which Ambassador was he?”

Sir Crispin: “Third of my three. The first was Pierson Dixon, the next was Patrick Reilly and the last was Christopher Soames.”

MMcB: “Who was your Head of Chancery?”

Sir Crispin: “He changed. First Peter Ramsbotham, later Ambassador in Washington. Then Alan Campbell, later Ambassador in Rome.

MMcB: “And so your drafts went straight through.”

Sir Crispin: “Mostly. Politics was my job. But the Ambassador was the boss, and his judgement, formed from wide contacts, was what mattered. The time that I was most useful in Paris was during the May events of 1968. I was about the only person in the Embassy who had any work to do. The Prime Minister required a report every night. He didn’t trust the newspapers.”

MMcB: “So that was May 1968, a very fraught time indeed. But what about the business about our entry into the EU?”

Sir Crispin: “Well, it wasn’t my job in the Embassy. It was done by others. That was the Anglo-French relations side. European relations were slightly to the side of my activities, but I was aware of them obviously, and I had a ring-side seat in the Soames affair.”

MMcB: “Ah, now the Soames affair.”

Sir Crispin: “When Christopher Soames came back from seeing General de Gaulle, he called a meeting of his trustees, of whom I was one, to recall what had been said and consider next steps.”

MMcB: “This was the matter where General de Gaulle floated this idea of reformulating the European Community and British relations with it.”

Sir Crispin: “That’s what people said afterwards. It’s not very accurate. General de Gaulle had taken the son-in-law of his old friend and enemy, Winston Churchill, for one of his typical wool-gathering conversations over a whole range of issues in which he expressed his prejudices as much as his thoughts. When reduced to paper, they came out, inevitably, as much more precise than they really were. I think General de Gaulle wanted to keep us out of the European Union at any price. That’s why he imposed the veto in 1963. He was always looking round for reasons to justify himself, but what he suggested to Soames was not a formal diplomatic effort to get us to change direction. It was the kind of wandering conversation favoured by Harold Macmillan in which a lot of nuances are left in the air. By pinning them down you destroy them. The mood in London at the time was paranoid about the French, so certain people exaggerated it far out of its proportions, and the Soames affair followed. I represented a substantial British mis-reading of the

scene and over-reaction, followed by a French over-reaction to that. What General de Gaulle said to Christopher Soames was unknown to the Quai d'Orsay, so for us to have informed the Five meant that they knew more than the French Foreign Ministry. So it was a mess."

MMcB: "But of course, that often seems to happen."

Sir Crispin: "But it wasn't Christopher Soames's fault. It was mainly the fault of the people in London."

MMcB: "I thought the problem arose because Harold Wilson then spilt the beans to President Kiesinger."

Sir Crispin: "He spilt the beans to all the Five as an act of policy."

MMcB: "Without telling the French?"

Sir Crispin: "We told the French, I forget the timing."

MMcB: "Sad to hear about that."

Sir Crispin: "Well, we always make cock-ups. Look at the cock-ups we make today."

MMcB: "Yes, that's right. Well, that's a fascinating little story. At that time, 1969, we were becoming increasingly aware of our relative impoverishment in relation to the other EC countries. Do you think that that was making us perhaps over-excited about getting into the EU?"

Sir Crispin: "People in London certainly felt the events of 1963 as a kind of humiliation which they were determined to put right. As I've said to others, the situation, after de Gaulle's veto, was two scorpions in a bottle: each could sting the other, but neither could move the other conclusively. We could hold up the development of the European Community as long as we remained on the doorstep, and the French could keep us out. But the price of keeping us out got increasingly high. The reason why the French kept us out was that they thought they could control the Germans and make it into a French Community. They were mistaken from the start and, of course, they became even more mistaken when German reunification took place. This is why the French need us in now to help produce a better balance. Which is why, no doubt, Mr Blair and President Chirac were making friendly joint statements yesterday."

MMcB: "We have to go on. Wasn't the price we paid in 1972 pretty high?"

Sir Crispin: "As you know, I was the Private Secretary to the Ministers who negotiated our entry throughout those negotiations. Yes, it was high in some areas. We shouldn't have signed up to so much of the Common Agricultural

Policy, and we made some mistakes over the Common Fisheries Policy. But by and large it wasn't too awful a deal."

MMcB: "It cost us money though, didn't it, despite Mrs Thatcher?"

