BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

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(In 1993 Sir Curtis Keeble wrote a private memoir addressed to his grandchildren and intended to give them something of a feel for the life which he and their grandmother had led. With his permission the following extracts dealing primarily with his career in the Diplomatic Service were edited in 2001 and accepted for the Programme in lieu of an oral interview).

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Introduction:

Curtis Keeble's studies were interrupted by the Second World War. He volunteered for the Army in 1941 and entered it the following year, being commissioned after initial training. In 1944 he abruptly found himself in work relevant to his later career:

SERVICE IN THE FORCES: RUSSIAN REPATRIATION

In the autumn of 1944, there came a request for volunteers who spoke Russian and were required for some unspecified duties. In a desperation of boredom, I filled in the form with name, rank, number, birth details, education and, finally came to the section headed "Extent of knowledge of the Russian language". "Lesson Nine in Anna Semeonova's New Russian Grammar" I wrote, signed the form and dispatched it. Some weeks later I was summoned to London and handed an examination paper in what appeared to be Russian. Here and there I noticed a familiar word and invented as plausible a translation as I could. My score cannot have been far from zero and I wrote off the exercise, content that it had at least given me a day in London, before returning to a battle training institution at Sedbergh. It was there that, a couple of months later, I was called to the adjutant.

"Keeble, I've got a telegram about you."
"Oh, Can I see it?"
"No. It's secret."
"Well, what does it say?"
"It says you're to go to Liverpool and join HQ."
"But what HQ? What's it all about"
"I don't know. Do as you're told. Go to Liverpool."

So to Liverpool I went and on the station announced my identity to the man who collected military waifs and strays. To my surprise, he seemed pleased to see me.

"Thank God you're here" he said "There's a car here to take you to the boat".

"Boat? Boat? Nobody said anything about boats. I'm supposed to be joining some HQ".
"Not HQ. It's H9. That's the convoy number and you're the Russian interpreter. You'd better hurry. They'll be here in a couple of hours. There's a War Office team coming to see them on board and then it's up to you."

My protests that I had never progressed beyond Lesson 9 were unavailing. I was driven to the ship, the "Staffordshire", equipped with a Russian dictionary and Arctic clothing and placed in luxury in a comfortable cabin. Before long a great noise broke out on deck. Clearly the Russians had arrived. A coward at heart, I decided that the prudent course, since I seemed to have been overlooked, was to remain out of sight in my cabin. When the tumult had subsided, I emerged to discover that, with a Czech sergeant who spoke something recognisable as Russian, I was to be the only means of communication between some two thousand Russians, other assorted wartime debris who spoke even less Russian than I did but were presumed to be Soviet nationals on the one side and on the other a major in charge of troops, a doctor and a Merchant Navy crew. I have felt a lasting debt of gratitude to the Czech people.

Fortunately, having sailed out of Liverpool, we turned left rather than right, and spent the winter of 1944-45 plodding gently between Marseilles, Naples, Taranto, Athens and Odessa, collecting Russians whom we repatriated and bringing back British and French who had been released from prisoner-of war camps in Russian held territory. The repatriation operation has been much written about by others. My first taste of what it meant was going down with the ship's doctor into the stinking fo'cs'le to tend a dozen men with rough bandages round their throats. These were the ones who had failed in their attempt to commit suicide before boarding the ship. It is easy now to criticize the policy of the British Government. On the Staffordshire, we were in no position to judge whether these men were deserters or collaborators who had good reason to fear vengeance or whether they were merely more perceptive of the nature of Soviet justice. All we could do was to give them decent medical care until we reached Odessa. The voyage was not without incident. A day out from Marseilles, I was summoned to the bridge where the skipper stood, purple-faced, watching inflated condoms floating past. He was succinct: "Get this lot into some kind of shape or I turn round and take them back." The threat may have been empty, but some action

was clearly required. The condoms were the lighter part of the task; but he had grounds for some displeasure when we had to run out the fire hoses to clean the excrement from the decks. In Naples we were boarded by a young officer from the Soviet military mission who was to accompany us to Odessa. Immaculate, he said, simply: "Tell me what you want and it will be done." By the time we reached Odessa, a squalid mass of humanity had become a body of troops who were, the skipper said, the best disciplined bunch he had carried during the war. It was a frightening example of the power exercised by one young man with the might of the Kremlin behind him. I hoped that I should never find myself fighting against the Russians, but I hoped that some day I might get to know more of them and their country. As the land came in sight discipline broke down; the enthusiasm at the first sight of Mother Russia was such that the Russians were swarming from one side of the ship to the other, making her almost unsteerable. Recollections of Odessa have faded: a ceremonial arrival with a military band playing at the docks, my attempt to convince a Soviet doctor that the patients filling our sick-bay were suffering from seasickness and diarrhoea, not dysentery, the sight of piles of rusting lend-lease equipment lying where it had been unloaded, a wild drive round the town in a Russian jeep, being shown the opera and the party headquarters, a row over the non-arrival of the British and French whom we were supposed to embark, sailing away empty and returning two days later to find our Russian passengers still waiting, a forlorn huddle where we had left them on the quay. We wondered what would happen to them. We could guess that those whom we had kept alive would probably be shot and the Soviet machine would not be kind to the others. I remember feeling sadness, but in relation to those whom we carried - and the distinction may be important - I did not see how, in the confused muddle which was Europe in the closing months of the war, the British Government could have done otherwise.

As winter turned to spring we made repeat journeys. There are memories of two riotous days of drunken celebration of May Day 1945 in the Sea of Marmora and VE Day in Odessa, of the great domes and minarets of Istanbul, the first city I had seen ablaze with light and not with fire since 1939, lilac blossom in the Bosphorus, Cos and Leros shimmering in the sun of early summer, glittering white villages clinging to the cliffs as we passed through the Straits of Messina, purple grey hills in a misty dawn as we approached Piraeus. Finally, our work with the Russians over, we were

dispatched to Crete where we watched the Germans firing off their remaining ammunition in a glorious firework display before coming on board for transportation, as they hoped, to Germany, but in reality to an Egypt which their leaders had planned to occupy in different circumstances. The war in the Far East was still in progress and the Staffordshire was on her way there. I was asked if I would like to go with her and agreed, but the War Office, when consulted, took the view that victory could be achieved without my help and I was deposited in Port Said with instructions to go to Cairo and await further orders. So I was able to pay my first visit to the Pyramids and another of life's illusions was shattered when I was told that the best way of reaching them was by tram, a journey only marginally more romantic than the 38 bus from Holborn to Leytonstone. To Cairo came someone from the British forces in Vienna who invited me to go there and help deal with the Russians, but again the War Office had other thoughts, so I boarded a troopship bound for Britain.

In Liverpool I reported to the same man who had dispatched me some eight months earlier. "Ah", he said, "Yes, Keeble, I remember the name. Something came from the War Office about you. They wanted to send you off on some course or other. To learn Russian, I think it was. I told them it was no good. You had gone." Having by now a realistic accent and a practical, if inelegant, vocabulary, but still being stuck at Lesson 9 so far as the grammar was concerned, I saw some merit in beginning Lesson 10. I encouraged him to search for the correspondence, but he could not find it, so I proceeded to a transit camp and, ending thus a singularly unheroic war, waited to see what the peace would bring.

A FLEDGLING DIPLOMAT: BATAVIA; the FOREIGN OFFICE

It was while I was still serving in Germany that an announcement appeared about the new-style examinations for members of the Forces wishing to enter the Administrative Grade of the Home Civil Service or the Diplomatic Service. I decided to apply and, since it cost no more, applied simultaneously for both these options. For good measure, I added in the London County Council.

Applicants were supposed to have obtained a University degree, but London did not award the purely symbolic wartime degrees offered by those less serious institutions at Oxford and Cambridge. However, in lieu of a degree, I was permitted to lodge a certificate from my tutor to the effect that if I had stayed long enough to complete the course I would have had a reasonable expectation of a 2nd class. It would have been a hard-hearted tutor who would have refused this, so in due course I was summoned first to a written examination in Germany and then, over the New Year weekend of 1946-7, to the celebrated 'country-house' style test at Stoke D'Abernon. We gathered for a preliminary evening of discussion on various topics. The first did not interest me. The second I knew nothing about. The session wore on. The other candidates deployed an impressive level of culture, sophistication, intellect and experience. I remained silent. Finally, having concluded that it would be well to offer some contribution, I was about to indicate a desire to speak when the session was brought to an end without my having opened my mouth. It seemed an inauspicious start. We progressed to psychological tests and were invited to write a commentary on pictures. Then came a blank screen. What did they want me to write? I have never much enjoyed party games and I felt like one of those wooden-faced Russian Communists who, exhorted by Gorbachev to show initiative, asked: "What initiative do you want me to show?". Things looked up when we came to the committee exercises in which we were invited to solve the problems of an imaginary island and the various interviews went well, since the Russian convoys made a good topic of conversation. All in all it turned out to be a relatively painless experience, but I left the establishment feeling that it would be well to look for some other career.

The demobilisation process was now accelerating and it was not long before I was able to hand in my revolver, collect a standard-issue blue suit and, retaining my

blackthorn stick, revert to that civilian status which, in spirit, I had never really left. Queen Mary College had now returned to its home in the bomb-blasted Mile End Road and, installing myself in the little back room in Eva's house which I had left in 1940, I began to commute by bus, with the intention of finishing my degree by the summer of 1947. The winter was bitterly cold, rationing was severe, the East End was dreary and my course seemed even further from reality than it had been five years earlier. I was pleasantly surprised to find myself accepted as a member of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, though I suspect this owed more to the fact that a friend of my mother was a friend of the secretary than to my own credentials in the field of foreign policy. With my thoughts turning towards the need to find a job, I had an inconclusive interview with John Brown, who were at that time hoping to restart their export business in ship construction. Then, surprisingly, came a summons to see a doctor. Hoping that it might perhaps have some connection with my Civil Service application, I telephoned the Commissioners to enquire whether this meant that, by some miracle, I had passed the exam. "We have written to you" said a female voice. "But I have had no letter from you. Can you tell me what it said?" "No, we are not allowed to disclose information over the telephone." "Could I then come and see you?" "No, we are not allowed to disclose information to callers. But," and she relented, "I don't think you will be disappointed." I dared not ask in respect of which of my three applications I should not be disappointed, so attended the medical and awaited further news. In due course it came. I had been accepted for the Foreign Service. It was not easy to take it in. At heart I was still the little boy at Walton Elementary School, paddling in the mud of the backwaters.

BATAVIA

Summoned to the Personnel Dept of the Foreign Office, at that time situated in the former German Embassy house on Carlton House Terrace, I was received courteously and asked where I should like to go. It seemed to me that, having now disposed of Germany, the most interesting problems in the field of foreign policy would come from Moscow and by now I had at least a reasonable oral fluency in the language. So this was where I asked to go. Sadly, there was no vacancy for a new entrant in Moscow, so I was told that I should be going to the Balkans and should return in a week's time. I did so and was told that I should be going to Batavia as Acting Vice-

Consul. I had little notion where Batavia was, but felt that the only thing to do was to assent with as much grace as I could muster.

There followed a talk about money matters in the course of which it was explained to me that I should receive a salary of £360 a year, plus an allowance to cover local costs. In order to turn this salary into spendable money I should be entitled to draw a bill on Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, but my emoluments were calculated on the basis that I was a 'non car-owning grade'; if I ran a car I might run into financial difficulty; and the Service took a serious view of any member who so conducted his affairs as to run into this situation. Alarmed, I enquired whether, in that case, I should take my bicycle. My interlocutor gave this request the serious consideration which it clearly merited and, after due thought, replied that the matter would be considered and I should be informed of the Department's decision. I had no idea what an Acting Vice-Consul was expected to do, but assumed that someone would tell me this - as well as the means by which I was to draw a bill on Mr. Ernest Bevin. As to timing, I asked whether it would be permissible for me to take my finals, which were due in a little over two months, but was told that the exigencies of the Service were such that this could not be permitted. If I wanted the job, I could take it. If I did not want it, I might be permitted, as a special concession to retake the examination the following year. Concluding that a job and no degree was better than a degree and no job, I said that I would forsake Queen Mary College forthwith.

I then rashly mentioned that I should like to be married before leaving. This produced distinct irritation. There was no housing for married couples. Could not my fiancée remain in England and then at some future date she could travel to Batavia and we could be married there? Would the Service, in that case, pay her fare? Indeed not. I doubt whether at that time everything we possessed in the world would have added up to the cost of a fare to Batavia. So, in negotiation, agreement was reached on the basis that we should marry in Britain before I left and that my wife should follow me to Batavia three months later, her fare then being payable by the Service. To the puzzlement of our family and friends, Margaret abruptly resigned from the Ministry of Labour, we were married with indecent haste in Edinburgh a week later on the 2nd of April 1947 and took a three day honeymoon at Chipping Campden, before I

reported back, breathless to Carlton House Terrace. "Ah. Yes." said the Foreign Office. "We think it would be useful for you to refresh your French before you go. You will not be able to speak it there and you may never go to a French speaking post in the whole of your career, so if you do not refresh it now, you never will." The logic was less than impressive, but the decision was not unwelcome, so I was moved from the Mile End Road to a crammer in Kensington, where for three months, instead of finishing my degree in German, I brought my French up to the standard required by the Service.

Having rushed our marriage to meet the Foreign Office deadline, Margaret was now left with no job and we had nowhere to live. My parents agreed that we could stay with them at Walton and this we did, but it was not an easy arrangement and started us off with some awkward tensions. The one redeeming feature was that I deducted the period of the French course from the time that I had undertaken to leave your grandmother behind and held to the planned date for her travel, so that we were able to book passages almost simultaneously, she on the Dutch liner "Oranje" and I by flying-boat to Singapore.

At no time did the Foreign Office suggest that I might usefully set foot in any operational part of the Office, nor was any mention made of the duties which I should be expected to perform on arrival, other than to give hospitality, for which purpose it was recommended that I should ship out a supply of liquor, obtainable from Saccone and Speed. We were given a modest allowance for tropical clothing, together with a suggestion that it might usefully be spent at the establishment of FP Baker in Golden Square where, among other things, I acquired heavy cotton drill bush shirts in the best style of a pre-war colonial official. As to the question of bicycles, the Foreign Office eventually concluded that both my wife and myself might ship bicycles to Batavia at the expense of His Majesty's Government. We might also, if we wished, be accompanied by our domestic staff, not exceeding five in number. A kindly thought on His Majesty's part, the latter concession was one of which, regretfully, we had no means of taking advantage. But the bicycles were duly crated up and shipped together with the whisky. Thus briefed and equipped, we embarked upon diplomacy.

In those days, to travel by air to Singapore was a gentlemanly process. On a warm August afternoon a coach took the two dozen passengers from London to Poole, with a stop en route for tea. We stayed overnight in a comfortable hotel and at a civilised hour the following morning, having had a good breakfast and armed with a copy of The Times and Punch, we went by motor-boat to the aircraft. We were seated at tables for four on the lower deck, the upper deck being fitted out as an observation lounge, where one could stretch one's legs, study a map on the wall and follow the course. Flying at about 8,000 feet, we cruised gently down to Marseilles, where we stopped for lunch, before proceeding that afternoon to Catania in Sicily for an overnight stop. For five days this leisurely progress continued via Cairo, where we flew twice round the Pyramids so that everyone could get a good view, Bahrein, Karachi and Rangoon to Singapore. Each night was spent in a comfortable hotel and, on those days when we had meals in the air, the tables were laid with linen tablecloths, sparkling glass and heavy silver-plated cutlery. This was air travel of a quality which I have never subsequently experienced.

From Singapore, it was a short and uncomfortable hop to Batavia and my first experience of the East. If anything were calculated to destroy images of oriental romance, this was it. I found a vast quasi-European slum, festering in the humid heat. I was allocated to a tiny three-roomed bungalow in a little alley, running off one of the main canals in the down-town area, where the air was permeated by the stench of sewage from that multi-purpose waterway. Our own water supply was baled from an inspection pit, into which it flowed from a broken pipe. From time to time we enjoyed electricity. The view from our front window extended only to the barbed wire fence of the concentration camp for Japanese prisoners which occupied the other side of the street. It was to this bungalow, shared with the air attaché and his Indonesian girl-friend, who, not surprisingly, had just contracted typhoid, that Margaret came to join me. She unpacked the wedding presents and struggled to turn the bungalow into some kind of home, while I contemplated our sickly banana palm and wondered how to clear the patch of derelict garden of its thriving colony of giant snails.

The Consulate-General occupied an airy Colonial-style building and here I settled down to my first experience of diplomatic work. The British forces had left Java a

few months earlier and the country was in a state of political turmoil as the returning Dutch administrators tried to re-establish the old colonial regime of the Netherlands East Indies, while, in the hills around Jokjakarta Sukarno was gathering his Japanese sponsored rebel army to fight for supremacy. It was one of the messier decolonisation operations and the Consulate-General was engaged in what was essentially a diplomatic operation, seeking to support United Nations efforts at mediation, anxious not to undermine the Dutch position, but rather to induce a sense of realism into their policies. We were, however, as a consular post, responsible to the Ambassador at The Hague. He had machine cypher and was able to send lengthy telegrams reporting every detail of his many conversations with Dutch Ministers. We, however, had only a manual operation, with the result that most of the staff, myself included, would spend days on end sitting with our pads of numbers, our pencils and our cypher books, subtracting the figures and looking up the results as we toiled through the groups: "I...had...a...long...and...interesting ..talk... this...afternoon...with...spell a word of 14 letters..." and on he went, while we fell further and further, days further, behind the flood of numbers. It was a good first lesson in the merits of brevity, since when the backlog ran to more than two or three days, we would have to put the balance on one side, pearls of ambassadorial wisdom and erudition undecyphered, in order to attend to the new traffic.

I was allowed to raise my head from time to time above the telegrams and had a first taste of genuine consular business and export promotion. The British Consulate-General in Batavia had hitherto been responsible for large communities from the Indian sub-continent and the Hadhramaut. India quickly established its own representation after independence, but there was a large Indian Moslem community, who, having lived as traders for generations in Java, were uncertain for a time whether to turn to India or to embrace the new Pakistan. I spent much time trying to help them with their problems and even more time with the Hadhrami Arabs, whose ancestors had left the remarkable mud-brick towers of their home east of Aden to trade with the spice islands. Although now in some cases substantial property owners, their warrior spirit was undimmed. One elderly man asked for my help in securing permission to return home, so I wrote to the authorities in Aden, only to receive the reply that he had rebelled against British rule, his village had been taken by direct assault by a battalion of troops, and it was the Governor's pleasure that he should continue to

reside outside the Protectorate. He received this reply with good grace, but reacted with fury when an officious customs official removed his pistol on arrival for a business visit to Singapore. He might as well have removed the umbrella of a visitor from the Bank of England as remove Abdat's personal firearm.

In time, but not before I had succumbed to an acute nephritis and Margaret to dengue fever, we moved out of our down-town slum into a substantial two-storey house in the suburb of Tjikini, which we shared with the assistant information officer and one of the secretaries. We were seeing very little of the charms of Java because intermittent fighting meant that most of the country was regarded as unsafe. An occasional day excursion to a hill station on the Puntchak, or to Buitenzorg (Bogor) was about the limit and only once did we venture down to the south coast. Life began gradually to assume something of the normal Eastern routine. The office functioned from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., the afternoon was largely a write-off and in the evening the round of entertaining began. At weekends the rijstafel at the Hotel des Indes was a ritual in which 22 waiters bore 22 separate dishes to each table and little was seen but the bulge of Dutch necks rising above the mounds of rice, while in the gloom of the Harmonie Club across the road the weightier members of the expatriate community settled into their heavy armchairs. At the Box Club there was tennis and cricket and there was obligatory diplomatic tennis too on the Consul-General's court. I found myself on the carpet one Monday morning for having had the temerity to say that unfortunately I could not play tennis on the afternoon I was due to bring Margaret back from hospital with our first child. On another occasion, we were at dinner with friends. The Consul-General, a bachelor, was ill, but was represented by his cousin, a formidable Scottish widow who accompanied him abroad. The evening wore on and eventually the Air Attache started to make his excuses, explaining that he had to leave by air at six the following morning. "That is interesting" said Susan in a loud voice. "I am leaving too. At five". The table was quiet. The attaché blushed and, laughing nervously, said "Oh dear. That makes me look rather foolish". "Yes" continued Susan's imperious voice "It was meant to." We wondered what extraordinary service this was that we had joined.

For our first wedding anniversary, we resolved to escape and planned a trip to Bali on board a cargo vessel fully laden with pigs and cockroaches. Having cruised gently

along the coast of Java, we eventually dropped anchor a mile or so off the north coast of Bali. A rope ladder was lowered over the side and down it we scrambled to a motor-boat which ferried us onto an empty palm-fringed beach. The motor boat left and we were alone. It was pure Somerset Maugham. We had been told that at the end of the beach we should find the village of Kintamani, where there was a shipping agent and a bus to Den Pasar, some seventy miles away on the south coast. We found the agent, but the weekly bus had left. However, the following day the agent would be travelling to a hill station half way to Den Pasar. He offered to take us that far and told us not to worry if we did not find anyone to take us the other half of the journey; he would be back two or three days later and would take us himself. So we ended up spending three magnificent days in a rest house on the rim of a half-extinct volcano, looking down across the lake in the crater, from which rose the gently smoking new cone, while in the village we could watch the ritual dancing. The agent kept his word and in due course we accompanied him to Den Pasar. It was a religious holiday the day we arrived and there were few staff in the hotel, but we were invited to make ourselves at home and assured that they would be back the following day. We did and they were. After the grey drabness of post-war Britain and the tropical squalor of Batavia, the fresh green hills of Bali, the neatly terraced rice fields climbing above the palms, the abundance of fruit, the gentle sound of the gamelan and the quiet, relaxed happiness of the people worked the same spell on us as it had on many others - on the Belgian painter and his Balinese wife who entertained us on the beach at Sanoer, while their children draped themselves among the blooms on the frangipani trees, on the English naval captain who had settled to grow roses half way up the mountain, even on the few Dutch officials. Now, with the 747's flying in and multistorey hotels on Sanoer beach there is no temptation to return.