Sir Crispin: "Ah, that was later. By that time the financial system had come to bear in a very unfortunate way, and, of course, that had to be put right. It still isn't right, because the way in which the Community finances itself is not a good system. We shouldn't be saying, 'We will veto any change.' We should be saying, 'Of course we'll change if we can find a better system'."

MMcB: "Was that foreseeable in 1971, that there might become this ?"

Sir Crispin: "I'd have to look back at my notes at the time. I certainly don't remember foreseeing it. Our philosophy was the belief that once we were in the system we could bend it to suit our interests. A lot of problems are more easily solved from within than without."

MMcB: "Yes, indeed. I mean, if you're outside you don't have"

Sir Crispin: "You don't have so much leverage. At least you have a hand on the steering wheel if you're inside, whereas you have none if you're out. Look at the euro now."

MMcB: "Indeed, going down. Well, anyhow, after five and a quarter years in Paris, it must have been a fascinating experience, and presumably rather good for your French, you then came back to London and, as you say in your 'Who's Who' entry, Private Secretary to successive Ministers negotiating our entry into the European Community."

Sir Crispin: "First of all under the Labour government to George Thomson, now Lord Thomson of Monifieth; then to Mr Anthony Barber, now Lord Barber, for a little while; and then to Mr Geoffrey Rippon, later Lord Rippon. The negotiations began under a Labour government and of course were carried on under a Tory government. I was the Private Secretary to one, two, three in succession with the permanent negotiating team of Sir Con O'Neill, John Robinson and their colleagues."

MMcB: "I wanted to ask you about John Robinson, because he seemed to play a key role in this negotiation. Then suddenly he went off to Algeria."

Sir Crispin: "But after it was over. He was Ambassador in Israel as well, and Minister in Washington under Peter Jay. Not a happy experience. John Robinson, who died recently, was single-minded. He had one thing that interested him, and he got deeply involved in the European enterprise all the way through the 1960s, and then, of course, in the negotiating team where he was a very important member. I tangled with him once or twice. I thought that he didn't sufficiently recognise the political aspects of what he was doing."

I saw the negotiations more from the point of view of the House of Commons and the Minister than in terms of the to-ing and fro-ing in Brussels. These different aspects have to be seen together. They all slot into place. I've given a pretty long oral interview about the negotiations in a comparable exercise being undertaken by the European Community."

MMcB: "Anyhow, where did we get up to?"

Sir Crispin: "Well, I did the job, which was very strenuous, from March 1970, through the British general election, to the day when we signed the Treaty of Rome: a good day to pull out."

MMcB: "And you were able to do that?"

Sir Crispin: "I was insistent."

MMcB: "You'd done three Ministers after all."

Sir Crispin: "Yes. It seemed to me a natural break point. So I then took on another job dealing with politico-military affairs in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office."

MMcB: "Before we get on to that, by the time Geoffrey Rippon arrived on the scene you'd done the two previous Ministers. You must have been pretty au fait with what was going on, and able to give him a steer?"

Sir Crispin: "Of course. Ministers are very dependent on their advisers."

MMcB: "Indeed. That is one of the reasons why I'm so keen on this project, to get that established. You're not actually telling them what to do, but you're making sure that they . . ."

Sir Crispin: "The art of being a good Minister is the art of taking good advice whether he takes it or not. When I was in a position of authority myself, for example, as British Ambassador to the United Nations, I was getting advice from a great many people and I had to choose rather as a Minister has to choose."

MMcB: "That's the key to it really, isn't it?"

Sir Crispin: "Yes. It's interesting that the Foreign Secretaries who quarrel with their senior officials nearly always come to grief. David Owen is a classic example. Such people feel it necessary that they should have all the bright ideas, and that other people shouldn't. The main thing is to get the best out of the system, whether you're one of the people who contribute advice, or whether you're one of the people who has to do the deciding. Some are better than others. There are people who don't listen very well."

MMcB: "Or who get dead drunk."

Sir Crispin: “Or who get dead drunk.”

MMcB: “Anyway, after that, you did resign and then went on to . . .”

Sir Crispin: “My posting came to an end, and I negotiated the next one. I took on the largest department in the Foreign Office. It’s called Western Organisations Department. I’d been in part of it a lot of years earlier in 1961. We dealt with politico-military affairs, NATO, Western European Union, and the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe, which was then just beginning.”