Back in Batavia the political and military situation was growing more tense. Our house was not far from the Republican Headquarters and we had frequent contact with their leaders, Sjahrir, Hadji Agoes Salim and the others, an attractive and cultured group, envious of the Indians whom we had trained as colonial administrators, while the Dutch had permitted them to study only politically 'safe' subjects such as medicine. But I never met Sukarno, the evil genius who remained in the hills waging the military campaign. There were stories of great battles, but very few reports of casualties and only on one occasion were we forced to take shelter on

the stairs when an outburst of rifle and machine-gun fire disturbed the calm of our little street. It was into this city that your mother was born, in the St Carolus Hospital, where my main recollection is of a large rat scampering out of the delivery room as Margaret was wheeled in and then seeing Suzanne, a huge pink and white baby among all the other little brown ones. Before long she grew even larger and pinker on a diet of mashed banana. Our own doctor was a Dutchman who had been interned in Japan and one evening, when we were discussing the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, he remarked quietly: "As a matter of fact I was in a camp at Hiroshima when it was dropped."

BACK TO LONDON

By the summer of 1949, with my probationary period safely concluded, it was time to return to London. . . . . My next job was to be in the South East Asia Department of the Foreign Office.

. . . .

In the South East Asia Department, six of us, with twelve telephones, shared responsibility in a large traditional "third room" for Britain's varied relations with the countries of South East Asia. We were a mixed bag. Bunny Fry, later, as Sir Leslie, Ambassador in Buenos Aires, straight out of the Indian Political Service, had retained every bit the manner of the Governor-General's ADC; Leslie Glass, sitting on the floor beside his desk with his shoes off, dealt with Burma, where he eventually became Ambassador; while Reg Hibbert, who later had the distinction of serving as Ambassador in only two capitals, the first Ulan Bator and the second Paris, handled the political and security problems which came together in the office of the Commissioner-General in Singapore. My own responsibility was for my old parish of Indonesia, now emerging as a fully independent state, the most populous in the southern hemisphere, for Vietnam, where we were trying to help the French to prop up the regime of Bao Dai against the Communists from the north, and also for the newly emerging states of Laos and Cambodia. Our room represented the bottom layer of the bureaucratic pyramid. Each incoming communication, whether by formal despatch, letter or telegram was placed in its own paper jacket and handed to one of

us. We might recommend action, we might draft replies, we might inscribe learned essays on that unsullied white jacket, we might send it for printing for the information of King, Cabinet and Commonwealth, or we might do nothing but sign it. A signature moved it onward and upward, through the Assistant and the Head of Department to Under-Secretaries and, covered with more formal blue minutes, to the Secretary of State and, ultimately, the Monarch. But an initial killed it and it returned unseen to the archives whence, such was the nature of the filing system, it was unlikely to emerge. A colleague in another department discovered that this system could greatly simplify his daily work-load and it was only when, after his departure, an apparent lacuna in communications reporting the world's troubles resulted in a search of the archives that one by one the jackets emerged, inscribed variously "Oh dear." "What a pity" "How unfortunate", followed in each case by his neat initials.

One day I was summoned, I cannot now make out why, to attend a meeting between Mr. Bevin and John Strachey, the Minister of Food. We badly needed Argentine beef and Strachey proceeded at some length to deliver to Ernie an intemperate lecture on the things he proposed to do to the Argentines. Ernie listened with remarkable patience for the first fifteen minutes, before remarking: "John, what is it you want? Do you want beef? Or do you want to kick them in the balls?". It was a lesson in negotiation which I never forgot and which others might, with advantage, have learned. On another occasion, as I was about to get off the bus in Whitehall, I heard the tail end of a conversation between two cleaning ladies: "You know, dear. What I say is it's nice to be nice". Indeed it is nice to be nice. It is nice for an Ambassador to be received with warmth, to say such things as will be welcome to a foreign audience and to bask in their approval. But in diplomacy those whose only thought is to be nice can be as dangerous as those who take delight in being nasty. Anger, whether real or feigned, has its uses, but the time to deploy has to be chosen with care. I thought of Mr. Bevin and the cleaning ladies many years later, in Moscow, when, after a sharp exchange on the subject of the Falklands, my Soviet interlocutor said with surprise: "Ambassador, I have not seen you angry before now."

Our third room was across the corridor from Far Eastern Department, where one desk was occupied by a slovenly, drunken, loutish Guy Burgess. He was a man reputed to possess great charm, but he certainly did not manifest it. Knowing nothing and

suspecting nothing of his work for the Soviet Union, it was still hard to understand how this disreputable character managed to hold onto his job. Of Donald MacLean I saw little, but there was a strange meeting in the early summer of 1951, when half a dozen of us assembled in his room to spend an hour discussing the filing of a certain paper. With hindsight it is easy enough to understand why such matters were of concern to him. At the time it was a source of puzzlement, but since most of the important issues in our relations with the United States were dealt with on a functional rather than a geographical basis, it seemed possible that the Head of the American Department had some grounds for sensitivity as well as ample time to fuss over the filing. When the pair fled to the Soviet Union I was on leave. I had postponed my departure for a week and thought I had made it clear that my return was also postponed by a week. Apparently I had not, as when we returned to Caterham one of the neighbours came round to say that "a man from the Foreign Office" had been looking for me. Presumably there had been an anxious check to see how many more were missing.

I had not expected to stay for more than a couple of years or so in London and by the summer of 1951 was becoming anxious to learn where I should be sent next. Margaret was pregnant again and the due date was in the early autumn. I enquired of Personnel Department and was told that it was probable that I should be moving, but they could not say exactly where or when. I waited. The weeks passed and we began to make preliminary enquiries about maternity arrangements in London. A further enquiry brought the answer that we were likely to move in July, but again no destination was revealed. Two weeks later: "It's odd. We still haven't a reply. Perhaps the Head of Post is away." I began to think that I was proving rather unsaleable, when, early in August there came another call: "I really can't understand it. I'm sure I signed the letter, but it doesn't seem to have gone." By now it was a race, but eventually, with a few weeks in hand, we left by train for Berlin, where I was to be Deputy Political Adviser to the General Commanding the British Sector.

BERLIN AND WASHINGTON

The Berlin airlift represented the definitive challenge to the western extension of Soviet power in Europe. It ended with the lifting of the blockade and a humiliating Soviet defeat in 1949. The Berlin to which I came two years later was still the focal point of a contest for power as West and East strove for supremacy in Central Europe, but for the time being there was a stalemate. The Soviet Union could not break the united position of the Western allies and the Berlin population in maintaining the integrity of West Berlin, but the city remained a tiny Western island surrounded by Soviet power. In the Far East, too, the Korean war was being fought to a stalemate. In East and West, tensions were high. In November 1951, shortly after I reached Berlin, Anthony Eden summed up the state of relations with the Soviet Union, saying: "There is now virtually no diplomatic contact between East and West either side of the iron curtain. This is something new and entirely to be deplored." In Moscow, Sir David Kelly was warning that the Soviet leaders might not feel that time was on their side and, in his view, "from the purely military point of view ... there is quite a case for a preventive war by the Russians (and Chinese) this year." He was assured that in London the risk had been "long and carefully weighed", but the conclusion was that the Soviet leaders were realistic enough to appreciate the appalling risk and would refrain "unless they were to feel themselves under imminent threat of attack". Nevertheless, there could be no great confidence and, if there had been an outbreak of hostilities, Berlin might well have served as the trigger.

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After the tropical colonial life style of Batavia and the grey, penurious existence of a very junior government servant in post-war London, we took off with one of those wild lurches which typify a diplomatic career, into the pampered situation of the occupying forces in post-war Germany. And an occupation force it was, with the British Headquarters in the old Olympic Stadium, the GOC installed in splendour in the lakeside Villa Lemm. The privileges were substantial, but the Berliners were grateful for the Allied effort which had saved the city from Soviet domination and on both the personal and the political level relations were easy and friendly.

The British, French and American forces, less an effective fighting force than a symbol of Western willpower, derived their authority from the occupation agreements of 1945. It was therefore a primary requirement to maintain the validity of those arrangements and the constitutional status of Berlin as a city under quadripartite control, pending an eventual German peace treaty. With each year that passed, the juridical basis of our position became more threadbare, but like an old outmoded coat, patched and darned, it was the only cover for our nakedness. The only functioning remnants of the quadripartite control of the city were the air traffic control and the guard over the war criminals at Spandau prison. The Soviet army still mounted guard over the war memorial in the British sector, but for all practical purposes the Allied Kommandatura functioned only on a tripartite basis. The city was physically still united and there was free movement between the British, French and American sectors in the West and the Soviet in the East, but around the outer boundary of the city there was a rigid barrier to movement into the Soviet Occupation Zone, with strictly controlled movement along the autobahn and rail links between Berlin and the West.

Our task in the political wing of British Military Government was essentially to uphold the position which had been won by the defeat of the blockade. This meant that we had to sustain in every way the special status of Berlin, deriving from the four-power agreements of 1945; the right of free passage throughout the city and of free movement for the Allied forces between Berlin and the West; and the city’s supply links by road, rail, canal and air. We also had to ensure that the links between Berlin and the Federal Republic fell short of total integration, since this would have been clearly prejudicial to our claim to sustain the 1945 status and could have been held to place our rights in jeopardy. In response to the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany by the Western Allies, the Soviet Union had established in its Zone of Occupation the German Democratic Republic, with its seat of government in East Berlin. In this they were acting in clear contravention of the four-power status of Berlin and in sharp contrast to British policy, which was that the Federal Republic's jurisdiction did not extend to any part of Berlin. It was therefore a major policy matter for us to permit no allied dealings with the GDR Government, but to insist on dealing only with Soviet authorities in relation to all questions relating to Berlin or to

the Soviet Zone. From time to time there was anxiety that the Soviet authorities would simply remove the personnel who dealt with allied movements and force us either to deal with the GDR or to suffer a self-imposed blockade. In my time, however, they never forced the issue to this point.

There were constant sources of friction, some major, some minor, some serious, some farcical, particularly those relating to the city boundaries. A particular source of trouble was the existence of some small patches of Berlin territory lying outside the city, but linked to it by footpaths. Free access to these territories, where our title to the path could be established, was sustained by the deployment of troops, but there were nervous moments. One night I was consulted about the appearance of Soviet soldiers apparently preparing to challenge our use of a path. It seemed to me that a show of force had to be met with a parallel show of force and I gave the instruction for a British platoon to be deployed on the path. For a brief period British and Soviet soldiers were face to face along the path with rifles loaded until eventually our claim was physically established by the erection of a wire fence. On another occasion the Russians demanded a border commission to investigate an allegation that the latrines belonging to a British barracks lay outside the city boundary. Walking through the snow, my Soviet opposite number and I found the old boundary markers, clearly dividing the army from its facilities. We drew up a supremely equivocal formal protocol and map, showing the City Boundary and the Boundary of the "British Occupied Area", leaving open the question whether this constituted Soviet acceptance of the legitimacy of our occupation or our acceptance of the legitimacy of their claim. They did not seek to interfere with the latrines, but we thought it prudent to build new ones within the city limits.

From time to time British soldiers would stray into the Soviet Occupation Zone around the city, sometimes as a result of going to sleep on a train which crossed the border, once being blown to the wrong side of a lake when out sailing and once taking a wrong turning when out on a training run in fog. On one occasion I was summoned to the telephone to receive a call from the Soviet Headquarters to say that they had a British officer, his dog and his car and would like to know whether we wanted them back. It transpired that the officer, hoping perhaps to play his modest part in easing the tensions of the Cold War, had driven to the border check-point, summoned a

Soviet soldier and issued an invitation to the officer in charge to dine in the mess. Beckoned through the barrier, he put his dog back in the car and drove on, progressing stage by stage up the Soviet army chain of command, with the invitation growing ever more desperate and the petrol tank more empty until eventually arriving at the Headquarters in Karlshorst where the innocence of his intentions was finally established. Not all border transgressions ended on this light-hearted note and there was a sharp rise in tension when a British aircraft which strayed into Soviet controlled territory was shot down. Fortunately, incidents as serious as this were rare. Most of the time, both sides played by an elaborate and well-understood code of rules and the uneasy status quo was maintained for the whole of my stay.

On the Western side, we had a close and friendly Allied community of military and civilians, many of whom remained friends all our life. The Western press correspondents were a distinguished group, not only those representing the so-called quality papers, but others like Bill Hamsher, the teetotal representative of the Daily Express whose proud boast was that, given the first line of any hymn, he could produce the second. With his vivacious Czech wife, Magda, he brought to his reporting an intellectual quality rather higher than his paper deserved. I still remember his pride when he actually persuaded them to print the words "Federal Constitutional Court".

Berlin at this time was, of course, a major centre for intelligence activities by both sides, some covert, as the tunnel which the British service used to intercept a major Soviet communications link, others semi-overt, as the activities of the British Military Mission to the Soviet Commander in Chief which had its base in Potsdam and was able to travel throughout Eastern Germany, seeking intelligence on Soviet military establishments. The open inner-city border brought a steady stream of Eastern refugees to our reception centre, where they too added their quota to the military and political intelligence take. It was clear to us that this drain of many of the ablest members of the East German population could not be sustained indefinitely and, looking back, it is remarkable that the Russians waited until 1961 before erecting the Berlin Wall, the symbol of failure of a state which had to lock up its citizens to prevent them from running away.

While we sought to maintain the integrity of the occupation regime in Berlin, the process of integrating Western Germany into the political, economic and security structure of Western Europe was moving quickly ahead. In May 1952 the "contractual arrangement" with the Federal Republic was a major step towards ending the occupation regime in the West and the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community began the process of European integration. In November, the victory of President Eisenhower brought John Foster Dulles to the office of Secretary of State, with a promise of rolling back Communism; and in March 1953 Stalin died.

REVOLT IN EAST BERLIN

In Soviet-controlled Eastern Germany the population was growing restive and on the 17th of June 1953, we received word in the Stadium that there was some kind of trouble in the eastern sector. I decided to have a look and, taking a military car with flag flying, drove throughout East Berlin, where there was no mistaking the extent of the revolt. The eastern half of the city was paralysed, with crowds of workers milling round, while telephone operators, spreading the word to other cities, were bringing into question the whole structure of Soviet power. Having seen all I needed, I turned back towards the West, but the car became caught in a street barrier and could move neither forward nor back. At that moment a crowd of demonstrators approached and succeeded in lifting the vehicle free. It seemed discourteous to accelerate away westwards, so I proceeded at a decorous pace and, had an enterprising press photographer been present, he would have secured a memorable photograph of the rioters led by a British military vehicle. The demonstrations were wholly spontaneous, with no substantial political organisation behind them. For a brief period the people had control. Had they chosen to proclaim an independent government and seek Western support, we should not have been prepared to intervene on their behalf and the outcome could have been a major tragedy. As it was, by the afternoon, Soviet tanks were in control of the streets and by nightfall the revolt was effectively over with remarkably little loss of life. The people of East Berlin and East Germany had to wait another 36 years for the crumbling of Soviet power to proceed to the point at which their own power could bring liberation.

THE QUADRIPARTITE CONFERENCE

I should normally have left at the end of 1953, but it was at this point that the decision was taken to hold a Foreign Ministers Conference in Berlin early the following year and I stayed on to join the British Delegation. The preparations for the conference were left in the hands of the four Generals, assisted by their political advisers. It had, no doubt, seemed to our masters in London, Paris, Washington and Moscow that it should not be beyond our ability to settle the minor housekeeping matters such as provision of accommodation and other facilities. Their decision was to meet in Berlin. But what did a meeting in Berlin mean? What was Berlin? Was it the 1945 fiction of the single city under quadripartite control? Was it two cities, one the capital of the German Democratic Republic and the other an area under Allied occupation? Or was it four separate sectors? The one thing which it clearly was not was some vaguely neutral area, in which administrative convenience could dictate the choice of meeting place. Whatever decision we reached had a potent symbolism for the status of Berlin.

So we began a series of meetings, a British delegation meeting each morning, a tripartite co-ordination in the afternoon and a quadripartite meeting with the Russians in the evening, for which we gathered in turn at each of the four headquarters buildings. General Coleman, GOC of the British Sector, was quite clear about his role. This was a simple administrative problem. In so far as it was a political matter he would do as his masters ordered and would speak as his advisers advised. At each quadripartite meeting we would go round the table, with each General in turn making his pre-arranged points in a ten-minute speech.

Our initial proposal was to hold the meetings in the building of the former Allied Control Council, a large building of several hundred offices, currently standing empty, centrally located in the American sector, with good access roads and having the advantage of a certain quadripartite character. The Soviet proposal was to meet in the Soviet Embassy to the German Democratic Republic, a rather more modern building, with a better situation on Unter den Linden, enjoying ample accommodation and capable of being given any character which the Ministers might wish. Round the table we went on the approach roads, the number of offices and the character of the

buildings. By the early hours of the following morning we had made no progress. So we continued as night followed night and week followed week. Each evening we would prepare for the General his set of speeches, numbered from 1 to 12 and, fitting them more or less into context, would offer them to him. Word for word he would read them. On one occasion we ran out of speeches and at 2 a.m., unabashed, bolt upright in his chair he extolled in parade ground tones the virtues of the Control Council building, using the precise words used at 9 p.m. and undisturbed by the clatter as a member of the Soviet team, sleeping soundly, fell from his chair.

This test of stamina went on, broken only by a brief surrender on the part of the French, until we were within days of the opening of the conference and still had no decision on its location. We were instructed by London to accept, in the absence of anything better, an arrangement for the meetings to alternate daily between East and West and this decision had already appeared in the American press. We began the final evening with the usual round of speeches 1-2-3-4; 1-2-3-4; 1-2-3-4. At 11 we broke for supper and resumed 1-2-3-4 until 2 a.m. Another recess. And again 1-2-3-4 for three more rounds, when the Soviet General said "I have a proposal to make". "Very well. Let us hear it." "I propose a week of meetings in the building of the former Allied Control Council, a week in the Soviet Embassy and a third week, if necessary in the Control Council building." We had a 2:1 ratio and we had the beginning and the ending, which we wanted for publicity purposes." "Fine" we said. "We accept your proposal. Let us now sign on it and we can join our wives for the Press Ball". "I am sorry, but I cannot agree". "But it is your own proposal and we have agreed to it." "Yes, I know it is my own proposal and I have authority to propose it, but I do not have authority to agree to it." "Very well. We shall wait here in the Olympic Stadium until you have returned to your Headquarters and obtained authority to agree to your proposal." At 8 a.m. our Soviet colleague returned, beaming happily and announced that he could accept his proposal. Margaret packed away her unused ball gown. The Foreign Ministers duly met and decided little except that their next meeting would be in Geneva.

In retrospect, much of what we did during those years in Berlin seems a mixture of tedium and farce. But it was by an unwearying insistence on minutiae, a refusal to concede points of principle and a readiness in the last resort to stake military force,

that, for over four decades, West Berlin remained inviolate and peace was maintained. Some repetitive language and some sleepless nights were a modest price. This was my first experience of dealing with the Russians since the Odessa sailings. It taught me the need to exercise extreme patience, to go on that little bit longer than the other man, but, when the opening comes, to grab it.

I had received vague indications that my next appointment would be to Rome, but was then told that the move was off. It was not until many years later that I discovered that the plan had been that I should go as Private Secretary to the Ambassador, but that at the last minute he had vetoed the move on the ground that he wanted a bachelor. He was right. I should not have enjoyed dancing attendance on him at all hours to the exclusion of my family and the Essex boy's social graces were certainly not those of the Rome Embassy. It was a merciful release. The alternative proved to be Washington.

WASHINGTON 1954-58

The job in Washington was that of Second Secretary in the Commercial Department, dealing with commercial policy questions. This was a wholly new area of work for me and in every way I was a learner, a learner about the United States and a learner about export promotion. The Foreign Service was beginning to take its commercial responsibility seriously and, before I left, the Board of Trade arranged a series of briefing visits to firms exporting to the United States. Towards the end of these my programme showed a call on the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. I reported to the receptionist and said that I had an appointment with the Secretary. "I'm sorry. I don't think the Secretary will be able to see you. He is just preparing for an important lunch engagement." Hesitantly, I said: "I wonder whether we are both going to the same lunch". Indicating that this seemed highly unlikely, my interlocutor nevertheless deigned to enquire and within moments I found myself led into a room where were assembled the top brass of Birmingham industry. Slightly apprehensive at finding myself in the place of honour, I enjoyed the lunch and enjoyed the company until the coffee arrived, at which point the Secretary informed me that the company were ready for my speech. I suppose it was an easy enough slip for someone arranging my visit to fail to point out to the Chamber that I was a very junior diplomat

about to leave for the United States, not a very senior one ready to share the experience acquired on a four-year tour of duty and to fail to warn me that I was billed as a speaker. My audience were kind, but the occasion can have done little to enhance the reputation of the Service for professionalism in the support of British industry.

The normal means of travel for a posting to the United States in 1954 was by sea, so that summer we went, a family of four with a German nursemaid for Sally, by the Queen Mary to New York and saw for the first time the Manhattan skyline. Behind it lay a tawdriness and a squalor which have grown worse over the years, but the first impression of the New World from the sea has, for me, lost none of its fascination in the passage of forty years.