MMcB: “Leading up to the Helsinki Act.”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. The Department had different sections, with different people working for me. When I left, they heaved a sigh of relief and chopped it up.”

MMcB: “But it must have kept you pretty busy.”

Sir Crispin: “It did. When I left three years later I was quite exhausted, but it was a very interesting job. I also chose a good moment to leave, because I left the day we signed the Helsinki Act.”

MMcB: “Ah yes, another key point.”

Sir Crispin: “I always know when to go.”

MMcB: “What did you do when you were there which led up to the Helsinki final act?”

Sir Crispin: “There was constant negotiation not only over the Security Conference but also over conventional arms control, the so-called MBFR.”

MMcB: “That’s Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions.”

Sir Crispin: “The story of the Security Conference is told in the Foreign Office book which has recently been published. Have you seen that?”

MMcB: “What? The documents on foreign policy?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. They gave a whole volume to the Conference.”

MMcB: “Oh, I haven’t seen that then.”

Sir Crispin: “It contains many of my minutes, submissions, memoranda, telegrams, and so on. On the one hand I was advising Ministers here, and on the other giving instructions to our negotiators in the field. There was also much personal dealing, for example with the Americans, on both sets of

negotiations, the MBFR and the CSCE, which tended to get mixed up together.”

MMcB: “I presume you had dual sets of files and telegrams.”

Sir Crispin: “Well, I had different sections working for me: among them one on the MBFR, one on the CSCE.”

MMcB: “That must have been a pretty important job for both of them.”

Sir Crispin: “I think it was, yes. Both of them flourished. At the beginning one was run by Roderic Braithwaite, and the other by Brian Fall, both mean later Ambassador in Moscow.”

MMcB: “Yes, they did well. Going back a stage, I gathered from the foreign policy documents, that the British were not really terribly keen on security and co-operation in Europe.”

Sir Crispin: “No. That’s partly because the people at the top didn’t understand it. They regarded the CSCE as a Russian propaganda initiative that we should treat with the utmost scepticism and care. That was the prevailing view when I started. But it became clear to me after a relatively short time that we had a lot of the cards in our hands and could make quite a success of it. And we did.”

MMcB: “Cards such as?”

Sir Crispin: “Well, the price that we could exact from the Russians for some of the things that they wanted, which I didn’t think were terribly important. Our most important aim was to open up the Soviet bloc through the so-called Basket Three of the Conference which contained all the stuff about freedom of information, and so on. I believe that we really did shove a wedge into the closed system as a result. The Russians were mostly concerned about the future of Germany. That was their great preoccupation. You’ll find all this laid out in the volume on British foreign policy at the time.”

MMcB: “Thank you. It might be useful to sort of append that.”

Sir Crispin: “Recently we had an afternoon seminar on the subject at the Foreign Office. The people who spoke were Jim Callaghan, Denis Healey, John Killick, George Walden and me. The published version of this seminar was less than complete, and some quite interesting bits were omitted.”

MMcB: “You personally say advantages in the CSCE from the beginning.”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, and I was determined to exploit them. And we did, with quite a good result. The Russians have always regarded us as being rather a success for the Western side. It was interesting that at that seminar in the

Foreign Office, the Russian Ambassador came along, who turned out to be the Private Secretary of Gromyko during that period.”

MMcB: “Did we get all 55 members to the Helsinki Final Act? Or did the number come up later?”

Sir Crispin: “I can’t remember.”

MMcB: “I think about 55 nations - I don’t know how that’s composed.”

Sir Crispin: “Well, it was the Europeans, plus the United States and Canada.”

MMcB: “I suppose the Soviet side could include a number of countries.”

Sir Crispin: “They brought in their lot, yes. A tournament!”

MMcB: “Did you find that this exercise, if one can call it that, gave you an opportunity to develop the European idea, the idea of co-operation within Europe?”

Sir Crispin: “There was a European group on the ground. Most of the negotiations took place in Geneva where there was a European group to help coordinate positions. It was the same when I was Ambassador to the United Nations. Sometimes this coordination was important, and sometimes it wasn’t.”

MMcB: “Of course the negotiation itself was fantastically important. It led to the downfall of the Soviet bloc.”

Sir Crispin: “Eventually, because we managed to prise it open.”

MMcB: “Yes, with information, all sorts of harmless things.”

Sir Crispin: “Yes.”