The move from Berlin to Washington brought a change in the quality of life and work as great as the change in scale of the environment. The change of scale was total. The whole city of Berlin was an island forty miles across, its only links with the world outside through the strictly policed access routes by road, rail and air. Now our parish was a continent. Gone were the privileges of the occupation force, but in their place was the privilege of freedom, freedom to drive out of Washington to anywhere in the United States without the need to present a military movement order before passing through hostile control points, freedom for our children to grow up in a normal suburban environment, going to school with the neighbourhood children.

The standing of a junior secretary in the Embassy had somewhat diminished since the time when Lord Hardinge, at the age of 27 and having spent five years in the Service, moved, like me as a Second Secretary, from Berlin, where he had become friendly with the future Kaiser Wilhelm, to Washington. Arriving there, he was left in charge of the Legation (the United States did not at that time rate an Embassy) and was able to record that he rode nearly every day in Rock Creek Park with Mr. Bayard, the Secretary of State who "in order to help me made a point of giving me a good deal of useful information which I transmitted to the Foreign Office, and this tended to create a favourable impression at home and gave me a reputation of being really well informed". In 1954 the Washington Embassy still retained much of the staffing and many of the functions which had been developed during the years of close wartime

co-operation. The main Lutyens building on Massachusetts Avenue would have served admirably for the diplomatic round of the Hardinge days when an Ambassador needed the support of a good cook and one or two bright young diplomats for whom a corner could be found in a grand house. Now two great armies of civilian and military officials laboured in outhouses, one in a ramshackle wartime building in the grounds of the Embassy and the other in a down town office. But, though we formed part of a mini Whitehall, the Service still recognised that the trade of diplomacy has its distinct features and that the British interest was well served if even a junior member was able to live and entertain in a way which helped him to mix easily with persons of authority in the country where he was serving. So my salary, which had now reached a level of some £700 a year, was augmented by allowances which were enough for us to live rather comfortably in a pleasant Maryland suburb, with a German nursemaid for the children and all the help we needed for entertaining.

A thoughtful Service had provided, for the benefit of such uncouth post-war recruits as myself, a celebrated manual of instruction, in the pages of which the newly appointed Mr. John Bull, who, like Hilaire Belloc's Lord Lucky " ... rose in less than half an hour to riches dignity and power", was instructed on the proper way in which he should conduct himself in the Embassy of Sir Henry and Lady Sealingwax. Warning Mr Bull of the "many pitfalls which surround his footsteps in the drawing room of his own Ambassadress and in the houses of foreign acquaintances", the author gave such firm advice as "He must not invite an unmarried girl of good society to accompany him alone to the theatre." He did not indicate whether Mr Bull should always take a chaperone, confine his theatre companions to ladies of doubtful reputation, or eschew the morally questionable theatre in favour of the chamber orchestra. This publication caused considerable hilarity and was mercilessly exploited when it fell into the hands of a national newspaper, but although couched in a style more reminiscent of the 1930s than the 1950s, the advice which it contained was sound and, sensibly interpreted, helped to save embarrassment. . . . . . [It contains] much of the good sense and good manners which make life run more smoothly and which would not come amiss in this ever more brutish world. It came back to my mind some years later when, serving in East Berlin, Margaret and I were entertained at dinner by a newly appointed foreign ambassador. He was an excellent host and the proceedings were conducted with an elegance which would not have

been out of place in a diplomatic dinner of the Edwardian era. We congratulated him and he explained: "You see, my wife and I were very new to this kind of life. So prior to our appointment, we found a chauffeur and the three of us sat down together and watched every instalment of your English television programme 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. There are various routes to a common goal.

In terms of career satisfaction, Berlin had provided the sort of work which had prompted me to join the Service. Washington, by comparison, was disappointing. Trapped in the lower reaches of a large Commercial Department, I toiled for four years with the problems of commercial policy. That they were important was undoubted. They were important in that access to the American market for British goods was essential to our economic survival. They were important, too, in the sense, that economic co-operation between the Western powers was beginning to be seen as a necessary response to the challenge of Soviet economic power. It was, however, hard to believe that they counted for much in the Embassy's order of priorities. I do not recollect that the Ambassador ever set foot in our grubby outhouse.

In 1956, at the mid-way point of our American posting, the double trauma of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Suez Canal crisis brought a brief moment when Britain seemed threatened with Khrushchev's ballistic missiles and with an American financial stranglehold if it failed to withdraw. By that time we had made many close friends in the middle ranks of the American administration and were saddened by their almost unanimous hostility. The first hope of peaceful co-operation with the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin and the appointment of Khrushchev had faded and it seemed that the West was now faced with a powerful combination of Soviet military and economic power, driven by a lust for imperial grandeur. Looking at the economic shambles of Russia in 1993, it is hard to realise the impact which was made on Western opinion in 1957 by the launch first of a Soviet inter-continental ballistic missile and then of the Sputnik earth satellite. What this did, however, was to bring Britain and the United States closer together and in October 1957 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan visited Washington where he and President Eisenhower concluded a formal Declaration of Common Purpose, providing for joint political, economic and propaganda measures against "the threat of International Communism." This unity of purpose was not easily translated into a freer movement of trade and we laboured long

to secure some amelioration of the more protectionist pieces of American legislation, such as the Buy American Act, which prevented British suppliers of heavy electrical equipment for competing on level terms with their American rivals for contracts for major government-financed power contracts. The State Department did their best to help and there were allies in the Congress, but it was an uphill task and our successes were few. While most of the Embassy most of the time was engaged in a broad process of Anglo-American co-operation, the Commercial Department more often found itself faced with a direct clash of British and American interests.

Washington DC is not the United States and one welcome aspect of the work was that it gave an opportunity to take up offers of speaking engagements with Chambers of Commerce and other groups in support of more liberal trading policies. Whether on duty or on pleasure, we took every opportunity to see as much as possible of the United States.

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Our expeditions were no earnest study tour of the nation. Some were work, but most were holiday and many of the places we visited were on the standard holiday itinerary for American families. But from the professional point of view, they were time well spent. The foundation of diplomacy is an understanding of the country where one is serving, a feel for its people, for the rulers and the ruled, for the land and the history, the prejudices, the experience, the hopes, the ambitions and the fears that make them what they are. You do not get this by staying in capital cities. The inter-governmental relationship between Britain and America may be built in Washington, but Washington stands or falls on the judgement of places like Little Rock, Arkansas or Muncie, Indiana, the archetypal Middletown, where our old friend Howard Trivers later settled to teach philosophy at Ball State University.

In the mid-fifties American society was going through a period of social trauma. The war years had thrust the United States into a qualitatively new stage of national evolution, a stage where post-war power and post-war problems had to be tackled by a society whose social structures still had deep roots in an isolationist past. The victory of 1945 had left American power, both military and economic, supreme in the

world, but the challenge of Soviet Communism had brought the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy years and raised doubts about the country's ability to sustain its supremacy, doubts about how best to deploy its power, doubts about the relationship with its allies and doubts about the cohesion of its own society. One critical issue was the process of desegregation and the schools were a particular focus of this. Washington, once described as a blend of northern courtesy and southern efficiency, was a racially mixed city, effectively segregated by residential location. Our own area was very typically prosperous, white and Protestant and one of our neighbours warned Margaret that it might be better not to let the children play with the children of a Greek family which had just moved into the next block. Sue and Sally went to the local community school in Kenwood and it was a matter of some significance when one day Sue came home to report that black children had been brought into the school by bus.

Looking back, it is remarkable how much of our personal life in Washington remains in the memory and how little of our official existence. This reflected the unique situation of an appointment where it was easy to slip into the society in which one lived, to experience its problems from inside, rather than to observe them from an external standpoint of diplomatic privilege. The Washington years may not have been very productive in terms of the problems which passed across my desk in the Embassy, but when the time came to leave I had, like so many of the British who served in Washington, established a basis of understanding which was to provide a solid base for co-operation in later years.

BRITAIN AND EUROPE

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[I returned to London in the summer of 1958 and worked first in Security Department and then in Economic Relations Department. In 1961 I was to be posted to Amman, but this fell victim to a bout of economy cuts. I stayed in London.]

THE EEC NEGOTIATIONS

Meanwhile, I had gone back into the office. My successor had arrived. We stood by the desk and I said, "You take it. I've done the job long enough. I'll find something else". Having failed to join in the first stage of the movement towards European integration with the Coal and Steel Community and Euratom, the British Government had stood aside from the Treaty of Rome which, in 1956, had established the European Economic Community. This was arguably the biggest mistake in post-war British foreign policy. It was a mistake made by Ministers, but I believe that the Foreign Office, still obsessed with Britain's role as a major power and with the special relationship with the United States, did not seek to persuade them otherwise. Had we joined at the outset, we could have shaped the Community. As it was the six founder members established rules and practices which were in many respects inimical to British interests. By the summer of 1961, the mistake was recognised and the first application for membership of the Community was made. The negotiations for membership had begun and I looked for a slot in the responsible Department, at that time called the European Economic Organisations Department. So, instead of dispensing aid in Amman, I found myself in charge of the half of the Department which was responsible for the negotiations. Policy was co-ordinated at a senior level by inter-departmental committees in Whitehall and executed by a group of "flying knights", senior officials from the Foreign Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office, the Treasury, Board of Trade and Ministry of Agriculture, who shuttled between London and Brussels. In this situation the role of EEOD was, to say the

least, somewhat overshadowed, but the load of work falling to it was massive and fascinating. It brought rather more contact with Ministers than I had had in my earlier work, especially with Edward Heath, who, as Lord Privy Seal, was responsible for the conduct of the negotiations and later with Rab Butler. It was to Butler that, on one occasion I put up a minute recommending a certain course of action on a major policy issue, only to receive it back inscribed "Hinc illae lachrimae" - a fair comment on the state of Europe, but not much help to one seeking a clear decision. Butler was the kindest, most courteous Minister I ever worked for, but . . . .   I felt that justice had been done when he went to Trinity rather than to No 10.

Edward Heath was as different as could be. He had a good brain, if not as good as Butler's, but what counted most with officials was that he had that quality which Butler most lacked, at least in relation to foreign policy, a clear sense of purpose and the ability to take the decisions necessary to implement it. Heath took his work very seriously. He inspired the respect of those who worked for him and, I believe, a genuine affection among those who were closest to him. Yet, over little things he could be quite foolish and occasionally quite insensitive. At one point he joined a group of us on a quick reading class. The fact that he did so was just one more demonstration of the professionalism with which he tackled any project in which he was engaged. The only way of testing our effective reading speed was by questioning us on what we had read. Heath did very badly. Instead of laughing, he became rather upset and argued with the instructor, pointing out that he had to read vast quantities of paper and if he remembered it all his mind would be cluttered with useless rubbish. He needed to remember only those few points which were new and interesting, which needed action, or which merited correction. He was, as usual, entirely right, but the teacher worked by the book and the mark was unchanged. Even Cabinet Ministers - perhaps especially Cabinet Ministers - need to be able to sense the situations when gracious retreat will pay better than graceless confrontation. Heath also had a remarkable knack for hitting the wrong note. When he left us to go to the Board of Trade, a group of us gave him a farewell party. For some reason it had to be held after he had already spent a day in his new Department. To the assembled group he recalled his arrival: "They told me that if I was going to be boss of that outfit I must sack someone within the first 24 hours. It didn't matter who it was, but I must sack someone. But I didn't need to ..." The great shoulders heaved with mirth "... One of

them dropped down dead". Indeed a colleague whom many of us remembered with affection and respect had that day suffered a fatal heart attack. The room was silent. It was not that Heath was an unkind or unfeeling man. He was capable of warm and thoughtful gestures, but he had a sublime talent for putting his foot in it. If I recite tales such as these, it is not to detract from his stature, but to introduce a note of sadness. They were only a small part of the man, but it was sad that a man of vision, a man who had so many great qualities, who was so determined to do his best for his country, and who had achieved so much, could not - perhaps through some inner uncertainty - strike quite the right note.

Looking back now on those negotiations with the Community, I think the odds were always against us. As one of our negotiating partners said afterwards: "The trouble with you British was that you read the Treaty before you started negotiating with us. The rest of us had simply signed it and sorted things out afterwards." There was some justice to this. The best brains in Whitehall had toiled through every article in the Treaty of Rome, the lawyers had examined the worst possible construction which might be put on them, every vested interest in Britain and the Commonwealth had been consulted and the negotiators had then sought maximum safeguards against the consequences.

We did eventually secure arrangements which, at least for a transitional period, would have met our requirements on many points. On other issues we were forced step by step to concede, but at the end it seemed that even a readiness to accept the Treaty and the regulations as they stood would not have saved us. An extreme example was the regulation on financing the common agricultural policy. The existing British policy enabled most foodstuffs to be bought on the British market at competitive world prices and made up the price deficiency to the British farmer. So market mechanisms functioned, the consumer got cheap food, often subsidised by foreign producers, and the British farmer got a reasonable livelihood. There were protective devices for products such as sugar, where Caribbean economies were dependent upon access to the British market, and in respect of many horticultural products where British producers needed shelter from foreign competition. For most bulk products, however, the British market was open. The common agricultural policy would require a fundamental reversal of this policy, closing the British market to most non-European

imports and supporting the British farmer by a system of high internal prices and a guaranteed market for unlimited quantities. Not only would acceptance of this policy deny to Commonwealth producers, in particular New Zealand, traditional access to the British market, but it would bring a substantial transfer of funds from Britain to the Community in order to finance the high Community prices enjoyed by those members whose dependence upon agriculture was greater than that of Britain. We began by seeking safeguards, not only for our traditional suppliers, but also against an excessive financial burden falling to the British Exchequer. On the former point, we secured useful transitional arrangements, but on funding the French were adamant that we must accept the regulation as it stood, with no amendments or understandings. After the lawyers had toiled their way through it again, Ministers finally decided that we could accept, whereupon the French said that this would not suffice. The regulation would have to be reinterpreted by the Six before we could be allowed to accede.

Underlying the technical difficulties was a deep mistrust on the part of the French as to Britain's role in the Community, a mistrust which was doubtless confirmed by the final discussions between de Gaulle and Macmillan at Fontainebleau. The truth of the matter was that there was - and to a certain extent there still is - a fundamental clash between two concepts of the Community. On the one hand was the existing Community of Six, based on a Franco-German 'special relationship', a closed Community seeking self-sufficiency and basing its operating procedures upon detailed regulations emanating from the centre and inspired by concepts of Roman law and Napoleonic practice. In fundamental opposition to this was the British idea of an outward-looking, liberal trading Community which would strengthen rather than weaken the transatlantic relationship, a Community with minimal central regulation, English legal concepts and empirical British administrative practices. De Gaulle could see very clearly that there could be no happy marriage between these conflicting concepts. He decided that the cleanest course and the one best suited to the preservation of French power was to bring the negotiations to an end. This, with total brutality, he did. At one stroke years of work were abruptly brought to nothing.

In the final stage of the negotiations and at the relatively early age of 40, I had taken over from Ken Gallagher as head of the Department. The structure of the Foreign

Office is such that the head of a Department has a substantial degree of responsibility for the formulation and execution of policy in the area for which he is responsible. I was lucky to be working to Roger Jackling and James Marjoribanks as superintending Under Secretaries and to have a Department staffed with people as bright as Derek Thomas, Robin O'Neill, Stephen Barrett and John Rich, who subsequently became Ambassadors in Italy, Belgium, Warsaw and Switzerland. We were, I think, a happy and effective team, but one thing we could not achieve. The European Economic Organisations Department had a name inspired by the need for inter-governmental co-operation in the post-war years, a policy embodied in the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, later renamed the OECD. The process in which Europe had been engaged as a result of the Treaty of Rome was a process of integration, but to change the Department's name to European Integration Department was at that stage thought to be unduly provocative to those who feared that Britain was about to surrender sovereignty through integration into the Community.

EFTA

With the failure of the EEC negotiations, the Department's main aim was to build up the European Free Trade Association, in which Britain was joined with Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden, with Finland as an associate. They were an easy group of countries to work with. Our interests did not always coincide, but the Ministerial meetings had the character of friendly gatherings of leaders who enjoyed meeting one another and who shared broadly the same trading policies. The contrast with the legalistic and doctrinal hassle of Brussels was as welcome as it was striking and the sight of Edward Heath standing on the table, arms linked with his Danish colleague as they sang student songs, was one I shall long cherish. EFTA was probably the most congenial international club I have belonged to. But it was not the solution to Britain's trading policy, nor to the great issues of European policy. The six founder members of the European Economic Community were the core of Europe. Without Britain they were incomplete, but Britain without them risked isolation. We could not safely base our policy on a relationship with the fringe of Europe.

It fell to me to represent the Foreign Office on an inter-departmental group which was charged with the task of working out future British policy on relations with the

Community. Should eventual membership continue to be our objective, or should we seek some other variant such as an enlarged free trade area? There was, of course, no reason to suppose that an enlarged free trade area would be acceptable to the Six - indeed every reason for supposing that it would not be. So far as full membership was concerned, the Treasury, the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture had to make the running in relation to the economic implications. The opportunity for increased British exports had to be set against the increased penetration of the home market by European producers and the cost of the common agricultural policy. Membership would be an added attraction to foreign investors wanting new plant to serve an enlarged European market, but would not that investment tend to go rather to the European mainland? Would the advantage of an English speaking base offset the geographical advantage of Lille or Dusseldorf? Would Britain become the Ulster of Europe?

By failing to take part in the Community from the outset, we had let the rules be established on a basis which did not match well with British interests. Now, after the failure of our belated application, the process of consolidating the Community to meet the interests of the Six could be expected to accelerate and if a later application for membership were made we could expect the consequences to be even harsher than at our first attempt. All in all, the economic consequences of a further attempt could not be assessed definitively in 1963. The combined efforts of the economic departments of the British Government could do no better than to say that the net gain or loss might be substantial, but that they could not tell whether the balance would be positive or negative.

In this situation, with the economic arguments cancelling one another out, the political considerations gained added weight. I was a child of the thirties. I had seen what it could mean for Britain when a resurgent Germany rose from post-war humiliation to bestride a Europe in turmoil. Over the centuries, Britain's fortunes had for better or for worse - and usually for worse - turned on the crises of continental Europe. It was too early to say whether the Community would realise the dreams of its founders and put an end to the threat of Franco-German strife, but it did seem that if Europe were to unite around anything it would be around the Community. Potentially this was the most important grouping in Europe and we could not afford to let it proceed without

us. In its present form it was ill-suited to British interests, but if we wanted to take advantage of it, the only way to do so was to join it as it was and, from inside, proceed with our friends to turn it into something better. That would mean working for more liberal, outward-looking trading policies, for the broadening of the Community by taking in those of our EFTA partners who wished to join and for developing the as yet embryonic process of political co-operation. This, in its essentials, was the policy which I recommended and which was accepted.

WHITHER FROM MAASTRICHT?

Now, as I am writing, Britain has been a member of the European Community for twenty years and, with ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, Europe has moved on from the European Community to the European Union. The debates which raged over Maastricht had many familiar elements, but much has now changed. The British farmers, who had been deeply anxious about Community membership, have prospered mightily, at least in the early years. Trade with our Union partners has flourished, but there is room to fear that in Britain the import trade may have been rather more successful than the export. Large sections of British industry have disappeared onto the scrap heap, though the decline has been offset by the attraction of Britain as a base for Japanese and American firms wanting to serve the enlarged Union. In Germany, the economic miracle has run its course. In the East, Communism has disintegrated, to be replaced variously by democracy, dictatorship and anarchy. Within the Community the habit of political consultation had begun to develop and now, in the Union, it has been formalised.

With so much accomplished, Britain and her partners have to pause for thought about the longer term. Maastricht came at a moment when the centrifugal forces within Europe were beginning to challenge the centripetal. The logic of the Community, as originally conceived, was not merely to heighten Europe's prosperity - an aim to which all could easily subscribe - but to create through economic union such a degree of interdependence as would inhibit any attempt at domination by a single member state. The declared purpose of the Maastricht Treaty is to set the Community on the road to total economic union with a common currency, while at the same time strengthening the element of representative democracy in the European Parliament

and limiting the legislative role of the Community institutions by the doctrine of subsidiarity. If Maastricht is achieved, the economic logic of the Treaty of Rome will have been fulfilled. National governments will have surrendered their right to implement independent economic policies and, with it, a major element of sovereignty. Britain has kept its options open on the final stages of financial union and it will be for your generation rather than mine to decide what is desirable and what is feasible.

You will want to consider whether, quite apart from the provisions of Maastricht, national economic sovereignty has much meaning in today's interdependent world. You will want to consider what you mean by a term such as "national identity". Is there something identifiably British or English or Scottish or Welsh? If so, what is it? Does preservation of it matter to you? If it does, what are the essential powers which must be exercised in Westminster rather than in Brussels or Strasbourg or Frankfurt? Where are the boundaries between economic union, political union and a federal state? You will want to balance the geographical broadening of the Union to embrace not only the EFTA countries but also those of Central and Eastern Europe against the deepening of its functional content. You will want to consider whether in seeking to tighten the bonds between members of the Union you may precipitate just those national and regional pressures which will tear it apart in strife. But against this you will want to consider whether by modelling British policy on the lowest common denominator of unity you risk ending with a Union which is so loose as to frustrate the political objective which we were seeking all those years ago when we decided to join. Will it now be Germany and Britain who take over the Gaullist banner of "Europe des patries", Europe as a grouping of independent states linked by common economic interests, harmonising their foreign policy where they can, but, in the last resort, retaining national sovereignty and national freedom of action? Will Europe be the poorer if the federalist dream of a United States of Europe fades? Only one thing is certain. The European Union is on that awkward threshold between adolescence and maturity. In all the European countries your generation will now take over the great debate. You will elect the men and women who will decide the shape of Europe. We have given a start. We prevented it from being united under German military hegemony and we brought Britain in as a partner in the process of peaceful integration. It is now for you to decide the future course.