MMcB: “Fantastic really. Well, anyway, after your time in London doing that, ‘72-’75, what happened after that?”

Sir Crispin: “Well, I put in a bid for a rest. I had a sabbatical fellowship at Harvard, in which I wrote my book on climate change.”

MMcB: “Climate change? How on earth did you get round to that?”

Sir Crispin: “Because I’ve always been interested in the relationship between science and politics. But I only took up this specific issue when I went to Harvard. I had a choice of subjects. Most of those who go to the Centre for International Affairs at Harvard do straight diplomatic subjects:

like whether the European Union and some aspects of economic something or other. But I decided to get away from that: I had had enough. So I chose a subject that was completely different. It caused some tooth-sucking, both in London and at Harvard. My subject was, the impact of climate change on world affairs. I gave some lectures on other things at Harvard, things I knew about. But I had to learn about meteorology and climate change. Eventually, I wrote a little book based on a lecture I gave at Harvard. In it, as early as 1976, I called for a climate change treaty. And lo and behold, there was one in 1992. Not exactly all I'd asked for, but if it had been what I'd asked for, it would have been better still."

MMcB: "And then back to ?"

Sir Crispin: "Well, I remember that when I was on a jaunt in the south, I was taken out, from New Orleans, to look at an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. I then had a telephone call when on the oil rig to say would I please ring the Permanent Under-Secretary in London. I did so when I got back to shore, and he said, 'Do you want to be considered as a candidate to be the Chef de Cabinet of Roy Jenkins?' who had just been nominated as the next President of the European Commission. I hesitated, then said 'Yes'. In the end I got the job, and so went back to the whole European business again. In the months before he took office, Roy Jenkins and I had an office in the Cabinet Office. Then I went with him to Brussels on 1 January, 1977."

MMcB: "You actually went with him?"

Sir Crispin: "Yes, went out with him. So I lasted the full four years."

MMcB: "That was the end of his term, was it, 81?"

Sir Crispin: "Well, the end of 1980. He had 77, 78, 79 and 80."

MMcB: "I see, yes. You must, therefore, have got on well with him."

Sir Crispin: "Yes, we are, and remain, very good friends. We see him regularly. I had lunch with him about three weeks ago."

MMcB: "At that time, he was being falsely accused of swilling claret, and that sort of thing, by our beloved Press. What actually was he doing?"

Sir Crispin: "As President of the European Commission? Or do you mean before? He was then Home Secretary."

MMcB: "No, I mean when he was President of the Commission."

Sir Crispin: "Well, running the Commission was no easy matter. The European Commission has numerous responsibilities - or 'competence' in the jargon - for example, our trade, agriculture and fisheries in the European Community, and there are other areas where it has a big hand. The President

of the Commissions sits, for example, at the world economic summits or G7 (or G8) meetings as of right. The difference between the political and economic aspects of problems is always fuzzy, and I did help at the beginning to make sure that he was at those meetings throughout. The people who wanted to keep him out were the French and the British.

MMcB: “And the British?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, James Callaghan.”

MMcB: “He was Prime Minister at the time?”

Sir Crispin: “It was Callaghan, yes. I mean, as far as they were concerned, Roy Jenkins was a slight embarrassment. Neither Callaghan nor Giscard wanted him at the table. Originally he was invited to come for matters concerning the European Union, but after a bit this was regarded as artificial and he attended, remaining silent as appropriate. The fact that he was there helped to establish the credentials of the Commission, and throughout Europe as such.”

MMcB: “Is the job of Chef de Cabinet comparable to that of Private Secretary?”

Sir Crispin: “No, it’s more than that, it’s like being Chief of Staff. The best translation is Chief of Staff to the President.”

MMcB: “You had to make sure that he was properly briefed for all these important meetings, and attended them yourself.”

Sir Crispin: “At all meetings of the Commission I sat behind him. Nobody else did. When they cleared the room of officials, I was the only one in the room.”

MMcB: “It must have been jolly interesting.”

Sir Crispin: “It was, yes. If he wanted to send a rocket to one of the commissioners, it was I who had to do it.

MMcB: “To deliver it or to draft it?”

Sir Crispin: “Deliver it, in a tactful way!”

MMcB: “He was not getting on too well with James Callaghan, was he?”

Sir Crispin: “Well, you know, like all members of the Labour Party they had a good on/off relationship. They liked each other on Mondays and perhaps scratched each other on Tuesdays. I think they liked each other.”

MMcB: “How about David Owen?”

Sir Crispin: “Everyone knows that David Owen is a maverick. There was a complex relationship between Tony Crosland and Roy Jenkins, and between both of them and David Owen. When Crosland died, David Owen got the job that Roy Jenkins would have liked, that of Foreign Secretary. Roy took it all extremely well. After all he had moved on, and was doing something else. But there was tension inevitably, because David Owen is a difficult man, by any reckoning.”

MMcB: “And young too.”

Sir Crispin: “Young, but difficult to work with. After Roy Jenkins had left Brussels, there was the Gang of Four, David Owen, Roy Jenkins, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams, who tried to create a new central force in politics.”

MMcB: “Yes. I was going to ask you, were the seeds of that being sown while Roy Jenkins . . .?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, it certainly began before he left Brussels. You will remember the Dimpleby lecture. But the job of President of the European Commission is exacting. He has to keep the member governments sweet, he has executive responsibilities in quite large areas, he’s got meetings with the Council of Ministers, meetings with others. In short he has major responsibilities for running the European enterprise. It’s a curious system, with the European Parliament, the European Court, the Council and the Commission. Playing these relationships with each other is quite complex. Roy Jenkins did it, and did it very well. He also took the initiative in launching the European economic and monetary union proposals in 1977. It meant that he was seeing a lot of the other leaders of the European Union such as Schmidt and Giscard. I usually went with him, and took the note.”

MMcB: “What was your impression of the other leaders?”

Sir Crispin: “Some of them I liked and thought were good, others I thought were less good. I always particularly liked Helmut Schmidt, the German Chancellor. He was a very sympathetic character. There was also travelling outside Europe. We went to China, to Canada, to Africa, to the United States where we saw President Carter. When I left the European Commission after four years, I assumed that all the records I had made, the records of the Cabinet as a whole, would go to the central archive. I was told, ‘No, no, they belong to you.’ so I took them out. Then I became a Visiting Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, to whom I gave the records for safe keeping. When will I ever sort them?”

MMcB: “When you’ve got time.”

Sir Crispin: “When I’ve got time, exactly.”

MMcB: “When Roy Jenkins went off to form the SDP and so on, I suppose he didn’t cast around for extra people to come in and help him there. You’d more or less left the Foreign Office when you went to Brussels.”

Sir Crispin: “No. I always made certain that I was going to return. I made it quite clear that I was on secondment from the Foreign Office. It is important always to make sure you can get back to where you were. At the end of it all, the question was what I should do. I had a choice of jobs in the Diplomatic Service. I also had the choice of staying in the European Commission. They offered me a nice, lucrative job there. But I decided to go back. The place I wanted to go to, which I asked for, was Mexico. I thought I’d like to get away from the affairs of Europe for a bit, not to mention the advantage of getting away from British politics at that time, where I was a slightly identified figure.”

MMcB: “Identified in what way?”

Sir Crispin: “As being European.”

MMcB: “Oh, as being too European.”

Sir Crispin: “Too European, yes. But the Ambassador in Mexico didn’t want to go. So I had a gap of a few months. I managed to get a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls, which meant I could go back to climate and a little bit of pre-Colombian history.”

MMcB: “Quite a contrast. So, anyway, you left Brussels behind with some regret I imagine.”

Sir Crispin: “Well, four years was enough.”

MMcB: “It’s a long time. But you went off to All Souls for a bit?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes, I went off to All Souls for a few months, about 7 months I think it was.

MMcB: “Until Mexico became vacant. Why did you want to go to Mexico?”

Sir Crispin: “I had much affection for Mexico and its history as a result of my first experience there. I spoke the language.”

MMcB: “What languages do you speak?”

Sir Crispin: “Just French and Spanish. I wanted to get out of the main scene for a bit. Yet within 6 weeks, the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher had come to stay. Within a few months we had a major currency crisis. Argentina invaded the Falklands. Then the Queen came. So it’s not as if I had a restful time in Mexico. I could not have foreseen all this when I went

there in 1981. But I didn't last long. I was only there for two and a half years."

MMcB: "You picked up a KCVO."

Sir Crispin: "The Queen came."

MMcB: "Yes. It must have been very interesting, given your interest in climate and environment."