But back from 1993 to 1963. With our transitional policies established, we began to work towards an eventual reapplication and, meanwhile, to strengthen Britain's existing relationships within and outside the Community. With our EFTA partners the machinery for co-operation was well-established. With the Community countries we had to make the most we could of the network of bilateral economic committees. More widely, we had to hold together the structure of international trade based on the GATT, the financial structures of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the economic policy co-ordination in the OECD.

During the Brussels negotiations, the pressure of work had been intense. Most Foreign Office Departments can expect the occasional Parliamentary Questions and in times of crisis an extra flurry. We had a relentless stream, tens and at the peak hundreds simultaneously, questioning the consequences of membership of the Community on every aspect of British life and every aspect of our external trading relationships. With the failure of the negotiations, the pressure of work was eased. The need to deal individually with the EFTA and Community countries brought a greater need for overseas travel, but there was also more time for the family, whom I had barely seen for the previous couple of years.

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After seven years in London I knew that a move could not be far off. From time to time I would come home with indications of possible postings, until eventually Margaret said: "Please don't tell me any more possibilities. Just tell me when we are actually going somewhere." Eventually the posting came, to Switzerland as Commercial Counsellor. So it was back to commercial work, but in a country where the commercial relationship was at the heart of the Embassy's work and, as the only Counsellor, I should take charge when the Ambassador was away, so should have the experience which I wanted in running a small independent mission.

SWITZERLAND AND AUSTRALIA

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BERNE

The Embassy in Berne was very typical of the smaller British Embassies in Europe. There was a pleasant modern office building in a reasonably central location and a substantial modern villa for the Ambassador, with the remainder of the staff in various rented flats and houses. In the Commercial Section I was ably supported by Richard Evans, who later became Ambassador in Peking, and by a second secretary as well as a strong supporting staff of locally-engaged employees, each of whom had experience in business and had become a specialist in a particular sector. The old town of Berne had a lot of charm, with its little shops nestling along the arcades leading up the hill to the market square. In that square, I was told, I could see the spirit of Switzerland - the Federal offices, banks and insurance companies, the vegetable market on top of the cobbles and the gold reserves buried underneath. But Berne itself was of marginal importance as a commercial centre, so much of the work of the Embassy was carried out elsewhere in Switzerland and we had the support of strongly-staffed Consulates General in Zürich and Geneva, as well as a Consulate in Basle. The Ambassador, Bobby Isaacson, had been Commercial Counsellor in Washington in my time and the Defence Attache was primarily concerned with the sale of British equipment to the Swiss forces, so in one way or another the whole Embassy was very much oriented towards two tasks, one being the direct support of British exporters and the other the politico-economic work flowing from Switzerland's position as a member of EFTA and as a leading financial centre. There was no question here of commercial work being on the periphery.

The problem then, as now, was to ensure that this substantial expenditure of governmental effort was deployed in ways which would actually boost the sale of British goods. There were standard operations such as providing the names of potential agents, assessing their creditworthiness and securing assessments of the sales prospects both for individual items and for broad ranges of equipment. For this purpose we had a very extensive range of contacts throughout the Swiss commercial

and industrial field. Beyond this bread and butter work were specific requests for items of market information which required individual research, support for trade missions, the organisation of British weeks in the main department stores and participation in specialised trade shows. We could provide the information, we could create the right climate for sales and we could open all the right doors. Whether anything came of it depended not on us but on the British businessman. I remember at a later period, when I was in Australia, being asked by the Foreign Office what I should need by way of extra resources to secure a doubling of British exports. I had, sadly, to reply that no additional resources could enable me to achieve this. It is not the midwife who determines fertility.

In addition to developing and co-ordinating our export promotion strategy in Switzerland, I saw my own role as being to develop contacts at the top level of Swiss industry, commerce and finance and in the Federal Ministries so as to encourage procurement from Britain and to provide the best possible opening for British exporters. This was an easy and enjoyable task in that all doors were open to me and I could normally expect a good hearing. How much I achieved is not easy to judge. Many of my interlocutors were already extremely well informed about the potential of British industry and knew the individual suppliers. I recollect one occasion when I tried to persuade Swissair to install British equipment in their American-built aircraft. They were keen to do so and dealt with British suppliers for galleys and seats. One day two senior executives came to see me in the Embassy and said that they were going to see their British suppliers: "They are very good people and close friends. They make the best equipment in the world. But they are in such a muddle that we have decided that the only way we shall ever get the equipment we need is to go over there ourselves and help them to sort out their affairs."

Yet Swiss industry itself was not uniquely efficient. Many of its methods had an old-fashioned feel and it was something of a mystery to me that it achieved such an impressive reputation as well as such impressive results. On one occasion we helped with the staging of a demonstration of British metrology which made the Swiss engineering standards appear crude by comparison with our ability to measure to a millionth part of a millimetre and to achieve an unparalleled accuracy of spherical measurement. Eventually I concluded that the Swiss had three major industrial

advantages. Firstly, they had achieved excellence in a few highly specialised fields, had exploited this by a variety of means, including a heavy reliance on licensing products and processes which they had developed and had succeeded in spreading this reputation into areas where their achievements were no better than average. Secondly, they enjoyed a remarkably homogeneous society based on a common educational system and common military service, as a result of which there was a team spirit and an absence of industrial strife which was enjoyed by very few firms in Britain. The owner of one of the main department stores, a friend of ours, was on the shop floor every morning, not just as a gimmick, but getting the feel of his operation by personally serving some of his customers. Thirdly, the need to survive had left the Swiss domestic consumer with a profound belief in the superiority of Swiss products as well as an instinct for brutal preservation of the Swiss national interest.

Harold Wilson's Labour government had taken over in Britain in 1964, shortly before I went to Berne, and George Brown was seeking to implement his National Plan. None of this made for great confidence on the part of the Swiss in the prospects for the British economy, which I was doing my best to talk up by taking every available opportunity for public speaking. Our financial situation was, as so often, precarious and the blame was being put on the "gnomes of Zurich" who were believed to be conducting currency operations of the type which have more recently earned George Soros such fame. Doubtless they were taking advantage of any opportunities which they perceived, but I do not believe there was any concerted action against sterling and I found them personally helpful. On one occasion, in the Ambassador's absence, I was in charge of the Embassy and attended a luncheon at which the guest speaker was the Chairman of the Conservative 1922 Committee. He made a speech much of which was devoted to a well-merited attack on the policies of the British government. However well-merited his criticisms, it is inappropriate for a British speaker to use a platform in a foreign country to launch an attack on his own government and improper for Her Majesty's representative to remain on the platform with him. I walked out. I then learned another lesson of diplomacy. Before walking out, make sure you have somewhere to walk to. We were in a country hotel. Reaching the foyer, I realised that my car would not arrive until the scheduled close of proceedings. I had therefore no option but to stand in the foyer until the meeting was over and everyone else emerged, doubtless giving the impression that my departure from the

platform owed more to the weakness of my bladder than to my professional rectitude. It was in Switzerland that I came close to walking out on a second occasion. Together with other senior Foreign Office officials, I was attending a meeting with George Brown. Brown's heart and intellect were in the right place so far as Europe was concerned, but his mouth was liable to let him down. It was late and Brown was, as so often, drunk. He let loose a wholly unmerited torrent of abuse at Sir Edgar Cohen, the gentle, courteous Board of Trade official who was representing Britain at the GATT. On this occasion, however, I was not representing Britain at a public function. I moved to the edge of my chair, but, to my shame, no further and made no intervention.

Despite the handicaps, the three years which I spent in Switzerland were busy and successful. British exports met their targets. In proportion to its size, Switzerland was proving four times as good a market as Germany and better still in comparison with the United States. Whether or not the Embassy's efforts deserved any part of the credit, it was good to be operating in an atmosphere of success.

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A MOVE TO AUSTRALIA

The news of that posting came when the children were all with us for the summer of 1968. I brought the letter from the Foreign Office home and read out the proposal that I should go, on promotion, to Canberra as Deputy High Commissioner, responsible for economic and commercial work throughout Australia.

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CANBERRA

The Australian's vision of himself is that of the tough frontiersman, but the reality of life for nearly half the population at that time was a modest suburban house in one of the sprawling suburbs which stretched for twenty five miles or more around Sydney

and Melbourne or, to a lesser extent, Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane. This essentially suburban nation had found its full expression in the ultimate suburbia of Canberra, the artificial capital created in open country, chosen on the basis of equidistance from Sydney and Melbourne and suitably back from the coast to reduce the threat of naval attack. The design of the capital was undertaken as a result of an international competition won by the Chicago architect Walter Burley Griffin. Burley Griffin was much influenced by Corbusier and his design was like a whole series of Welwyn Garden Cities, with a population of about a quarter of a million spread over more than 100 square miles. In the nineteen-sixties, when we arrived, Burley Griffin's central feature, the lake named after him, had already been created by damming the little stream which ran through the centre of the site, but this was still a capital city waiting for its heart. Many of the Government departments were still housed in temporary buildings and the debate over the location of the Parliament was still raging.

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Life in Canberra felt just as remote from Europe as its location implied. We lived in our clean, comfortable, hygienic British government house, surrounded by the clean, comfortable, hygienic houses of Australian civil servants with their tidy gardens, their patio barbecues and their swimming pools. Under a blue southern sky Margaret played golf at the Red Hill club to the derisory laugh of the kookaburra while I took to jogging each morning and for the first time had some serious tennis coaching. That was how I met the redoubtable John Southwell, the archetypal Australian. I was on the court before him one morning. He ambled up, apologising: "G'day, mate. Sorry I'm late. I've bin to see me farver." "That's all right. How is he?" "Well, e's a funny old bugger. I wanted 'im to come and mend my 'ose." "Oh. Is he coming?" "Yeah. E's comin'. I jist sez to 'im. Git up outer the pit you old fox. Come and mend my bleedin' ose. So e's comin'. Mind you, I could've spoke real nice to 'im. I could've said farver, dear, would you be so vewwy kind as to come and mend my 'ose for me. You know what e'd have said - Go to buggery. Funny like that, my farver is." But John's coaching did some good and with an Australian partner I even managed to secure a plaque for coming as runner-up in the diplomatic tournament. We raced our Seafly on Lake Burley Griffin and in winter we could drive up into the Blue Mountains for skiing. Jean and Alan Roger, our Canadian opposite numbers, with a robust family of sons lived nearby and became close friends. But we yearned for

Europe. Australian national politics were, even by political standards, unstimulating. (Charles Johnston began one of his political despatches: "There are a lot of second rate people in the world and a high proportion of them are engaged in the business of governing Australia"). Internationally, the focus was almost entirely on the Vietnam War. It was like living on a distant planet, a very comfortable planet, from which Europe could be viewed with all the remoteness and unreality of a computer-enhanced image of a far off galaxy.

A GREAT CONTINENT

I do Australia less than justice. Canberra may epitomise Australian suburbia, but, though few Australians may experience life in the outback, it is there. Reality may be beers around the swimming pool, but no man or woman could live in that vast, empty continent with all its potential riches and not experience some firing of the spirit, some feeling that for him or her, too, it is all there for the taking if you are tough enough to grasp it.

The great privilege of my job in Canberra was that, for me it was all there for the taking, all its 3 million square miles, into which thirty countries the size of Britain could comfortably have fitted and still left something over. We had the use of High Commission flats in Sydney and Melbourne, where most of the export promotion work had to be done. I enjoyed Sydney. It was unashamedly brash, but it was alive with a vigour which could make the sophistication of Europe seem stale and irrelevant. Australian mineral developments were exciting much interest at the time. The financial speculators may have been mining more gold than the miners, but there were real and massive investments, in which Britain was playing its part. In an attempt to understand the solid base of the Australian economy, I crossed and recrossed the continent, visiting the great iron ore developments in the Hammersley Range in the far north-west, the goldmines of Kalgoorlie, the lead, zinc and silver of Mount Isa, the coal, the sugar and the beef of Queensland, and the little towns of New South Wales and Victoria which served as local centres for the graziers, the aristocracy of Australian agriculture. There was a national uncertainty about Australia's role, but no matching uncertainty to the individual Australian. Much was typified by the Australian response to the Texan who boasted of his vast ranch where

he could ride for a day and not even reach his own front gate: "Yeah mate, I had a horse like that once."

The underlying commercial relationship between Britain and Australia had been upset by the Common Market negotiations and the influx of new immigrants was diluting the old British links. There was good will at the personal level, but no doubt where Australia's interests lay. I asked the manager of a Vickers subsidiary in Western Australia how he resolved the possible conflict of interest in relation to manufactured items which might be supplied either from the local plant or from the British parent. "Easy, mate. It's bugger Vickers".

One characteristic of the Australian outback was the remarkable ability of Australian drivers to bump into one another. There might be only two vehicles on a hundred miles of dirt road, but if they were going in opposite directions there seemed to be a 50:50 chance that they would run into one another. Our poor battered station wagon bore the marks of such encounters and when Edward Heath decided on the spur of the moment to look in on his way back from the Sydney-Hobart yacht race I had to meet him at the airport with a large sheet of plastic over the ruin of our off-side, testimony to an encounter with an abalone fisherman on a blind bend in Tasmania. In Alice Springs Margaret and I were taken to see the finest house in the area. The owner greeted us on the threshold and pointed with pride to a mosaic of a golden hammer. "That", he said "is the tool of my trade". "Ah, yes", I replied, "Were you a prospector?". "No, a panel beater".

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NUCLEAR POWER

One project in which I was particularly closely involved was the attempt to persuade Australia to base its programme of civil nuclear power reactors on a British design. There were competing designs from Britain, Canada, and the United States, submitted by various international consortia and heavily backed by the respective governments. At that time the leading British competitor was the Steam Generating Heavy Water Reactor. An experimental model was operating successfully at Winfrith and the North of Scotland Hydro Board was considering the construction of a full-scale power

reactor to the same design. It was firmly believed that upgrading of this design would not present substantial difficulty, since it would be based on multiplication of the basic elements, rather than enlargement. The competition was intense and the Australian Government eventually decided to commission a United States company to conduct an impartial evaluation. To our delight the American assessors came out in favour of the British design and it looked as though the deal could be clinched if, at the same time, the Scottish contract were awarded. This was, however, the time when the campaign against nuclear power was already beginning to gather strength and Australian politics led to a decision to defer the whole project. In Britain, the nuclear power industry which, a decade earlier, had seemed ready to lead the world, was in the throes of reorganisation and the SGHW design was abandoned.

NAURU PHOSPHATE

In the course of a diplomatic career one acquires some odd forms of specialised experience. With my Canberra appointment came the need to represent Britain on the Commission which handled the purchase of Nauru phosphate. The island of Nauru was dependent upon phosphate for virtually the whole of its income and the purchase price was agreed by negotiation with Britain, Australia and New Zealand. None of the Nauru phosphate was normally shipped to Britain, but the price obtained for Nauru phosphate established a base price for Ocean Island phosphate. Ocean Island was a British colonial dependency. The island consisted of little but phosphate and its inhabitants, the Banabans, were subject to a very old-style colonial exploitation, receiving only a minimal royalty in exchange for a mining process which was quite literally digging up and removing their island. These minimal proceeds were placed in a trust fund by the British Government and expended on the purchase of an island in the Fiji group to which the Banabans had no desire whatever to be expelled. With these issues I was, however, not involved. My main task, sitting with the tripartite purchasing delegation, was to secure as high a price as possible for Nauru phosphate, in the knowledge that the price would be paid by Australia and New Zealand and at least some minimal benefit would accrue to Ocean Island. In this I was, I thought, successful. I telegraphed to London for authority to sign and received a reply which amounted to "Not yet". It was all very well to say "Not yet" in London, but the negotiations were effectively over. We had a good deal. To refuse to sign would

have left us worse off. The other delegations were ready to leave. So, on the only occasion on which I have acted against a clear instruction, I backed my own judgement and signed, contemplating uneasily the consequences of acquiring on my personal responsibility a one-third share in two million tons of phosphate. Fortunately, the following day, after everyone had left, I received the instruction to sign. I hope the Banabans may have secured some minimal benefit. It was only after I had left Australia that protracted legal proceedings brought a judgement which, to my delight, largely upheld their case, though, by that time, I wonder how much of Ocean Island could have remained for them to enjoy.

The Canberra appointment demonstrated very effectively the way in which commercial and economic work was playing an ever-larger part in British diplomacy. When I arrived, the High Commissioner had two Deputies of ministerial grade, one for political work and the other for commercial and economic. It soon became apparent that there was no worthwhile job for two deputies, so the separate political appointment was scrapped and I assumed the additional responsibility, taking charge of the mission during the absence of the High Commissioner and during the interregnum between the departure of Sir Charles Johnston and the arrival of Sir Morrice James. In this capacity I was fortunate enough to be made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St. George and Margaret and I went, with Jane wearing a rather fine floppy hat, to Government House, to receive the award from the Governor General.

My dual role meant increased contact with the Australian Prime Minister's Department, led by the redoubtable Len Hewitt. Normally Embassies deal with Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but at that time, because the relationship between Britain and Australia was not a relationship between two foreign countries, bilateral matters were handled with the Prime Minister's Department and only matters concerning third countries with the External Affairs Department. I remember how, in one of Britain's recurrent economic crises, I was instructed to inform the Australian Prime Minister immediately of measures which the British Government was about to introduce. The telegram, despatched after lunch in London, arrived around 2 a.m. It required action that night. I telephoned Len at home, hoping that he would decide that it could wait until breakfast. But he was a conscientious official and asked me to

bring it round to his house. I set off in my car. The streets of Canberra are a maze of crescents and circles and avenues, interlacing in a delicately constructed and wholly confusing pattern. I came to the first crossroads and looked at the signpost. It seemed completely bereft of lettering. I blundered on. The next signpost was the same. Eventually, more by luck than navigation I found my way to his house and learned that the signposts were being repainted. The white had been done. The lettering would follow. Len read the message, went back to bed and I retraced my circuitous route.

From my point of view the whole Australian experience was probably healthy in preventing me from becoming excessively Eurocentric. Len was a tough adversary and much of the Commonwealth argumentation over trade matters smacked of special pleading. My heart could not bleed for the woes of the wealthy Queensland sugar producers. I had to recognize that Australia with its German wine producers, its new Greek restaurants and its Japanese mining investments had already moved far from the time when Britain was the mother country for most of its population. In the reverse direction, from the Sun to Neighbours, Australian penetration of Britain may have been something less than an unmixed blessing. But there are still ties which can work to the advantage of both countries and, when the chips are down, there are not many nationalities I would as soon have alongside me as an Australian. I cannot help feeling that in our enthusiasm for Europe we might have done better to cherish a little more the relationship with the Commonwealth countries, even though they themselves did not make it easy.

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Valuable though the Australian experience had been, I was not unhappy when, in the summer of 1971, I received the news that I was to return to London as an Assistant Under-Secretary of State, responsible for commercial and economic questions in the Foreign Office.

FROM THE COD WAR TO THE STASI

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Having handled commercial and economic policy and trade promotion successfully in the United States, Switzerland and Australia, as well as having had responsibility within the Foreign Office first for our broader commercial policy and then for our EEC negotiations, I had a range of experience on that side of the work of the Service which few could match. I suppose that, had I not been lucky in being promoted rather young, I might have been tempted to cash in my experience for a more lucrative job in the private sector. The responsibility of an Assistant Under-Secretary is rather different and in some ways less satisfying than that of a Head of Department, who, if he is good, as he usually is, will establish personal authority within Whitehall for his own policy areas and will be capable of recommending policies in terms which will carry Ministerial support within the Office. The Under-Secretary's role is essentially supervisory and at that time it was weakened by the existence of a double tier of Deputy and Assistant Under Secretaries dealing with economic questions, as well as the Permanent Under Secretary, all standing between the Department Head and the responsible Minister. Given that, in relation to economic and commercial policy, the Foreign Office was rarely the lead Department in Whitehall, this made for marginal involvement in a large number of subjects, with direct responsibility for few of them. The range of work was enough for the Under-Secretaries to concern themselves with different areas, rather than maintaining a straight-line hierarchy, but even so the situation was not one which I greatly enjoyed.

FISH AND OIL

One area of work which fell to me was the Law of the Sea, a subject which might not appear to rank among the more exotic, but which has, over the years, produced a fair harvest of diplomatic business. During my time in London, it came to a head in a major dispute with Iceland, the celebrated "cod war". As a wide-ranging seafaring nation, Britain had consistently sought the maximum freedom of movement for its vessels to fish and to trade throughout the seas and had resisted the pressure of others to extend their territorial waters beyond the classic three-mile range of a shore based

cannon. Already in the fifties a Foreign Office paper had warned, in less than usually felicitous language, of the dangers of "a slippery slope to 12 mile territorial waters". By the seventies, 12 miles had become the norm, but many smaller countries, determined to claim exclusive fishing rights, were seeking a 100- mile limit. This would have impinged with special force on the British trawler fleet which had traditionally fished for cod in the waters around Iceland.