Sir Crispin: "I did some work on that when I was there, and travelled a lot."

MMcB: "It is an absolutely fascinating country."

Sir Crispin: "It is a fascinating country. It was a nice place to go to. It was also an ideal place for a radical change which is what I wanted. By the end of 1980, which is when I left Brussels, I had had ten years of dealing with European problems, or arms control problems, or East-West problems, and for the six years before that, I had been dealing with France and long term policy planning. So it was good to focus on a particular area, and one as pleasant as Mexico."

MMcB: "Yes, I think that must have been very pleasant."

Sir Crispin: "But it didn't last. I was summoned back to be Deputy Under-Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Foreign Office."

MMcB: "And that brought you plumb into the 'money back' negotiations."

Sir Crispin: "Yes. But they had changed since I was on the other side of the fence in 1980."

MMcB: "But it was Mrs Thatcher, wasn't it who Oh, in 1980, it started then?"

Sir Crispin: "Yes, or in '79, when she became Prime Minister. I remember going with Roy Jenkins to a meeting with her in Downing Street shortly after she'd become Prime Minister. She was already heavily in to this problem. When I came back to it again, this time from the British point of view, it was as Deputy Under-Secretary, in 83. I was not there long. A vacancy occurred at the Overseas Development Administration, and Margaret Thatcher asked me if I would agree to be Permanent Secretary. Would I like to take a temporary job in the Home Civil Service and run this particular Department? After hesitating a bit, I said 'Yes.' I'm very glad I did go. It was a fascinating job. Being a Permanent Secretary in the Home Civil Service was a very interesting experience after the other things I'd done elsewhere. It embodies a different culture. Running the aid programme I'd had very little interference. It represents high politics, more important than most people realise. Clare

Short knows how important it is. At that time, the Overseas Development Administration was still under the wing of the Foreign Secretary. It isn't any more."

MMcB: "Then it was being run by Lynda Chalker?"

Sir Crispin: "No, she wasn't there when I was there. When I was there, the Minister was Tim Raison, and then Chris Patten."

MMcB: "Raison, Patten, then Chalker."

Sir Crispin: "I did that job for three and a half years. It took me all round the world. I had to cope with the problems of the Third World, which I hadn't really had much to do with before."

MMcB: "No, quite, not in Brussels or Paris or anywhere else."

Sir Crispin: "Well a bit, but not much."

MMcB: "What did you think of our aid programme?"

Sir Crispin: "I tried to set the political priorities. We had quite a lot of money, double the amount of money that is available to the Diplomatic Service. The question was how to use it wisely, what our policy should be, and what helping people overseas really meant. I thought changes of emphasis were necessary, and indeed we brought them about."

MMcB: "Did you not also decide to give quite a large share of that aid budget to the European Commission?"

Sir Crispin: "I didn't decide to, it was part of the system."

MMcB: "But, I mean, the amount grew, didn't it?"

Sir Crispin: "The amount grew a bit. I'm not sure what the proportion is, but it's a proportion. So we had to work with DG8 which is the Directorate General in Brussels that deals with these things. They do a good job, but we had to make sure that our aid programmes were complementary."

MMcB: "Did you have anything to do with the setting up of these development divisions or were they already in place?"

Sir Crispin: "They were already in place. I travelled a good deal, for example to Africa and India. The only part of the world I didn't go to was the Far East. We had a small programme there."

MMcB: "Did you go to China?"

Sir Crispin: “I went with Roy Jenkins. I’ve been to China a lot since, but not as Permanent Secretary of the ODA.”

MMcB: “Anyhow, you found that a worthwhile job?”

Sir Crispin: “A very interesting job. I did that for over three years.”

MMcB: “Who did you take over from? It wasn’t Peter Preston was it?”

Sir Crispin: “No, it was Sir William Ryrie. He became a Vice President of the World Bank, a job which was also dangled in front of me before I left the ODA. But again I decided to go back to the Diplomatic Service. I may have left the Diplomatic Service four times in my career, but I’ve always gone back to it.”

MMcB: “It says something for the Diplomatic Service.”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. By that time I was designated as Ambassador to New York, as Permanent Representative to the United Nations. I wasn’t going to miss that.”

MMcB: “Did you enjoy that experience?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. It was a great experience, and a very good time to have been there.”

MMcB: “What happened?”