Attempts were made to reach a settlement by negotiation and I began a series of visits to Reykjavik, sometimes as leader of a British team, but usually as adviser to Lady Tweedsmuir, the Minister of State responsible for the negotiations. There was in fact very little to negotiate about. Iceland was adamant on the principle of the 100 mile limit and prepared to discuss no more than a scheme to phase out British fishing completely within a specified period, subject to transitional arrangements for limited operations within certain defined areas for a limited period of time. The British position was that we were ready to accept catch quotas which would apply to all vessels in the area, but would not accept the Icelandic claim to sole jurisdiction out to the 100 mile limit. Eventually we decided to take the case to the International Court of Justice, which ruled in Britain's favour, a ruling which Iceland proceeded to ignore. The effect of a ruling in Britain's favour was, if anything, to make a solution more difficult. With their legal rights fully established, there was even less reason for the British industry to accept any compromise, while Icelandic intransigence reflected the self-righteous belligerence of those who feel the world against them. However, we kept on trying. On one of my Reykjavik visits, the telephone in my hotel bedroom rang as I was shaving. It proved to be the Radio 4 Today programme, asking whether I had brought any new proposals with me. Pausing amid the lathering, not best pleased and unaware that I was on air, I indicated that I was in the middle of shaving and that although I had a very full brief case with me I was not disposed to open it in advance. Only when I returned to London did I learn that the nation had been enjoying my shaving dialogue. Our negotiations became progressively more acrimonious. We were confronted by demonstrators and, indeed, it was in Reykjavik that, for the only time in my career, I received a death threat, from the leader of the improbably named "Scottish Nationalist Party of Iceland".

With no agreement, Iceland announced that it would proceed to enforce the 100-mile limit. In order to permit continued British fishing, it was decided to introduce naval escorts, for which purpose frigates were needed. This was not an easy solution, since the Admiralty were always able to produce charts demonstrating that the operational availability of British frigates at any given time was about -2 i.e. the number of frigates was two less than the number needed to implement existing British commitments. Nevertheless, frigates were provided. The question then arose as to what the frigates should do. A frigate, as one naval authority explained to me, was essentially a package of missiles wrapped in tissue paper. To maintain a frigate permanently on station through the winter in Icelandic waters was an unattractive proposition to the crews involved and the utility of such a course was called into question by the risk that if a frigate bumped into an Icelandic gunboat which was harrying a British trawler, the frigate would probably suffer more damage than the gunboat. On the other hand, it would not be within the accepted rules of the game, as between a large NATO member state and a small, if bellicose, partner, for the frigate to stand off and use its weaponry. After one or two incidents resulting in minor scarring to Her Majesty's ships and rather more pronounced scarring to the Navy's temper, we were forced to conclude that alternative methods were needed. A frigate was kept on station, but for immediate protection of the fishing fleet, we chartered Dutch seagoing tugs, vessels which, by their combination of massive construction and great power, were eminently suited for the kind of dodgem car tactics which had to be employed. Together with Peter Pooley, my opposite number in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I found myself responsible for the day to day conduct of this faintly absurd operation, an unlikely role which produced equal mirth from the family at home and colleagues in the office. Eventually, our persistence paid and a satisfactory agreement was reached in a final discussion at 10 Downing Street between Prime Minister Heath and his Icelandic opposite number. If anything we made too good a bargain, with the result that a few years later it was denounced by Iceland, thereby reinforcing the lesson that the best deals are those which are genuinely balanced and to which both parties are therefore disposed to adhere. When the time came for us to adhere to the common fisheries regime as a consequence of entry into the EEC, I was glad I was not responsible. I could not have stomached that arrangement under which, after conceding to Iceland and Norway their extended

claims to national jurisdiction, we were forced to open the British industry's own waters to our European competitors.

In some ways analogous to the fisheries dispute was the problem of establishing agreed boundaries for the purpose of oil exploration on the continental shelf. The boundary between Britain and Norway in the North Sea had been settled, to my mind on a rather disadvantageous basis, in negotiations conducted by my predecessor. (There is a deep trench close to the Norwegian coast and we might have argued that this was effectively the boundary of the Continental Shelf, on which basis most of the present Norwegian oil would have fallen on the British side. I am by no means sure that such a transparently 'unfair' interpretation of the law could have been sustained, but I suspect that we should have ended up with somewhat more than we actually settled for.) As it was, coming on the scene after this issue had been resolved, I had to take responsibility within the Foreign Office for the negotiations with France. The principles for establishing the boundary between two countries such as Britain and France, sharing a common continental shelf, are reasonably well established by international law and take account of features such as large bays and offshore islands. We accordingly proposed a median line, drawn according to these principles, which, in layman's terms, divided the English Channel by drawing a line down the middle. To this the French negotiators objected on the ground that the most promising area for oil exploration lay to the north of the median line. They therefore proposed that, on grounds of "natural justice", the western end of the line should be swung northwards in order to divide this promising area equally between the two parties. To this we objected, whereupon the French designated the area between the median line and their proposed line, all lying on the British side of the median line, as an "area of dispute." The dispute eventually went to the International Court of Justice which gave half the "area of dispute" to each party, thus proving that it is more profitable to advance a wholly specious claim and abandon half of it than to start out with a reasonable proposition and try to hold to it. As far as I know, however, we lost nothing, since subsequent oil exploration in the disputed area proved fruitless.

It was at this time that the resumed negotiations for British entry into the European Community were in train. This time round I was not personally involved, but, as it began to be apparent that the negotiations would succeed and that we should need to

be ready to nominate officials to serve in the Commission, I was invited to serve on a selection committee which would interview potential candidates. I agreed to do so and asked to see the list of candidates. To my surprise, I found my own name on it as a candidate for appointment as Director-General of External Affairs. I remarked that I could scarcely sit on both sides of the interview table and, very fairly, was invited to choose the side I wanted. It was not an easy choice, since the Brussels job was a plum one and I knew that I should enjoy it. On the other hand, if I were to go to Brussels as I was coming up to 50, it was unrealistic to expect that I could return to one of the top jobs in the British service. Did I really want to spend the rest of my working life as a Eurocrat? Moreover, the job was not in the gift of Whitehall. There would have to be bargaining over the Commission slots which might go to Britain, both at Commissioner level and at Director-General and lower levels, and the outcome was by no means a certainty. So I asked for my name to be deleted from the list of candidates. As it happened, I lost nothing by the decision since the appointment did not go to Britain and I did not sit on either side of the table, since the selection process was delayed until after I had moved on.

All this had a somewhat unsettling effect. Having turned down the chance of Brussels, what were the likely alternatives? I was strong on various kinds of specialised experience, but still had relatively little experience in the basic political work of the service. This was where my interest lay and what I really wanted was a small conventional Embassy of my own. One morning Margaret and I sat over our breakfast and contemplated the possibilities. Since we both spoke German well, a German-speaking post would be ideal, but Bonn was at that stage out of my league and someone was already sitting very contentedly in Vienna. It then occurred to me that, with negotiations in train over Berlin and with the prospect of some kind of relationship being established between the two Germanies, the way might be opening up for appointment of an Ambassador to the German Democratic Republic. I made a discreet enquiry which confirmed that plans were indeed afoot, but that nobody had thought that I should be interested, since I might reasonably have expected within a year or so to go on promotion to a more substantial and possibly more congenial Embassy. However, I persisted and within a few months was told that the job was mine. Preparations could begin, although I could not actually proceed to Berlin until the negotiations between the two Germanies were complete, since it would be

inappropriate for Britain to be represented in East Berlin before the Federal Republic had established its own representation. Those negotiations took rather longer than we had expected and, having given up my London job, I was forced to ask to be allowed to resume it for the greater part of a year. It was not until the spring of 1974 that Margaret and I took the ferry from Harwich to Hamburg en route for Berlin.

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EAST BERLIN

After having spent three years in West Berlin denying the existence of the East German State, it was an odd experience to proceed there as Britain's first Ambassador. So far as Britain was concerned, the city of Berlin was still subject to the quadripartite jurisdiction of the occupying powers. Although we now recognized the existence of the German Democratic Republic, we still did not recognize the legitimacy of its claim that its territory included any part of Berlin. In formal terms, therefore, my office and my residence, like the seat of the head of state to whom I was accredited, would be outside the territory of that state. The three Western powers still exercised the right to free movement throughout the whole of Berlin on production not of passports, but of Military Government identity cards. It was therefore inappropriate for me to make my formal arrival through West Berlin. Our plan was to enter the GDR through a crossing on the Hamburg autobahn and proceed direct to East Berlin without entering the Western sectors. When I was appointed I was told that a Daimler would be provided as my official car and was asked what colour I wanted. I have never been very fond of black and, having seen a rather elegant very dark maroon Daimler, I asked for this. The first time I saw the result was on the quayside at Hamburg where it appeared that a bright red fire engine was drawn up. I was never able to discover what had happened, but at least there was no possibility of the British Ambassador's presence failing to be noticed among the lines of routine black Mercedes.

It was in this vehicle that I was later to go to Schoenefeld airport to greet Mr Brezhnev on his official visit to Berlin. The ceremony was brief. A long line of Excellencies. The great man moved along, being introduced and passing quickly on.

When he reached me it appeared to the onlookers that a conversation was taking place. Gromyko's son was serving in the Soviet Embassy and, curious to know why I had been thus singled out, rushed up as soon as he could to ask what we had been discussing. I had to admit that our conversation turned entirely on the appropriate height for Ambassadors, the Soviet leader having concluded that my modest five feet and nine inches did less than justice to the stature of my country. However, the situation was rapidly restored by the red Daimler. Somehow George, who was driving, succeeded in turning out onto the ceremonial route to the centre of Berlin in advance of the Soviet guest. As we went past a group of onlookers someone must have asked what car this was. We were flying the flag and the answer was "England". Hearing this, others repeated "England". From rank to rank of serried obedient citizenry we drove and from rank to rank, accustomed to organised mass greetings, they took up the cry: "Eng-land, Eng-land, Eng-land". After half a mile or so I thought it might seem discourteous to spoil the reception of the Soviet Head of State and turned off down a side street to let him pass.

The eastern half of Berlin had traditionally been the German seat of government. The scent of power still lingered on Unter den Linden, but it was Moscow's viceroy, the Soviet Ambassador, Yefremov, whose palace confronted my modest office on that imperial avenue. A few hundred yards to the west, the Brandenburg Gate was closed and the ugly scar of the Berlin Wall slashed across the city's face. To the east lay the institutions of the East German state, the foreign ministry, the Presidential palace, the red Rathaus, the windy expanse of the Alexanderplatz and the uniformly regimented apartment blocks which stretched down the Stalin allee eastwards to Moscow and Hanoi.

Our residence lay in the northern suburb of Niederschönhausen. The approach along grey streets of drab apartments was unattractive and the neighbouring tram depot did not add to the amenity of the area, but the four acres of wooded grounds led a certain charm to a rather modest suburban house which had served as a hostel for visiting GDR provincial officials. I was interested and not a little alarmed to find that my request for a slight enlargement of the six-foot square entrance hall and for a downstairs toilet had been generously interpreted. I entered through a newly constructed room of substantial dimensions, floored in black and white checkerboard

marble, from which a flight of marble steps with a gilded handrail led to the house, while off it was not one toilet but a row of six. The whole was labelled on the plans as the "Marble Hall" and I lived in considerable anxiety that some visiting parliamentary group, enquiring about this splendid folly, would be informed that it had been constructed at the Ambassador's specific request.

It was from here that I was to set out a few days later to present my credentials to President Stoph. Driving with a motor cycle escort for seven miles through the heart of Berlin with police holding back the traffic at every intersection, inspecting the guard of honour and proceeding into the Presidential palace, I felt a certain sense of unreality and my mind went back to the time when, at the end of the war, I had turned off the other end of Unter den Linden to enter the ruined hall of the Chancellery, where the unfortunate Neville Henderson had been summoned to Hitler's presence as Britain's last Ambassador in the very different Berlin of 1939. The ceremony over, I returned with the Head of Protocol to the house for a glass of champagne with our senior staff. The conversation turned to recollections of minor mishaps in similar ceremonies which one or other of us had experienced in other capitals. There was the occasion in Budapest when half the convoy of official vehicles had taken a wrong turning; in Vietnam where the Ambassador clad in tropical uniform complete with spiked helmet, had punctured the roof of his car when it went over a bump, but remedied the situation by stopping the convoy and unscrewing the spike; or in Berne when the sole of His Excellency's shoe had come off as he approached the President. Amid the general hilarity, the German official grew increasingly sombre before finally explaining: "I am sorry. I should like to join in, but I cannot. You see, nothing has ever gone wrong here". Not for nothing were we now in the old Prussian capital.

The Berlin appointment proved exceptionally interesting. Politically, everything stemmed from the fact that the GDR Government was wholly dependent on the Soviet Union for its very existence as a state. Here were some 17 million people. In their bones, they were Germans. They might be Prussians, Saxons or Mecklenburgers. But they felt a sense of community as citizens of the German Democratic Republic only in the sense that the British prisoners of war incarcerated in Colditz might have felt themselves part of a Colditz community. The German Democratic Republic existed by virtue of Soviet power and that power was deployed in such a way as to

sustain the principles and practice of Soviet Communism. If it were not for the readiness of the Soviet Union to sustain by force the existence of a Communist state in the eastern provinces of Germany and to shoot those of its reluctant citizens who tried to escape, the infant East German state would crumble and the 17 million would simply reassert their German identity. This, in 1989, was what happened. It was in the belief that it might someday happen that we supported the constitutional principle of a united Germany, but at that time we could see no realistic prospect that it would come about in the foreseeable future. We had therefore to deal with the GDR as it was and to recognize that there could scarcely be any genuine meeting of minds on political matters.

My task was fivefold. While showing to the GDR authorities the courtesy appropriate from an Ambassador accredited to their head of state, I had to sustain, as I had done in West Berlin twenty years earlier, the British policy regarding the special status of Berlin and the rights of the allied powers in relation to Germany as a whole. I had to handle the conduct of day-to-day relations in such a way as to ensure that the British case on international questions, if it could not be accepted could at least be heard and understood. I had to sustain our stance in relation to the human rights of GDR citizens. I had to secure every possible opening for British exporters. In the reverse direction I had to understand and ensure that London understood the economic and political situation in the GDR.

THE STASI

I knew that I should be under constant surveillance by the GDR security authorities, the dreaded Stasi, and it was not long before I received positive confirmation of the efficiency of their operations. Most of my initial courtesy calls on GDR Ministers were paid at the start of the day and I was frequently greeted with a large glass of brandy. After one more than normally generous reception I returned to my office and exclaimed to my secretary: "I simply cannot stand any more of this damned brandy for breakfast". The following morning I called on the Minister of Finance, who remarked: "Delighted to welcome you Ambassador. May I offer you a cup of tea. I gather you are not very fond of brandy for breakfast." I was impressed by the efficiency of the eavesdropping, by the speed with which the product was conveyed to

the appropriate recipient and by the brazen effrontery with which it was played back to me. I returned to Berlin in 1990 after the GDR had ceased to exist and was able to inspect the installation in a carpenter's shed across the road from my old house, where the ducting under the street emerged with cables leading to a bank of tape recorders. The instruments had gone, but the cabling was still in place. So too was the mounting for the video camera and equipment for making up two-way mirrors. I had always assumed that every word spoken in my house or over my telephone could be listened to and that much of it was. But I still shuddered to see the scale of the operation and to imagine the much more complex operation which was mounted against the office.

The eavesdropping campaign conducted against us did not in fact constitute more than a source of minor irritation. Eavesdropping in one's house has five main aims: to obtain from indiscreet remarks by the Ambassador or by visitors from London such information as may expose flaws in British positions or personal points of view at variance with government policy; to secure information on aspects of British policy or operations which the British Government wished to keep secret; to monitor any deviation from the official line or any potential dissidence by GDR nationals invited to the house; to obtain material against the Ambassador or any of his guests which may subsequently be used for blackmail; and more generally to build up those comprehensive personal and policy dossiers which are the foundation of any intelligence operation. Since we had to assume that everything spoken in the house could be recorded, that any lock could be picked and any document read, we had to conduct ourselves accordingly. This was no great hardship. We made the usual jokes about speaking to the chandelier when we wished to put on record some grievance against the authorities. We speculated about the backlog in the transcription service when, after Margaret had been speaking at great length on the telephone, it was cut off for half a day. We laughed about the care with which our wastepaper baskets were emptied. But the constant awareness of surveillance was possibly more of a strain than we thought at the time and, in the caution which it inspired in our conversations with German friends, it probably served a Stasi objective.

Knowing that it was impossible to secure the house against any access by the Stasi, and seeing little advantage in an illusory semi-security, we accepted the employment

of East German staff in the house. Herr Gerhardt and his wife Anni looked after us conscientiously and were no doubt equally conscientious in their duties to the Stasi.

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Accepting the polarisation of our political views, it was possible to have a reasonable working relationship with the senior East German officials, in particular the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade who were my main contacts. They made an oddly contrasting pair, the former Kurt Nier, for the most part cool and correct, the latter Gerhard Beil aping the style of an American businessman as he struggled to develop the foreign trade of the GDR. The Foreign Minister, Oskar Fischer, was an inconsequential figure, an official rather than a politician, cutting no ice in party circles and left to the task of maintaining a superficially amiable relationship with foreign Ambassadors, in the pursuit of which enterprise, wearing your mother's fur hat, he celebrated the Swedish Ambassador's birthday by dancing a can-can. The promotion of British trade required regular visits to the twice-yearly Leipzig fairs, where I would stand with our exporters while they waited in the hope that the Party leader, Erich Honecker, would grace their stand with a visit, provide a photo opportunity and pronounce a blessing on their efforts which might then be seen as the signal for a commercial order. The pale bespectacled, schoolmasterly figure of Honecker symbolised for most people all the evil of a very nasty regime. And nasty it was. Years later, seeing the photographs of him awaiting trial in West Germany I could not say that his fate was undeserved. But I remembered too that this was the man who, in my youth, when some respected British figures were accepting Hitler's hospitality, had gone to prison for opposition to him. This too was the man whom West German leaders had received not so long before with the courtesies due to a national leader. International politics is a funny old trade. I sometimes look back with envy at the years when the line between good and evil seemed clearly drawn and the moral judgements easy.

A PLANNED ECONOMY

I was particularly interested to see how the GDR planning system functioned. After all, if anyone could make sense of a socialist state-run economy, it ought to be the

Germans. Yet even the energy and the discipline of the Prussians could not conjure real prosperity out of this system. The country was reckoned to be the most advanced of the Soviet Union's European satellites, but the statistics were flattered by a fictional exchange rate based on the formal equality of the Eastern and Western marks. The best of GDR industry such as the great Zeiss state within a state at Jena, working for the Soviet defence programme, was competent. But the system failed abysmally to provide prosperity for the ordinary citizen. I asked a leading politician, Manfred Gerlach, for an explanation. His answer was: "Look at this striped shirt I'm wearing. You can't buy a plain white shirt anywhere in the German Democratic Republic. The planners go to the foreign trade fairs, they study the literature and they conclude that striped shirts are the thing. They work out how many are needed. They plan the production lines and the materials and every shirt factory in the Republic sets to work to produce the specified number of striped shirts. There just isn't any plan for white shirts." "But surely they could plan one line to make white shirts?" "You may well say that. But you just have to take my word for it. The system doesn't work that way". This was, of course, only a partial answer. It explained the dullness of consumer products, but not their sheer absence. Nor did it explain why the little towns around Berlin seemed as though they had been growing gradually more shabby and derelict ever since the end of the war. The system, no matter how carefully it was structured or how conscientiously it was administered, might provide basic sustenance but could not create a living, vibrant society.

Gerlach was not in the SED, the Communist Party, but was leader of one of the sister parties. I asked him why. He was young and ambitious. Why take a route which could never lead to the very top jobs? His answer was interesting. The SED was a vast bureaucracy. He would have had to join at the bottom and work his way slowly up through the ranks, with no guarantee of ever reaching the top, whereas, in the Liberal Democrats he might never attain supreme power, but he could rather more quickly reach a position close to the central organs. And this, indeed he had done. Later, watching the Soviet gerontocracy, I understood even better how he must have felt and how this great bureaucracy, a kind of reverse Midas, turned everything it touched to clay.

I think that although most of us recognised the inherently evil nature of the East German regime and the fragility of its hold on the population, we probably tended to underestimate the ease with which, in 1989, it would be swept aside. One felt that the East Germans were like patients who had been incarcerated for half a lifetime in a mental institution. Within its walls, accepting the discipline, they were fed and housed. They had no need to plan for themselves. No need for individual thought. But outside it could they survive? Had their faculties so atrophied that they would crumble under the strain of exposure to the real world? Elderly people would say: "I'd love to go over to the West just for an afternoon's shopping on the Ku'damm. But I don't think I could live there. Too much stress. We've got our flat here and the family are here. Anyway, it's too late. Perhaps if we were younger ..." At the other end of the social scale the bosses of the socialist state lived well, with their hunting lodges, their speedboats on the Berlin lakes and champagne at the opera. Those who endured the system enjoyed mocking it. At a concert in a works canteen near Weimar, I watched an actor come onto the stage, hang out a line of ladies' underwear and, as he did so, sing a mournful little parody of Gretchen's song in Faust: "Meine Ruh ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer. Meine Frau ist geworden Parteisekretär". Finally, as the only means of seeing his wife, he too joined the Party and, triumphant, thought his night had come, only to have her reply "Ach. Wär's nur gestern gewesen. Denn heut' studier' ich die Feuerbach Thesen". In another scene two women came onto the stage and began disputing about whose husband was the more important. Salaries? Numbers of staff? Knowledge of secrets? The argument was clinched with the winning line; "My husband knows the time of the train to Moscow". There was, too, some thoughtful drama. I remember "Die neuen Leiden" a parody of Werther, based on the suffering of a young artist who stifles under a blanket of well-intentioned bureaucracy.