Sir Crispin: “No less than the end of the Cold War. I had a hand in setting up regular meetings of the five permanent members of the Security Council. They used to meet in my apartment. We worked closely together on a huge range of international issues that came to the Security Council.”

MMcB: “Such as what exactly?”

Sir Crispin: “During my time we helped to end three wars and began one. The three wars that we ended were, one in Cambodia, one in Namibia and one between Iran and Iraq. The one we started, just as I was leaving, was over the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. I was much involved in putting together a Resolution on that in the early days. I had to stay on in New York. I couldn’t leave when I was supposed to leave, and stayed on for a couple of months. They worked it out by terminating my permanent appointment on the due date and giving me a temporary job, with the same salary!”

MMcB: “Enhancing your gratuity.”

Sir Crispin: “I don’t know if they did that. If so, I suppose it was by a tiny bit.”

MMcB: “They should have done. That brought your formal Diplomatic Service career to an end. But then you became an adviser to Mrs Thatcher.”

Sir Crispin: “I did that before I left. I was giving her advice from 1984 onwards on environmental issues, in particular climate change. I had dinner with the lady the night before last and I was talking to her about it then. I became a very unofficial adviser, and I helped write her famous speech to the Royal Society in 1988 on climate change. And then after my departure from the Diplomatic Service, I went with her to the second World Climate Conference in Geneva. I carried on with John Major doing the same sort of thing, and then I carried on with Tony Blair. My position is highly unofficial: I don’t get paid for it. I much prefer that. It gives me more independence. The Rio conference in ‘92 took place when John Major was Prime Minister, and I gave him advice before it all happened. Since then I’ve taken on responsibility for two of the institutions which arose from the Rio conference, one being the Government Panel on Sustainable Development, and the other being the Darwin Initiative of the Survival of Species. I’ve done both since they were set up. This is going to be my last year running the Darwin Initiative. Who knows, I might decide to finish with the Government Panel on Sustainable Development next year. It has been a long time. It’s about time somebody else did it.”

MMcB: “I recall, but not well, Mrs Thatcher’s speech about the climate, environment and so on. It was surprisingly far-sighted, given that it’s not the sort of thing one would expect to appeal to a person like that.”

Sir Crispin: “Margaret Thatcher much prided herself on being the only scientist in her government. Anything that related to science she took a particular interest in, and almost felt that she owned it. Some of her views were radical and didn’t always fit the other views she heard from others. The main advice she got was, of course, from the civil service machine. I came back from New York to attend two meetings for her. I think she regarded me as someone useful who could stir the pot for her, and perhaps challenge the orthodox wisdom, whatever it might be.”

MMcB: “And did she feed you with ideas, or the other way round?”

Sir Crispin: “I was there to give her ideas. Her great point was always, ‘Don’t give me problems, give me solutions to problems.’ On that basis I’d suggest something.”

MMcB: “And you found she was receptive?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. She was more receptive on some things than on others. The genesis of the 1988 speech to the Royal Society on climate change arose from a meeting when I went to see her when I was on holiday. I always tried to make a point of going into No.10 when I was on holiday. I then suggested three ideas to her which she might try. I didn’t know which, if any, of them she was going to follow. Then I heard about three weeks later that she was

interested in the one about climate change, and we started toing and froing about what she might say and when she might say it. She's always been very interested in science and felt that she had that particular contribution to make."

MMcB: "And when you were on leave, you'd just ring up No.10 and say you'd like to see her?"

Sir Crispin: "Well, I suppose before I left New York, I'd send a message to No.10 asking if I could call on the Prime Minister. I've discovered on many occasions that in a Security Council debate you frequently have to think on your feet. Things never follow the track that you would like them to follow, and anything you might say in a debate in New York, which is five hours after London, the Prime Minister might have to answer for the following day in Prime Minister's Questions. Somebody might stand up the next day at 2.30pm which, of course, is 9.30 in New York, saying, 'I understand that our representative in New York said last night Is that the policy of Her Majesty's Government?'. So I had to be in touch all the time, and couldn't afford to free-wheel. That's why I used to try to go to see her so as to get the vibes right. Any wise British Permanent Representative to the United Nations would have done likewise, especially at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end and all the old certainties were beginning to dissipate."

MMcB: "Is there anything you'd like to add about New York and that particular period?"