There was a whole class of semi-tolerated dissenters, but it was hard to judge their significance. Stefan Heim, whose novel 'Seven Days in June' was a powerful analysis of the 1953 revolt, asked for my help in smuggling an English translation out of the country in the diplomatic bag. I could not help him directly, but gave an alternative suggestion which I believe he followed. Certainly he succeeded. An interesting character whom I chanced to meet was John Peet. He had been a Reuter correspondent in West Berlin many years earlier, had fallen in love with an East

German girl and had moved to the East, where he was given the job - which he did very well - of producing a little propaganda leaflet called German Democratic Report. As a side-line, he would take on bit parts when an English gentleman was required for a film. When I met him, German Democratic Report had been closed down as an economy measure and he was engaged in a book on the correspondence of Karl Marx. With great glee he told me that his researches had brought to light a letter in which Marx's Scottish mother-in-law pointed out that her daughter's life would be much easier if only Karl would stop writing so much about capital and instead try to make a little. One had to assume that all contacts with GDR citizens would be monitored by the Stasi and could be exploited at will. In this way the Stasi did in fact achieve a worthwhile success in their policy of reducing the foreign diplomatic community to the role of ornaments to the prestige of the GDR Government. What they could not do was to isolate their own people from foreign influence, above all through exposure to Western radio and television; it was this which so effectively sapped the foundations of the regime that, at the right time, a small push brought the whole structure down.

One day I came into the office after lunch and was greeted by one of the secretaries who said: "A visitor has just been here. He asked for the information officer, but I said he was not in. He didn't seem worried. He just left this note for him". I took the note. It was brief and to the point. "One of your Ambassadors is going to be kidnapped. If you would like to know who it is, this will cost you £5,000. That may seem a lot of money, but it will cost you much more if he actually is kidnapped. If you would like to know who it is, meet me in the bar of the Hotel Unter den Linden at 6 o'clock. P.S. I am a black man." All the secretary could add was that the visitor was indeed black and that he seemed totally calm. I decided to consult London and crossed over to the Military Government Headquarters in West Berlin to make a secure telephone call. There were really two issues: whether to follow up the approach and whether to tell the East German authorities. We concluded that both should be done. I tried to inform the GDR Foreign Ministry, but it was about four o'clock on Friday afternoon and nobody was around, so I told them not to worry and said that I would contact the Stasi direct. This immediately produced a meeting with a Deputy Foreign Minister. I told him that I had no fear of any attempt to kidnap me, but that it could be that our informant had heard of a plan which was being hatched

against some other British representative and that I intended to send someone to the Hotel to meet him. A junior member of the Embassy staff accordingly went to the hotel. He found the bar full of black men. Studying them carefully, he eliminated those who were busily engaged with the local ladies and came down to a pair who were sitting morosely over their beers. Taking a chair at the same table, he waited. With no apparent interest evinced, he said, a propos of nothing: "Hullo. I'm the information officer at the British Embassy". "Uh. Huh" was the reply. And they continued drinking. Abandoning the effort he returned to the Embassy and I went back to the Residence which by that time was surrounded by a large contingent of the GDR army. It took me the next two days to persuade the authorities that I did not feel in any need of protection. But it was shortly afterwards that a British Consul was kidnapped in Asmara and I concluded that probably our informant had been genuine. Perhaps we had been wrong to tell the Foreign Ministry. Our informant may well have been a trainee terrorist and I could only hope that the Stasi had not picked him up outside the hotel before we got there.

Reading through these recollections of East Berlin, it is depressing to see how many of my memories reflect an awareness of the brooding presence of the Stasi. This does them more than justice. For they were not, in truth, a major feature of our life. Living only a mile or so from the Wall and with freedom to pass at will between East and West, we were largely freed from the pressure of life in a police state and with West Berlin for all our shopping we were totally free from its privations. To move at night from the dark, quiet streets of the East, through the Wall, where rabbits played among the barbed wire and the tank traps, to the froth, the glitter and the human trash round the Zoo station was to experience in all its sharpness the total contrast between two civilisations.

Our weekends were spent largely exploring the GDR. It happened that the neutral Ambassadors from Austria, Switzerland and Sweden shared our enjoyment of walking in the countryside and we would go as a group on long rambles through the woods and fields and lakes which surround Berlin. Professionally, however, our closest colleagues were the French and American Ambassadors and Gunter Gaus, the representative of the Federal Republic, with whom a common policy basis was reinforced by personal friendship. With my Russian colleague there was little

common ground. As the Soviet representative with responsibility for quadripartite matters affecting Germany as a whole, his counterparts were the Western Ambassadors in Bonn and his relationship with the GDR Government was more akin to that of a viceroy than an Ambassador. It was traditional to celebrate the anniversary of the end of the war in Europe with a major ceremony at the Soviet war memorial and this was normally attended by representatives of the East German Government, while Ambassadors of the allied powers were relegated to a minor position. When Abrassimov succeeded Yefremov as Soviet Ambassador, I expected that the practice would continue, but to my surprise no GDR representatives were present. Having laid his wreath Abrassimov ostentatiously turned to myself and my French and American colleagues with demonstrative greetings on the occasion of "our" celebration. He had not forgotten what the German army had done to Russia and to his own family.

WARSAW AND PRAGUE

While in Berlin Margaret and I took the opportunity to pay a brief visit by train to Warsaw. We travelled in a compartment with two East German businessmen who, wholly unaware of our identity, entered into a lively discussion of the awfulness of the Poles. "This used to be the loveliest part of Germany. Now look what they've made of it. One horse, one cow, one cat - and they call it a collective. I've got a few bottles of good German beer and that's going to last me for a couple of days. None of that filthy Polish food." So much for fraternal socialist solidarity. We had the obverse of the coin on a later visit when we travelled back by car from Vienna to Berlin through Prague. We reached Prague in the golden sunshine of a warm autumn afternoon. We planned to stay only long enough for brief sightseeing, but needing a little local currency, went to an exchange booth and, asked for proof of identity, rashly spoke German and produced GDR diplomatic cards. The response, at mere sight of the GDR emblem, was a torrent of abuse: "You damned Germans. Coming here and wanting money. Don't you know you are supposed to get it before you leave?" A hasty display of British passports produced an immediate apology, a welcome and the necessary currency. We might have saved ourselves the trouble. Prague at first sight, with the sun bringing out the warm colour of the stone, was superb. On closer inspection, the golden stone was crumbling, the windows were grimy and behind them were only the miserable consumer products which we knew

from Berlin. By early evening we were on our way, planning to take the direct road to Berlin and spend the night somewhere just across the GDR border. It was not to be. The old inns and hotels existed. But they were dark and shuttered. Not a bed to be had. We pressed on, finally reaching Berlin in the small hours.

It had been a salutary journey in many ways. Physically it had driven home the reality of the short direct route from Berlin through Dresden and Prague to Vienna and brought to mind all the history that was bound up in that route. Emotionally it had taken my mind back to that autumn day when I had watched with disgust the television image of Chamberlain after the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich. As we marvelled at the crumbling glory of that golden stone, I could not help thinking how Prague, betrayed, raped and impoverished, had survived; while Warsaw, for which we had waged an honourable war, had seen its ancient heart devastated, its citizens murdered by the million and its land laid waste by German and Russian alike; and the terrible price which Dresden had paid for Nazi evil. As you consider today the horrors of Bosnia, you may, with all the clear conviction of youth, see absolute right and wrong. So you should. You cannot build a worthy life on moral equivocation. But give a thought for an older generation whose hesitations flow from a consciousness of the personal grief which can flow from righteous policies based on strong moral convictions.

MANAGEMENT OF THE SERVICE

Before I left for Berlin, the suggestion had been made that I might next take over as Chief Clerk and it was to this appointment that I returned in the summer of 1976. The Head of the Diplomatic Service is the Permanent Under-Secretary, but the post with the ancient title of Chief Clerk, dating back to the days when all those serving in London were Foreign Office clerks, is held by a Deputy Under Secretary who takes responsibility for all aspects of the management of the Service. Once, when asked to explain it, I said that I was the garage mechanic. The Secretary of State decided the destination, the Permanent Under Secretary drove the car and my job was to make sure that the engine ran smoothly. The structure has changed somewhat since my day, but at that time I had responsibility for seventeen departments, falling into two main groups and supervised by two Assistant Under-Secretaries. The first covered the classic management area of Personnel and Establishments, Finance, Accommodation, Communications, Security and Training, together with the Inspectorate. The second, functional rather than administrative in character, dealt with Consular, Visa, Passports and Claims. The Diplomatic Service is its staff. The whole purpose of the management group of departments was to administer that staff. There were upwards of 2,000 of them in London and another 3,000, together with some 8,000 local staff, were scattered through 120 countries, in posts ranging from the Washington Embassy to the Consulate in Libreville. To run this service cost at that time very roughly £200 million a year. This may sound a lot, but to put it into perspective we were about 1% of the whole Civil Service.

When I joined the former Foreign Service in 1947, the reforms instituted as a result of the wartime White Paper by Anthony Eden were beginning to be implemented under Ernest Bevin. Their purpose was to create a new unified Foreign Service, dealing with foreign countries, but not with the Commonwealth countries or the Colonies. The new Service embraced the former Diplomatic Service, the home-based Foreign Office staff, the Consular Service and the Commercial Diplomatic Service. Throughout three decades that Service had evolved. It had also expanded mightily as a result of the merger with the Commonwealth Service and the absorption of residual Colonial Office responsibilities. As the number of independent countries multiplied

and the problems grew exponentially, so did the complexity of Diplomatic Service work. To the classic issues of peace and war and the protection of British interests abroad were added new tasks involving an understanding of subjects such as the technology of nuclear weaponry or the economics of space programmes. Staffs and budgets grew too. But Britain's resources did not. Commitments and resources had, by some means or other to be brought into balance. It was due to the success of my predecessors and their political masters that those strains were to a quite remarkable extent contained. Year by year, as the inspectors toiled their way around the world, savings were made, establishments were rationalised, waste was eliminated, resources were released for new commitments, conditions of service were maintained or improved and techniques of management were brought slowly from the erratic excellence of nineteenth century amateurism in a narrow field to the competence of twentieth century professionalism over a wider field. With all that, some things were lost. When I joined the Service it was still in many ways a family, a family which had perhaps a larger than average share of eccentrics and a smaller than average share of black sheep, a family which had its feuds and its jealousies, but one which was still bound together by ties stronger than those which can be formulated in establishment codes and one whose members felt themselves under a very real obligation to serve their country as best they could wherever they might be sent. We tried to maintain the good features of that family spirit and at the same time to break down the sense of exclusivity which, at its worst, had the potential to set the Service apart from the people whom it existed to serve. But as the Service was broadened and deepened, so it was bureaucratised. In a sense I had been a part of that process when I joined in the initiative to form a Diplomatic Service Association. I believed that step to be necessary, but I regretted the circumstances which made it necessary.

THE CPRS REVIEW

Over the years, the Service had been subjected to two major reviews. In 1962 a committee under Lord Plowden had examined British Representational Services Overseas and had produced a very positive and helpful report, as a result of which the former Commonwealth Service and the Trade Commissioner Service which operated in Commonwealth countries had been merged with the Foreign Service to form a single Diplomatic Service responsible for the totality of British overseas

representation. In 1969 a committee under Sir Val Duncan, an industrialist, had carried out a similar examination and, like Plowden, had produced a broadly favourable report. By 1976 the Service felt that it had had more than enough investigation and inspection. What it wanted was to settle down and get on with its job. Unfortunately, the Government's newly appointed Central Policy Review Staff, led by Sir Kenneth Berrill, was looking for subjects to review and picked enthusiastically upon the Diplomatic Service. So it was that in January 1976, shortly before I took over as Chief Clerk, the Review Staff were given the remit they wanted to conduct yet another examination of the Service. Against this background, at the time when I took over, the Service was in a somewhat tense and unhappy state. The economy was suffering from the runaway inflation caused by the oil price increases and the balance of payments was in heavy deficit. James Callaghan, who had been a respected Foreign Secretary, had taken over as Prime Minister from Harold Wilson and Anthony Crosland had become Foreign Secretary. The decision to undertake the CPRS Review brought into the open a whole array of pressures and prejudices. There was the old resentment, never completely stilled, at the very existence of the Service as a distinct body, separate from the Home Civil Service. There was resentment at the structure of allowances which, it was felt, made the Diplomatic Service a privileged class, out of touch with the pressures experienced by the bulk of the British people. There was resentment at the selection procedures which, it was argued, resulted in a Service staffed by Oxbridge arts graduates, over-decorated with honours and unrepresentative of the country as a whole. There were arguments that export promotion work should be conducted by seconded businessmen rather than diplomats. There were those who felt that in its policies the Service was geared to a concept of foreign policy which had been appropriate to Britain when it was a world power, but which was out of scale with the realities at a time when Britain's responsibilities had to be trimmed to match its resources as a struggling medium-rank power. On the other side of the coin, the Service had its own frustrations. It was felt that not enough account was taken of the heavy responsibility which members of the service accepted in being ready to move at short notice to any part of the world, of the sacrifice made by wives who were expected to give up independent careers in order to play their part, unpaid, in the representational work of Embassies. There was growing irritation at the seemingly endless process of reducing staffs and trimming rewards, while imposing new burdens of work.

There was some force to both the external criticism and the internal grievances. The Service had been undergoing a major evolutionary process throughout the whole period from the introduction of the Eden reforms. We could not stand still. What we needed was to take stock and plan the course ahead. As Chief Clerk, this would have been my objective. What happened, however, was that the CPRS review was conducted in such a way as to lead to a polarisation of opinion. The preparation of the Report was largely in the hands of Tessa Blackstone and Kate Mortimer, both of whom have subsequently attained a degree of distinction which properly reflects their intellectual ability. Twenty years ago that ability was harnessed to a degree of youthful energy, a reforming zeal and a scepticism about established practices which are valuable, indeed necessary, if an external report is to have any value. Sadly, however, it quickly appeared to many members of the Service that crusading zeal had gained the upper hand over realistic assessment; that the outcome was prejudged; and that the process of research and analysis was designed to lead as quickly as possible to preconceived conclusions. The reaction from a Service which was proud of its ability and achievements was a determination to repel by any means possible what was perceived as an unfair and dangerous attack. So, what might have been a constructive exercise became a sharp conflict. A colleague, Andrew Stark, who was serving as Ambassador in Copenhagen, was appointed to co-ordinate the response of the Service. A doughty, hard-headed fighter who knew well how the Service was run, he did a magnificent job. The Berrill case was overstated and was largely countered by evidence from those who knew and valued the work which the Service performed.

The CPRS Review occupied the greater part of my time as Chief Clerk and although it produced some sensible changes, such as greater interchange between the Diplomatic Service and the Home Civil Service, I would not say that, on balance, it did much to help the evolution of the Service. I shall not weary you with all the detail of it. There are few easier ways of boring a younger generation than for an old man to recount every detail of his old battles. But some of the issues are of long-lasting significance for the conduct of Britain's relations with the rest of the world. They matter not just to those who are engaged in the business of diplomacy, but to all the people of this country. So let me just put down some of the things you may like to consider if you have some day to join in the debate.

I take the criticisms under four broad heads:

Is the principle of a unified and separate Diplomatic Service right? Or should its core staff be cut back and many of its functions be performed by members of the Home Civil Service, independent agencies or recruits from the private sector?

Is the recruitment policy right? Are the senior levels of the Service occupied by an unrepresentative elite?

Is the Service trying to do too much and consequently too big for the country's needs?

Are the members of the Service pampered in terms of material rewards?

A SEPARATE DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

On the question of maintaining a separate Diplomatic Service, you have to consider whether there is something special and peculiar about overseas representation. Is there a distinct skill which means that someone who has been Ambassador in Tehran will make a better Ambassador in Washington than someone who has been a member of the House of Lords or an Economics Editor of The Times? Is export promotion in Moscow done better by someone whose last job was that of export manager for an engineering firm or by someone who has come from the Russian desk in the Foreign Office? Surely the answer ought to be that it depends on the man or woman in question. I have known an economist make a sorry mess of the Washington Embassy; someone from the car industry make a success of the commercial job in Moscow; and an ex-diplomat make a successful banker. In the highest reaches of many professions, the excellent will be distinguished from the competent not by their mastery of technical skills but by qualities of perception and judgement, by a sense of timing and by the ability to evaluate character and to inspire colleagues, qualities which are of universal applicability. I believe that British interests would be better served if those engaged in diplomacy, the civil service, industry, finance and the armed services could get out of the habit of peering out at the world from behind the battlements of professional privilege and see themselves more as members of one team. This is something which I believe the French and the Japanese do rather better than we do.

In short, I believe in interchange. But, that said, you cannot make everyone interchangeable. (Before Berrill came on the scene we already had arrangements under which someone from industry, trade or finance would come into diplomacy for a couple of years or so in exchange for one of our people and we needed to expand this, but oddly enough the main difficulty came from those outside the Service, who were anxious that when the time came to return to their own firm, they would find that their contemporaries had moved ahead of them into the best jobs.)

Diplomacy is a profession in its own right. It has its own skills and, on the whole, those who have been trained in it ought to be able to do it better than those who have not. On the whole, you do not pick a butcher as a brain surgeon and your mother, a doctor, would not claim particular expertise in the anatomy of the Christmas turkey. In a team, we accept that one is a bowler, another a batsman and another a wicketkeeper. It is for each to hone his own professional skill, but I would expect those engaged in diplomacy to be capable of holding a sharp catch as well as playing a straight bat and delivering the occasional googly. The men and women who staff a professional diplomatic service must represent their country in all its aspects and this is difficult if they have never moved outside their own profession or their own sector of British life. What is needed therefore is a distinct, but broadly based profession, with a broadly based recruitment policy - to which I shall turn in a moment - and a comprehensive exchange programme.

There is a further point which is relevant to the maintenance of a separate Diplomatic Service, covering all aspects of the country's overseas representation. If you want an efficient service, it must be a flexible service. You must be able to find at short notice a Japanese speaker with commercial experience for Tokyo or an experienced trade negotiator with fluent French and German for the Community representation in Brussels. For some of these jobs you will be able to recruit from outside the Service. We did so and we were often able to place in the Home Civil Service those of our members who, for one reason or another, could not sustain the obligation to world-wide service. This is all to the good, but you will not get an efficient service if the career diplomats who accept the obligation of world-wide service find themselves in Ouagadougou, Yaounde and Sanaa while specialists from the Home Service or the private sector cherry-pick their way into Paris, Washington or Brussels. There are

those who will argue that life is not meant to be fair and that to try to introduce this concept into management is to espouse the philosophy of Buggin's turn. They may be right. The United States pursues a different policy which has produced first-class professionals who have had to stand by while political appointees - some of them first class, others, well, less so - take the major Embassies. All I can say is that as Chief Clerk I thought it wrong that those who, with their families, accepted a commitment to service in posts which were remote, uncomfortable, unhealthy and sometimes downright dangerous should not have an equal chance of serving in the major missions in pleasanter cities. I tried to run the service fairly and I think it was none the less efficient for that. There was force to the argument that some members of the service led a charmed 'inner circle' career while others laboured unnoticed in faraway countries. Michael Palliser and I made a point of visiting as many posts as possible, especially the harsher and remoter ones, meeting those who were serving there and ensuring that they were not forgotten by the administrative departments in London. You may some day have to make your own decisions in your own professions. When you do, remember how much the efficient functioning of any organisation depends on those who do the unglamorous jobs. Make sure that their work is properly regarded and properly rewarded.

RECRUITMENT POLICY

What about recruitment policy? This is still hotly debated. On the face of it the Service still has too high a proportion of Oxbridge arts graduates. But the selection process was impartially administered by the Civil Service Commission. We were not looking for social graces. We were looking for a good brain, a sound judgement, a sturdy character and a perceptive intellect and these are not unique to Oxbridge. It is said that like tends to recruit like. But with my educational history I could scarcely be accused of an instinctive preference for Oxbridge. In fact we did all we could to encourage candidates from the broadest possible range of universities and academic disciplines, but we never found as many non-Oxbridge or non-arts as we wanted among the successful. I think that the main reason why we had relatively few high quality applicants with a scientific background was that, naturally enough, they tended to prefer careers more closely linked to their own specialisation. For a specialised job such as a scientific attaché, we had to have a scientist, but I do not

think we could usefully have introduced discrimination in favour of scientists or non-Oxbridge candidates as part of our general recruitment policy. Nor do I think we should have lowered our standards. I had a study made of those who after ten years or so were showing exceptional promise and those whose careers were beginning to fail. It was not surprising that the former had done well in the entrance examination. What was interesting was that 85% of the latter proved to have been borderline candidates at the examination, upgraded by a charitable final board. This suggested that any lowering of standards would have left us with a greater proportion of men and women whose careers would prove disappointing both to themselves and to the service. It was argued by some that the Service was recruiting too high a proportion of the national ability. Perhaps we were. But my job was to ensure that we recruited the best we could; if more of the nation's talent was needed elsewhere then it was not for the Service to reject them, but for others to attract them; and this, by its cash incentives, industry frequently did.

Oxbridge or not, I would not have wanted to pass into the Service any candidate who, by his performance in the two day interview process, showed himself to be out of touch or out of sympathy with the reality of life in Britain. Political impartiality is another matter. We were not looking for political eunuchs, but a member of the Service will need to work loyally for political masters of different persuasions. I believe we did, but I never objected to the importation of the occasional political adviser outside the career structure. There is a duty of impartiality on the professional, but a politician can very properly want to test the professional's advice by reference to someone who shares his own political instincts.

THE SCOPE OF BRITISH DIPLOMACY

The question of the scope of British diplomacy is more difficult. It may be argued that with the loss of an imperial role, reduced economic power and the decline in external defence commitments, the scope for British diplomacy is greatly reduced. Against this it is argued that reduced resources require, if anything, a greater reliance upon diplomacy to secure national interests. Certainly Britain's role in the world and the work of the Service have been constantly adapted to meet changing national interests. To take only two examples, European Community membership has added a

whole new dimension and the increasing concentration on export promotion has brought both a new burden of executive work and a reorientation of priorities. Nevertheless, by comparison with other similar sized powers, our role in international affairs, though shrinking, has been greater than our means might have indicated. Have we been right to sustain it? One must discount the attraction which international affairs have for politicians who enjoy all the glitter and the excitement, finding it flattering and sometimes domestically useful to cut a dash as international statesmen - or stateswomen. But Britain does still command a degree of respect in international gatherings which others would be glad to enjoy. We are in a position to influence the outcome in many of the world's trouble spots as well as in areas of vital interest. In such situations a modest expenditure on diplomacy may help to avoid much greater subsequent cost. We have to be realistic in our ambitions and to deploy our effort in concert with our allies, but I was glad that when the Berrill report was debated the weight of opinion was in favour of maintaining our capacity for global coverage.

MANAGING RESOURCES

The role which Britain plays in world affairs is, of course, determined by ministers. They should reflect the views of Parliament and Parliament should reflect the wishes of the people. The role of the Diplomatic Service in this process is to ensure that Ministers are fully and accurately advised on the foreign policy options open to them as well as the implications of their decisions and, when those decisions have been taken, to ensure that they are effectively implemented. A responsible Diplomatic Service should not recommend policies unless these are within the resources which Britain can realistically make available, but with those resources once determined, the management of the service must ensure their effective deployment and, if the policy requirements exceed the resources, must indicate how the two may be brought into balance. In my time, for instance, if the major Embassies were to be kept at full strength, it was necessary to consider options such as a reduction in the availability of consular services for tourists or the merging of posts in some of the smaller third world countries. Today, there is a need to find extra resources to staff missions in the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union. To have no representation in, say, Kazakhstan would be to reduce British influence in an area of political and commercial importance. There is a constant search for savings through higher

efficiency. Before setting out to inspect posts abroad or departments in London, the inspectors would be briefed on policy requirements for the posts they were to visit and on their return their recommendations would be analysed by the responsible departments before decisions on implementation were taken. The governing principle was the effective use of resources. The most important resource was staff and it was important not merely to ensure that staff were effectively deployed, but also that the working and living conditions were such as to sustain their morale. The inspectors were not simply looking for savings, but year by year, while I was Chief Clerk and for many years before and after that, we were obtaining efficiency savings of 1 to 2% a year. There are few organisations in Britain, whether governmental or private, which could match the Diplomatic Service in terms of consistent year-on-year productivity gains. In the last resort, however, resources for new operations may have to come from a reduction of operations elsewhere. This constant balancing of needs and resources required co-operation between the functional departments which established the needs and the Chief Clerk who managed the resources.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Was the Service pampered? When I was a new entrant I listened to a talk by Harold Nicholson, in which he said: "As a member of the Diplomatic Service, you will never be rich. But you will always be able to live as though you were". This had an element of truth to it. Certainly the Service salary was not one to grow rich on. In London, one lived if anything at a lower level than members of the Home Civil Service who were able to organise their lives on a static rather than a mobile basis, whereas abroad one was able to live at a higher standard than one's counterpart in London. In part, as I have indicated elsewhere, this reflected a real need to carry out representational duties in one's own home and in part it probably reflected the fact that most countries find they have to give expatriate staff some privileges to offset the undoubted disadvantages. The specific privileges of the Service such as payment of boarding school education and holiday journeys to a parent's overseas post or payment of medical and dental expenses overseas were no more than the minimum needed to remove what would otherwise have been a major loss. If you doubt what I say about these so-called privileges, ask your mother about her own experience. Moreover, year by year the Treasury and the Civil Service Department had done their

best to nibble away at DS conditions of service, while the unions and the administration had done their best to preserve what was necessary and to remedy the deficiencies. The net effect was that the level of reward received by the senior branch of the Service was well below that which its members could have commanded in the private sector; as indeed those who, wearying of slow promotion and niggling economies, were able to demonstrate by opting out. No, I do not think we were pampered. I would say that, wouldn't I. But Parliament, when it came to consider the CPRS report, took much the same view.

APPOINTMENTS POLICY

The whole process of the CPRS Review and its subsequent consideration by the House of Commons Expenditure Committee took up most of the period during which I was Chief Clerk. The fact that it ended with the main criticisms of the Review rejected and the Service vindicated was satisfactory, but it was all a terrible waste of time and money which could have been better spent. During that time, the normal process of running the Service had to continue and it was fortunate that I was able to devote myself to this while Andrew Stark took care of the CPRS. I will not weary you by recounting the minutiae of administration, but you may like to know how appointments were made. Things had moved on a long way since my first appointment to Batavia. By 1976 there was a well-established system of training. Every member of the Service was expected to have a reasonable degree of linguistic ability, but those who showed exceptional promise were given the opportunity to train in a hard language, after which they might expect to spend perhaps one-third of their career in a post where that language would be used, the remaining two-thirds being divided between London and other overseas posts. There was also basic training for new entrants and for those who were in mid-career, with a growing emphasis on training in management. Appointments would be recommended by the Personnel Department on the basis of qualifications, taking account of the accumulated annual reports on each member of the Service; the career plan for the individual concerned; and the family circumstances. Our reporting system was confidential and thorough. From an accumulation of reports from different posts over a period of years it was possible to form a very good picture of an individual's strong and weak points - and also of the idiosyncrasies of individual reporting officers. But there was a general

rule that no posting could be arranged by a single person on the basis of written reports. With the members scattered throughout the world, it was important to ensure that those who were in remote corners were not overlooked, so all recommendations were considered by committees and we hoped that on each committee there would be at least one member who knew each of the individuals under consideration. In the case of the most senior appointments, I made recommendations to a Board of Under-Secretaries, chaired by the Permanent Under Secretary. Before putting forward recommendations, I would discuss them with the Minister of State responsible for personnel matters. The Board's recommendation would then be submitted for approval to the Foreign Secretary, who was the final authority but would give the Prime Minister an opportunity to comment before the appointment was confirmed.

The system ran into difficulty when David Owen was appointed as Foreign Secretary. He came to the Foreign Office with no understanding that it was possible for a Minister and a Department to work together as a team. Previous experience of Whitehall seemed to have left him with a belief that officials, rather than implementing a Minister's policy, would seek to subvert it and that this subversion could only be countered by a kind of counter-subversion against his own officials. I was reminded of him when I heard Sir Geoffrey Howe commenting on Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet, where the captain sent the opening batsmen onto the field, having first broken their bats. The worst example which I encountered was Owen's decision to remove Peter Ramsbotham from Washington and to appoint Peter Jay in his place. Peter Ramsbotham was an exceptionally able and upright member of the Service, a total professional, in his mid-fifties. Jay, with a first in PPE had experience in the Treasury and then in the media, was just forty, a man of considerable intelligence with an attractively open personality, but no experience of diplomatic work. There was no fault to be found with Jay's ability and, personally, when I first met him, I liked him. But this was not a sensible appointment. Nor was it fair to Ramsbotham. Owen, arrogant as ever, was adamant. It was the only occasion in my career when I considered resignation. As Chief Clerk I felt that my loyalty to the Service outweighed my loyalty to the Minister, but to Owen my departure would be no more than the removal of a tedious official and if I were to go and he to stay what good would that do? So I did my best to mitigate the damage, finding another appointment for Ramsbotham, with consequential moves for one other High Commissioner and

one Ambassador, and selecting a career officer whose talents and temperament would, I hoped help him both to work well with Jay and to complement his abilities. Let it suffice to say that despite our efforts, the result was to do unnecessary damage to the functioning of the Washington Embassy and to the careers of several loyal members of the Service. Owen, of course, went into the political wilderness where he seems to have matured while still young enough to bring his considerable ability to bear in the national interest.

TERRORISM

In the late seventies, diplomacy the world over had become a more dangerous profession. We had traditionally thought of security as meaning protection against hostile intelligence services, but more and more we had to consider it in terms of the physical protection of Ambassadors and their staffs against the organised violence of direct terrorist attack or the casual danger of being caught in other people's conflicts. The safety of the Embassy in Beirut, operating virtually in the middle of a war zone, was a matter of constant concern. Fortunately the Ambassador there, Peter Wakefield, remained unscathed. Others, however, were less fortunate. Two died in planned attacks directed specifically against them. Christopher Ewart-Biggs had just been moved on promotion from Paris to Dublin and the security of his residence and his office had been the subject of special consideration, but it is hard to see how any reasonable precaution which the British Government might have taken could have prevented the detonation of a bomb placed in a culvert under the road as the Ambassador's car passed over it. It was not an easy task to appoint someone to succeed him, but Robin Haydon, who was at that time serving in Malta, accepted the appointment and I went to Dublin shortly afterwards to look at the security arrangements. I felt for him and his wife as we sat over dinner in the big grey house, ringed with wire and drove with him in the bullet-proof car where the risk of collision gave him more concern than the risk of a bomb. There was a special sadness to the murder by the IRA of Richard Sykes; he had understandably preferred The Hague to Lagos, which would have carried promotion, as his final post and it had certainly not occurred to us that he would be subject to any special danger there. These were exceptional cases, but in less dramatic ways there were many members of the Service and their families who had to accept the constant threat to their own life and the strain

which security restrictions imposed on their families. We owed it to them to do all we could to give them not only physical security, but also those minor amenities which make life more tolerable.

TIME FOR A MOVE

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There came a need for a decision about my final post. Arranging a posting for the Chief Clerk, who is himself responsible for putting forward all the senior appointments, is a delicate business. As a first step, Michael Palliser, the Permanent Under-Secretary asked me for my own ideas. It ought, he said, to be a Grade 1 post. The calculation was not too difficult. It does not make sense to send someone as a senior Ambassador to a post where he will stay for less than three years. This meant that, with my sixtieth birthday in 1982, we could sensibly consider only those posts which could be expected to become vacant around 1979. It did not take long to reduce the list to two, Ottawa and Moscow. For a moment I hesitated. After having spent two years dealing with an essentially hostile regime in the GDR I was tempted by the idea of a post where I could expect to be broadly in sympathy with the Government and the people. The hesitation did not last long. Moscow was the post I had wanted when I joined the service thirty years earlier. Many of the world's problems still came down to the underlying threat presented to the Western democracies by the combination of Communist ideology and Soviet imperial power. "Let's make it Moscow." I said. Accordingly the necessary processes were put in hand, my deputy stood in for me at the next Board meeting, the appointment was duly confirmed by the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. Teddy Youde, Ambassador in Peking and later Governor of Hong Kong was appointed to succeed me.

I had kept my wartime Russian from rusting away too badly and to the amusement of my neighbours used sometimes to read Pravda rather than the Times on the train to work. But I was determined to have an absolutely fluent command of the language before I went to Moscow, so arranged that I should give up the appointment as Chief Clerk in the spring of 1978, spend a year working full time on Russian and go to

Moscow in 1979. That plan was thrown into total confusion. James Callaghan was dissatisfied with the running of the Security Service and asked that the Ambassador in Moscow, Howard Smith, should be brought back to run it. So Howard came home early, I put in a few hasty Russian refresher lessons in the Foreign Office and in March 1978 Margaret and I set off for Moscow.

MOSCOW

The great cream-washed green-roofed British Embassy house stands by the Moscow River on the Embankment of Saint Sophia. Facing it the harsh red-brick Kremlin wall punctuated by watchtowers runs for nearly half a mile along the opposite bank. Behind the wall a steeply wooded slope is crowned by the palaces and cathedrals which have for so many troubled centuries symbolised the power, barbaric and splendid, of Russia. Here are the five golden domes of the fifteenth century Cathedral of the Assumption, the nine-domed Cathedral of the Annunciation, the Cathedral of the Archangel, the exquisitely beautiful Church of the Deposition of the Robe and, towering over them, the 250 foot high bell tower of Ivan the Great. Here too are the edifices of power of Tsars and Soviets, the Great Kremlin Palace, the Armoury, the building of the Council of Ministers and the Palace of Congresses. It is as if St Paul's, the Tower of London, the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace and half a dozen Wren masterpieces had been assembled in one majestic group, looking down on the Thames. Superb at any season, it is at its finest in winter, with the temperature minus 30 Celsius, thin wisps of cloud in a blue sky, the dark green conifers heavy with new snow, the river frozen hard and sun glinting on the snow-powdered gold of the domes rising above the great steaming mass of Moscow city. It is hard to escape the clichés of the magic palace, but in our day it was a tired old ogre who was living out his last days in it. No Embassy in any country of the world has such a superb seat, superb not just in visual terms, but in its location alongside the very heart of power of an empire.

It was to this Embassy that Margaret and I came in the spring of 1978. There was a day when Ambassadors travelled in great state, bearing gifts to the monarch to whom they were accredited. Even in more recent days, some of my predecessors travelled by a special aircraft of the RAF. We came on the regular daily British Airways flight arriving at Moscow's decrepit Sheremetyevo airport at teatime. In 1978 the new international terminal had yet to be built and alongside the road from the airport there were still a few remaining clusters of wooden village houses among the tower blocks of new residential complexes. We drove past the monument marking the furthest spot of the Nazi advance to the suburbs of Moscow in the winter of 1941 and on down the

wide avenue, the Embassy Rolls using the special lane reserved for the cars of the powerful, sweeping past tiny Zhigulis, ancient grey-green army lorries and dirty overloaded buses, past the drab apartment blocks and offices into the heart of the city, round the Kremlin, with a quick glimpse of Red Square, over the Great Stone Bridge, past the four police guards, through the ornamental iron gates and into the Embassy. From the dark heavily panelled Scottish baronial hallway a broad red-carpeted staircase led to the first-floor apartments which were to be our home for the next four and a half years.

The house was built in the 1890s by a sugar merchant, Pavel Ivanovich Kharitonenko, and was made available to the British Embassy on a 20-year lease from the Soviet Government at the end of 1929. We lived under constant threat of eviction and it was only after my retirement that I was able to complete an eight-year negotiation and celebrate the centenary of the house by securing a new 99-year lease. This magnificent mansion had been designed largely for grand formal entertaining. The ground floor had been converted to Embassy offices, but the first floor was retained in very much its original condition, its central feature being the white and gold ballroom with its fine parquet floor. The whole of our house in England would have fitted into that ballroom and still left a little space to spare. Splendour we had in plenty, but bedrooms were another matter. Three in number, they were located at the corners of the building, with the great expanse of the reception rooms, the dining room and the ballroom between them. . . . . . . You three were adored by fat Nina, Galya, pert and attractive, Lyuba who had been in her own right as a guest in St. Andrew's Hall, by Lyuda the cook and her various helpers, Konstantin and Leonid the drivers and the small army of dvorniks who looked after the outdoor work, helped at table, moved furniture and set up the great Christmas tree. They were all paid to report to the KGB on our doings, but this did not prevent them from being real people, with that larger-than-life quality of all Russians, loving twice as warmly, hating twice as bitterly, drinking twice as deeply, weeping with twice the grief and laughing with twice the joy of the English. I remember coming back to the Embassy once after a leave. As we walked up the staircase, they gathered at the top, welcoming us with hugs and kisses all round. "Good God" someone remarked "It's the Cherry Orchard played in reverse".

DEALING WITH BOLSHEVIKS

Ever since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Britain had been trying to make up its mind how best to deal with the Soviet Union. Marxist-Leninist ideology defined the world-wide struggle between socialism and capitalism as the basic principle of Soviet foreign policy. For the Soviet leadership, the whole course of international relations was governed by the fact that "the world outlook and class aims of socialism and capitalism are opposite and irreconcilable". Theirs was a state founded in dogma. I recollect commenting to an archbishop of the Orthodox Church on the conservatism of the Kremlin leadership. "Yes" he replied, "Conservatism and dogma, the twin pillars of the Orthodox Church and the Soviet state". But even the dogma-ridden Soviet state could not afford to remain locked in total and unremitting conflict with the Western world. Its theorists therefore developed the policy of peaceful coexistence under which the underlying conflict could be waged by means which would minimise the risk of armed conflict with major powers, while Soviet interests were pursued, as most states would pursue them, by the normal processes of international diplomacy. In the face of this policy, successive British Governments had found it hard to formulate a satisfactory and consistent policy for dealing with the Soviet Union. When the War Cabinet first considered the problem in 1918, it tried to decide whether to fight the Bolsheviks or to try to do business with them and concluded, in effect, to do both. For sixty years, policy had oscillated between the two options and by 1978 the problem remained much as it had been defined in 1918.

The military intervention in Russia in 1917-1920 had been originally designed as a means of holding open the eastern front against Germany, but gradually it had developed into an unsuccessful attempt to remove the Bolshevik Government. We had established relations in 1924, broken off again in 1926 on the ground of espionage by the Soviet Trade Delegation and resumed again in 1929. Having failed to draw the Soviet Union into a defensive pact against Hitler, we had come close to war against the Soviet Union when that country first aligned itself with Hitler in the partition of Poland and then invaded Finland. The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 had brought a formal Anglo-Soviet Alliance and it is probable that the Soviet defeat of the German armies was the decisive factor in saving Britain from a German invasion. No sooner had victory been achieved than the spirit of alliance

faded; the former allies were ranged against one another in the nuclear confrontation of the cold war and in a world-wide contest of power and influence. Hopes were raised with the death of Stalin, but the crushing of Hungary in 1956, the threats to Berlin and the Cuban missile crisis made it seem that Khrushchev's erratic ways presented more of a threat than Stalin's paranoia. The accession to power of Brezhnev brought a somewhat more predictable, but no more amiable pattern of Soviet policy and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 suggested that fifty years of evolution had done little to make the Soviet Union an easier partner. In the gaps between crises, successive British Governments had tried to build through trade and cultural contacts the basis for a more stable relationship and in 1961, at the instigation of Harold Macmillan, the Great-Britain USSR Association (of which I later became Chairman) was formed, with a view to establishing better professional and personal contacts between the two countries. The work of the KGB in trying to suborn British citizens was a constant irritant to relations. Despite repeated warnings, they built up their establishment in London to such a level that, in 1971, the British Government ordered the expulsion of 105 Soviet agents, working under diplomatic, military or commercial cover. This produced an immediate further chill in relations, but the improvement in German-Soviet relations which had made possible my appointment to Berlin, the progress of the US-Soviet negotiations on nuclear arms and in 1975 the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) all created a certain atmosphere of détente, so that when I went to Moscow in 1978 the general climate of relations seemed to be entering one of its more favourable periods. Thus it was possible to hope for a political dialogue which would carry forward the process of détente and establish a background against which British commercial interests could be promoted.

AN AMBASSADOR'S ROLE

An Ambassador cannot function until he has presented his credentials to the Head of State to whom he is accredited. For this formal ceremony Soviet protocol is flexible and adjusts, if necessary, to lounge suit, morning coat, national costume or diplomatic uniform. I have always thought that if one is going to have a formal ceremony one may as well make it truly formal. Both the British and Soviet Diplomatic Services have uniform, so I elected to wear it. Accompanied by the senior members of my

staff, I proceeded to the Kremlin in the full glory of gold-braided uniform, ostrich-plumed cocked hat and sword. Unfortunately the normal practice was for the Presidents of the fifteen Soviet Republics to take turns, a month at a time, to receive the credentials of foreign Ambassadors. I was not, therefore, received by Mr. Brezhnev, who at that time combined the office of General Secretary of the Communist Party and Head of State, but by the President of Kazakhstan, a stolid, not unamiable, but wholly unremarkable individual. I can remember nothing whatever of my conversation with him.

It is commonplace, nowadays, to say that modern communications have reduced the role of an Ambassador to that of a mere messenger. When Margaret Thatcher suggested to Edward Heath that he might accept the Washington Embassy, he remarked icily that he was not cut out to be a postman. Certainly, for some of those who have occupied posts of political power, transient though that power may be, the Ambassador is the "obedient servant", the hired hand who will carry their messages, meet them at the airport and entertain them in his house. Indeed he is paid to do all these things and will take a pride in ensuring that they are well done. But if this were an Ambassador's sole function, the job would have little appeal. The extent to which he can be more than a combination of postman and innkeeper depends upon him. Fortunately he has all the authority he needs to fulfil a wider role and in most cases he will want to do so. Under my formal commission from the Queen I was granted "all Power and Authority to do and perform all proper acts, matters and things which may be desirable or necessary for the promotion of relations of friendship, good understanding and harmonious intercourse between Our Realm and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and for the protection and furtherance of the interests confided to [my] care". This is old-fashioned wording, but it still sums up rather well the essence of an Ambassador's job: the handling of a relationship between two countries and the promotion of his own country's interests.

So how do you set about this? What does an Ambassador have to do? One difference between the Ambassador and the postman is that the efficacy of a message between governments can be strengthened or weakened by the standing of the messenger. An Ambassador has a better chance of being taken seriously in a foreign country if it is clear that he is heard with respect in his own country. In this respect, a political

appointee with an established standing in the public life of his own country and good personal relations with members of his own Government can be better placed than a career diplomat. Unfortunately politicians who are making a success of their own trade do not usually wish to exchange it for diplomacy and those who take to diplomacy because they have failed in politics have already lost their main potential advantage. If it is apparent that an Ambassador does not enjoy the confidence of his own government, why should a foreign government place reliance upon his word? The first requirement therefore, and it is not always observed, is that the Government should make clear not just by words but by deeds the reliance which it places upon its Ambassadors. I was lucky in that, appointed by a Labour Government and serving most of my time in Moscow under Margaret Thatcher, I had no cause to complain of the backing I received from either.