Sir Crispin: "Well, you are in a permanent negotiation. I think perhaps it was more true then than it is now. I had, perhaps, more rope than my successors. For example, when we started to sweep up the mess after the Falklands, I entered into discussions with the Argentines, and I carried on negotiations with Argentina, on strict Cabinet instructions, for three semi-secret meetings with the Argentines, which led eventually to the resumption of diplomatic relations. I suppose that in some way it was off the normal beat. When it was clear that we were going to have discussions with the Argentines, there was some question about who should lead them. But because I speak Spanish and knew the previous Argentine Foreign Minister (I'd met him once or twice in New York), it seemed reasonable that I should do it. By then the Foreign Minister had changed, but I continued. My counterpart was a very sensible wise old owl, a former Secretary General of the Argentine Foreign Ministry with whom I had a good personal relationship. In our series of talks we resolved the issues. That was the kind of thing that happened on the side in New York. But the main thing to remember is the broad background in 1989. Gorbachev then made his famous speech to the General Assembly, which sounded the end of the Cold War. Among the discussions among what were called the permanent Five in New York, it almost began to get easier to get on with the Russians or Chinese than it was to get on with the French or the Americans (who were always in difficulties because they were too close to Washington)."

MMcB: "What's your general impression about the Americans?"

Sir Crispin: “I’ve lived with them all my diplomatic life. They can be a bull in a china shop. They see themselves as very much the top country in the world. This means that they make mistakes. The only thing to do is be firm with them and not let them get away with it, but do it in a friendly way. We are very close allies. Part of the process of being an ally is standing up and saying, ‘Don’t do it like this, do it like that.’ which is what I always tried to do.”

MMcB: “They do seem to listen.”

Sir Crispin: “They probably listen to us more than they listen to others.”

MMcB: “Individuals.”

Sir Crispin: “Individuals, yes. I always had a good relationship with my American colleagues in New York. They were often glad we were being firm because it helped them fight the battles in Washington. Washington is usually riven between the Agencies - the White House, State Department, CIA, Defence, Treasury - and they all had different views. That’s why they have so much difficulty in reaching conclusions. I remember that when I was President of the Security Council on one occasion, I virtually had to issue an ultimatum, ‘If you don’t decide by 12 o’clock, we shall proceed without you.’ This acted as a helpful spur.”

MMcB: “Did you do that on your own initiative?”

Sir Crispin: “Yes. A member of my staff once said to me that in the crowded room of diplomacy the Americans were like a kind of brain-damaged giant who did not entirely understand what was going on, but eventually agreed or disagreed. Most of the time no-one objected but people did object when the brain-damaged giant started to break up the furniture.”

MMcB: “A bit unkind.”

Sir Crispin: “A bit unkind, and not always true. It was certainly true on one or two occasions.”

MMcB: “Have you got any lessons arising out of your quite remarkable career for some young chap trying to make his way in the Service?”

Sir Crispin: “I’ve nothing but cliches. It depends whether he is interested in being a diplomat or being someone who contributes to foreign policy. I was always interested in foreign policy, and the whole of my diplomatic career was in places where foreign policy was made. In some ways Mexico was an exception. Otherwise I was usually near the centre of things.”

MMcB: “But you had a positive attitude to all these things, didn’t you?”

Sir Crispin: “Some of that was chance: I happened to be the person standing in the right place at the right time. Any diplomat should have a strong sense of politics. That’s why it’s good training for people to be a Private Secretary. All the essential decisions are political decisions. It’s quite easy to work for some Foreign Secretaries and not at all easy to work with others.”

MMcB: “Does it lead to the temptation to want to go into politics yourself?”

Sir Crispin: “I have thought about it once or twice. But I decided in the end not to.”

MMcB: “Was Roy Jenkins involved?”

Sir Crispin: “No. The best advice I received was that if I was interested in making things happen, I was more likely to do so in the kind of jobs that I’ve had than if I tried to become a Member of Parliament.”

MMcB: “Where you’re just putting a gloss on it.”

Sir Crispin: “Putting a gloss on it. The chances of reaching the Front Bench are fairly small. Even if you do get there, it is difficult to achieve what you want to achieve. Think how Ministers are struggling at the moment to do what they want to do. It’s what Harold Macmillan always called ‘Events, dear boy, events’. Very often it’s better to work from inside the system rather than from outside it. But I have been tempted from time to time.”

MMcB: “I think that’s a very good note to end on. Thank you very much indeed.”