That said, however, the effectiveness of an Ambassador depends upon personal qualities backed by hard work. It may seem obvious to say that he cannot be a recluse - though some are. He must do his best to have access to leading personalities in every sphere of life - politics, civil service, business, the media, the arts and the unions. His ambassadorial standing gives him a flying start. The rest is up to him. It is not enough to be on good terms with half the world. What matters is to be heard with respect. Are you worth listening to? Are your facts right? Will what you say hold good? Do you have the political antennae not only to understand today's policy, but to sense tomorrow's? Can you deliver what you undertake? Are you, in short an "interlocuteur valable" and not just someone like my friend and colleague "Shifty Ifty" with whom it is fun to pass the time?

In Moscow, my mind went back to Mr. Bevin and the charladies. Our relationship with the Soviet Union was characterised by doctrinal hostility and by Soviet policies which were designed specifically to subvert British interests. But there were interests of our own which we needed to promote. I could not do this effectively either by kicking the Soviet Union in tender parts of its anatomy or by glossing over the difficulties in an attempt to make myself loved. I had so to handle relations as to make it plain that, so far as Britain was concerned, we genuinely wanted to build upon those interests which the two countries shared and, where we differed, to explain in terms which would carry conviction the reasons underlying British policy. I was

hopeful enough - naive enough if you like - to think that I might make some contribution to the task of persuading the Soviet leadership that, while the NATO countries were resolute in resisting Soviet expansionism and defending human rights, they posed no military challenge to the integrity of the Soviet Union itself.

A country cannot get its own foreign policy right unless it understands the people it is dealing with. History is littered with instances of the disasters which can flow from a lack of understanding. Hitler did not understand that there would come a point when Britain would stand up to him, prompting Churchill to say: "What kind of people do they think we are?" Lord Franks' report on the Falklands War blamed officials in London for failing to understand the kind of men they had to deal with in Argentina. So as well as trying to ensure that the Soviet Government and its people understood Britain and British policies, I had to ensure that my own Government was as well informed as possible about the state of the Soviet Union, the personality of its leaders and the motivations which determined their policies. It is a matter of understanding the material and the human factors, the leaders and the people: in short, a matter of understanding what it is which makes countries act the way they do. It is a fascinating task. It cannot be done without a command of the language and a feeling for the history of the country, without first-hand knowledge of the life of the provinces as well as the capital and without establishing the kind of personal relationships which I have just mentioned. It is one thing to write about all this as a theoretical proposition. It was another to do it in the Moscow of 1978. I had the standing. I had the backing of a first-class staff. I had a fine house and the means to entertain well in it. I had come from London and had the feel of things there. I was in the post that I wanted and in political circumstances which, if far from ideal, were at least a good deal better than my predecessors had enjoyed. My command of the language was less than I wanted, but it was adequate and would improve with practice. I had freedom to travel widely throughout the Soviet Union. And I liked the Russians.

So what was the problem? In relation to personal contact with leading personalities the problem was the system. Power in the Soviet state lay with the party. Supreme power lay with the Politburo, the little group of a dozen or so elderly men, led by Leonid Brezhnev. Under them was the machinery of the Central Committee and the

Party Secretariat. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union dealt with fraternal parties in other countries, but it did not deal with the representatives of foreign governments. Those dealings were the business of the Foreign Ministry. Within the Foreign Ministry my working relationship was with the Head of the Second European Department, Vladimir Pavlovich Suslov and the Deputy Minister, Zemskov. Suslov, a big man, with a large, pale face, immobile features and an air of vague hostility, was not the easiest of interlocutors. He would accept hospitality, but had a distressing tendency to pass from silent menace to alcoholic incoherence with only the briefest interim phase of amiability. Over the years I gradually came to know him better. In a rare moment of confidence he disclosed openly that he was a committed Stalinist. Blandly dismissing the crimes committed by that pathological murderer with the remark: "Great men commit great crimes", he passed to me a lapel badge of Stalin. Thanking him, I said: "I hope you don't expect the British Ambassador to go around wearing a Stalin badge". "No" he replied "but I thought you might like to see what one of our chaps is turning out". Moments like this, when one saw briefly beneath the official veneer, were few. I still have the badge in my stud box, but unfortunately Stalin's head has fallen off.

A.A. GROMYKO

On major matters I would deal with Andrei Gromyko, the Foreign Minister. I was luckier than some of my colleagues in that I could usually secure a meeting with him at relatively short notice. As head of the Foreign Ministry and a member of the Politburo, he combined governmental and party functions. When I arrived, he had already been Foreign Minister for over 20 years, during which time eleven British Foreign Secretaries had come and gone. Prior to that he had served in London and Washington and participated in the great wartime and post-war conferences. His memory was phenomenal and his officials found his encyclopaedic knowledge deeply frustrating. But meetings with him were disappointing. We were happy to dispense with an interpreter for most of the time. He would speak Russian and I English, with recourse to the interpreter only for his jokes and proverbs. The jokes were rare and ponderous, but like every Russian he carried a good stock of popular sayings suitable for every occasion. I recollect delivering one disagreeable message and being told: "Ah, yes, Ambassador, but, as we say, a spot of tar spoils a barrel of honey". I was

too slow and it was only when I got back to the Embassy and checked with the dictionary of proverbs that I realised that the correct response would have been "He who is all honey will be eaten by the flies." I waited for him to use it again, but he never did and the next time I looked for the dictionary it had disappeared. I did not expect to agree with him on many matters, but what disappointed me - and I was not alone in this - was the superficiality of our exchanges. He could have done so much better. As it was I might as well have read Pravda's leading articles. I could only hope that, although he never indicated that anything I said made any impression, perhaps he may have absorbed more than his responses betrayed. As for the other members of the Politburo, we would greet them at an annual reception, but the only opportunity which ambassadors normally had for contact with them was when their foreign Heads of State visited Moscow. For reasons which I shall relate, my time in Moscow was marked by a great dearth of top-level visitors.

On commercial matters there were regular contacts with the Foreign Trade Ministry, normally at Deputy Minister level and with the heads of the various foreign trade monopolies. It was also possible to have contact with Ministers in the many technical ministries which, under the Soviet system, where the state controlled everything, were more like the heads of nationalised industries. The Ministry of Culture was also accessible and had to be dealt with over cultural exchanges, but since its function was to corral culture into a Communist strait-jacket, contacts could scarcely be described as productive.

This all sounds very bleak. And in reality, so it was. Yet if you look at the records you will find that in 1975 Harold Wilson had visited Moscow as Prime Minister, with James Callaghan, his Foreign Secretary and had concluded an impressive package of agreements providing for annual meetings between Foreign Ministers or their representatives on a whole range of international and bilateral questions, as well as for meetings of a Joint Economic Commission and specific programmes for the development of economic and industrial co-operation, for science and technology, medicine and public health and cultural exchanges. In 1978 all this machinery was functioning, but the responsible departments on the British side, with the possible exception of the Board of Trade, had already become rather disillusioned with the results. Nevertheless, each meeting was valuable from my point of view, in that it

provided an opportunity to establish contact with another group of Russians and thus both to increase my understanding of the local scene and also to establish channels for subsequent business.

CHERS COLLEGUES

A feature of the diplomatic scene in any country is the round of dinners and receptions with one's colleagues. In Moscow, this round, for various reasons, was more than usually demanding. Virtually every country in the world wanted to be represented in Moscow. This meant that there were upwards of a hundred Excellencies wanting to call on Soviet Ministers, a hundred Excellencies calling on their Excellent colleagues and a hundred calls to be repaid, a hundred national day receptions to be attended and dinners to be eaten, a hundred colleagues airing their complaints about the unresponsiveness of Soviet bureaucracy and a hundred colleagues to be given a farewell reception. The Dean of the Corps when we arrived was the Canadian Ambassador, Robert Ford, but on his departure the Bulgarian took over and the traditional silver salver presented to retiring Ambassadors was replaced by a Russian palekh box of the Kremlin; when the first of these was offered to the retiring Irish Ambassador, he refused to accept it and continued angry - and eventually successful - exchanges from his next post in Vienna. Of such trivialities was diplomatic life made. The more secretive the Soviet machine, the more it resisted normal contact, the more the diplomatic corps gathered together to circulate the latest gossip and rumours about everything from the state of Brezhnev's health to the rents of Embassy premises. One set of meetings which was always valuable was my weekly session with the American, French and German Ambassadors. At the political level, France and Germany were maintaining a substantially more active relationship with the Soviet Union than was Britain; and the United States, by reason of the nuclear superpower relationship was in a special position. My three colleagues in this group became and remained close personal friends. No such relationship is ever wholly without reserve, but I would say that we enjoyed as intimate a political and personal relationship as I have had with any foreign colleagues during my career. Each week we would meet in a fully protected room to exchange views on the Soviet scene and possible developments in Soviet policy and also bring our colleagues up to date on any bilateral contacts which we had had. By this means, each of the four

Governments had as good an assessment of the Soviet scene as our combined resources could provide.

In one respect Soviet policy was easy to assess. The purpose of press, radio and television was not to promote a policy debate, but to ensure that the Politburo's instructions and its interpretation of events were communicated to the country. With careful study and a noting of every qualification, every 'however', we were left with a clear view of official Soviet policy. In this respect, we had an easier time than our successors as they seek to interpret all the conflicting voices of contemporary Russia. Looking behind the declared policy, we could often judge with reasonable accuracy the underlying considerations and unexpressed anxieties. We could also hear the voice of dissent, but what we could not do was to assess the strength of that voice or the strength of the doubts which were developing within the party structure. That, perhaps, was why those of us who could see the fault-lines in the Soviet structure still over-estimated its durability.

The American ambassador when I arrived was Mac Toon, a career officer and Soviet specialist, blunter than most in his denunciation of Soviet policy. President Carter replaced Toon by Tom Watson, a political appointee. Tom was a remarkable colleague, having during the war delivered aircraft as a ferry pilot through Siberia to the Russian front and, while building up IBM, the firm which his father and he had created virtually from scratch, had made quite a reputation for himself as an ocean yachtsman. He already had experience in arms control and, supported by his elegant wife Olive, came to Moscow with the intention to create a better relationship between the two superpowers. Disillusionment was inevitable, but I felt that the Foreign Ministry from Gromyko downwards were guilty of a remarkable political blindness in the lack of courtesy with which they treated him and the President who sent him. In Reagan they got the man they deserved.

The quadripartite meetings were supplemented by regular meetings of the European Community Ambassadors which were substantially less interesting. Among the group several were highly perceptive and well-informed observers of the Soviet scene, occasionally with individual sources of value, but with these it was more profitable to speak individually. In our group meetings far too much time was spent

in unproductive discussion of purely administrative problems in the functioning of our missions. Then there were lunches with the large group of Commonwealth colleagues. These were a cheerful family style occasion, but with some distinctive value since many of them had their own special insight into Soviet policies in the third world.

A BRITISH WEEK IN NOVOSIBIRSK

In the summer of 1978 I had my first opportunity to create a substantial British impact outside Moscow. For some years the Great-Britain - USSR Association had been planning a British week in Novosibirsk, a return event for the British Week which the Soviet Union had staged in Leeds. Novosibirsk is a big, dull industrial city with a population of a million or so, in central Siberia, a mid-point on the Trans Siberian railway, some 1500 miles east of Moscow. This was very much an attempt to show the flag, with a small exhibit of British industrial achievements, a concert, a fashion show in which some surprisingly elegant Siberian girls modelled British clothes and a Scottish piper who caused a police complaint that the crowds around him were causing an obstruction. Just outside Novosibirsk lies Akademgorodok, the Siberian branch of the Soviet Academy of Science. The standard of English language training in the Soviet Union was high and it was particularly good in the academic community at Novosibirsk, so we had a good response to an English language competition for schoolchildren, marred by the attempt by the Soviet authorities to prevent the winner from accepting her prize, a journey to Britain. Two characters stand out in my memory of that event. The first was Academician Marchuk, who later took up a senior appointment in Moscow and who impressed me during the visit by his description of the ways in which his institute was putting its scientific resources to work on the problems confronting the Soviet Government in opening up the mineral resources of Siberia. The other was Robert Maxwell, whom I met for the first time there. He had come with his wife to open a small display of scientific publications by Pergamon Press and joined with gusto, uninvited, in the tree-planting ceremony. On a later visit Maxwell was received by Brezhnev, whose speeches he had printed. After that meeting he came to lunch at the Embassy and with great pride showed me a copy of the book, inscribed in Russian, in Brezhnev's quavering hand "To my dear friend Robert Maxwell". I complimented Maxwell and he replied: "The first time he did it,

he transliterated Maxwell incorrectly into Cyrillic". "What did you do?". "Oh. I just told him to do it again." I had a vision of the ageing Brezhnev, arguably still the second most powerful man in the world, barely able to hold a pen, meekly taking dictation from Maxwell.

The Soviet authorities had a well-developed drill for ambassadorial visits and in Novosibirsk Margaret and I went through the standard round: meetings and lunches with the local authorities, visits to schools and housing developments, a collective farm, a factory, the opera house, the war memorial, the university. It was all designed to impress one with the achievements of the Soviet state and the care with which the authorities catered for the needs of the population. Carefully rehearsed statistics were presented in abundance and there were lengthy toasts to peace and friendship, but there was a depressing superficiality to the whole process. I think that many of the men and women we met were genuinely trying to do their best for their city and in some respects, for instance the sheer volume of new municipal housing, low though the quality was, the achievement was not unimpressive. The trouble was that they were like well-drilled schoolchildren repeating carefully prepared little speeches; one was left longing to get underneath the surface and find out what the people and their life were really like. But this was something which the Soviet machine did its best to prevent. It was only a small consolation that shortly after my visit I read that Mr. Brezhnev had made a tour of Siberia and it was apparent from the press reports that he had met the same officials and received the same reports; he had been less constrained than I had been in pointing out failings, but I felt that, when his train pulled out of Novosibirsk station, things would not change much.

PRINCE PHILIP IN MOSCOW

Before I left London there had been some speculation about the possibility of a royal visit to the Soviet Union. This would not be easy, in view of the fact that Tsar Nicholas, a cousin of the British royal family, had been murdered along with all his family, by the Bolsheviks and, in fact, no formal visit took place during my time in Moscow. However, in the winter of 1978-9, we did have a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh. He came in his capacity as President of the International Equestrian Federation, in order to view the facilities which the Soviet authorities were preparing

for the 1990 Olympics. His programme was the subject of careful advance planning, but this was far from easy, since the visit was to be very definitely equestrian in character and not political. Now the world of the horse is a world to which one either does or does not belong. Margaret and I very definitely did not belong to it. Nor, more surprisingly, did any of the 40 British-based members of the Embassy staff. (This, in itself, is perhaps a small commentary on the changing make-up of the British Diplomatic Service.) However, what the Embassy lacked in knowledge it made up for in resourcefulness and we gathered a remarkable group of people who bred horses, rode horses, owned horses, raced horses, photographed horses, wrote about horses, legislated for horses; in short the equestrian society of the Soviet Union. I shall long cherish the memory of that reception, not least because they were all real people as distinct from the cardboard cut-out figures with whom we normally did business. Other incidents of that visit are still vivid - Prince Philip securing without a single quibble the signature of the Minister of Agriculture on a document containing his requirements for the veterinary arrangements; our cook coming in joyfully to say that she had managed to buy a cucumber for His Royal Highness; the Soviet officials borrowing my Range Rover because they thought it would cope better with heavy snow than their own military vehicles; the delicate manoeuvring which in the end led to refusal of a Soviet offer of a meeting with the Vice President; the confusion when Prince Philip suggested that Soviet security arrangements for the competitors were inadequate; the impossibility of persuading Soviet drivers that there was no direct correlation between the importance of the guest and the speed of the official convoy; and the generosity of my Luxembourg colleague in offering his last few bottles of Chateau Yquem in response to my desperate hunt for Sauternes in Moscow. Since this was not an official visit, the political impact was limited, but it was by no means negligible and the sheer professionalism of Prince Philip must have impressed all those who met him.

I had hoped that the holding of the sailing part of the Olympics in Tallinn would remove one constraint upon my travelling. Britain did not recognize the legality of the wartime annexation by the Soviet Union of the three Baltic Republics, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, although we accepted that they were de facto under Soviet control. Consequently junior members of my staff were free to travel there and to deal with the local authorities on official business, but I was not, since, for an

Ambassador accredited to the Soviet Union to pay a visit in his official capacity might have been held to constitute acceptance of the legitimacy of their incorporation. I thought that the sailing Olympics might provide a legitimate occasion for a visit, but as it happened the Olympic boycott frustrated this plan. Of that, however, more later.

GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

Continuing my programme of visits to the capitals of the other twelve Soviet republics, I went with Margaret in 1979 for a memorable week-long visit to Georgia and Armenia. We arranged that Brian and Delmar Fall (now Ambassador in Moscow) should drive down in the Embassy Rolls Royce, while we went by train and took over the car for our travelling once we were there. Long distance trains are something special in Russia. You settle into a compartment which will be your home for anything up to a week on the Trans-Siberian or in the case of Georgia for about 36 hours. The attendant will bring you glasses of tea, but you have probably provided yourself with a box of provisions to last the journey and will supplement this by purchases from local traders at stops along the route. After a while, visiting between the compartments begins. It started on this occasion with a tap at the door and our Georgian neighbour arriving with a cucumber, to which, shortly afterwards, we responded with some English biscuits. The exchange swiftly developed to champagne and vodka in our neighbour's compartment. He appeared to be one of the many Georgians who commuted regularly on undefined business between Tbilisi and Moscow and on this occasion he was accompanied by a somewhat sulky and clearly embarrassed young lady whom he introduced as the daughter of a distinguished Soviet marshal. He was, he said, going to spend a weekend showing her Georgia. It was fairly well known that the KGB planted their people in the compartments next to those used by foreigners and we were always rather uncertain about the bona fides of our neighbours; in this case I felt that he had more to fear from the KGB than we had, though I had my doubts when he pointed out of the window to a building which he said was a camp for political prisoners and added: "Why not take a photograph of it?"

Our visit came just after the Labour Government had been defeated at the polls and Margaret Thatcher had assumed office. With a nice touch of humour my Georgian hosts presented me with a plaque of the Georgian Queen Tamara leading her knights

into battle. Georgia is a proud country and the Georgians, conquered by the Red Army in 1920, have little in common with the Russians. Their country of great mountains and fertile valleys has something of a Mediterranean climate and their people something of a Mediterranean temperament. They say that when the Lord was dividing up the world among the different peoples the Georgian was asleep in a corner. Suddenly he awoke and came forward: "Lord, Lord, what about me?" "I'm sorry" said the Lord "but you were asleep and now it has all gone. There is nothing left for you." At this the Georgian was so sad that the Lord took pity on him and said: "I tell you what I will do. I shall give you the little corner that I was keeping for myself." Great is the Georgian story-telling and great is the Georgian hospitality and the two march hand in hand. On our first day in Tbilisi, there was an official lunch with numerous toasts which went on until about 3.30. I had invited one or two of the Georgians to dine with us that evening in our hotel. By the evening none of us wanted much dinner, but honour was at stake. The Georgians, a little pale, turned up and dinner went off amiably enough. They were about to leave when your grandmother produced a bottle of Scotch and said: "Right. We've been drinking Georgian style all day. Now we start Scottish style." She poured a handsome glass for each and intervened firmly when the Georgians reached for water. With this gesture, the evening drew to a convivial end. The following day, the luncheon routine was repeated, but as we went in I heard the protocol official whisper to our host: "The Ambassador doesn't drink much. But his wife ...!" It takes some doing to acquire this reputation in Georgia and even more when, like Margaret, you rarely take more than a single glass.

No Georgian meal is complete without a tamada or toast master, whose responsibility is to keep a succession of toasts rolling. They run through a standard formula - the ladies, absent friends, peace, our children, our leaders, our parents, our grandparents, our countries, the fallen in the war. Then there are the special Georgian ones: "May you have as many misfortunes, as many disasters, as much misery and unhappiness as there are drops left in my glass" or "We drink to our distinguished guest and his coffin. May it be made from the finest oak, a two hundred-year-old tree, hard as iron, straight-grained, seasoned and true. And today let us plant the acorn from which it shall come." I never successfully resolved the problem of eating at these banquets. The food was excellent and lavish, but it seemed that all the time I had either to listen

to a toast which was being addressed to me or to reply to it. Fresh courses arrived and were removed before I was able to raise a fork to my mouth. And throughout the wine flowed. But it was not all hospitality. The Georgians also have a reputation as businessmen. We visited a big commercial vehicle plant and a semi-conductor plant; these were, in themselves, much like the rest of Soviet industry, but the visits provided useful background for subsequent commercial contacts and added to my understanding of the problems of running a command economy. One felt that if ever free enterprise came to the Soviet Union, Georgia would prosper in those areas which are devoted to making the consumer happy, the area where state enterprise has so signally failed. I could visualise the little sun-lit streets of old Tbilisi, so different from the grey muddy villages and towns of Russia, filled with shops and cafes, the citrus farms, the tea plantations and the vineyards prospering, the Black Sea resorts rivalling the Côte d'Azur. Culturally, too, Georgia was alive even under the Soviet regime. There were the actors who had made a hit at the Edinburgh Festival playing Richard III in Georgian. There was Gudrashvili, the artist who had studied in Paris with Modigliani. He had a Modigliani sketch hanging like an icon in the corner of his room and explained that it had been done for a Danish girl with whom they had been sitting in a restaurant, but taking one look at the elongated neck she had pronounced it horrid, so Modigliani had presented it to our friend. But Georgia's history is filled with violence and, sadly, now that freedom from Soviet rule has brought the full horror of civil war, my vision of Georgia seems further away than ever.

From Georgia we drove through the mountains to Armenia, to meet a very different people. Armenia, the remnant of the world's first Christian state, seemed burdened with the tragedy of its history. There was scarcely a meeting in which the Turkish massacres were not recalled and the memory of them loomed over the consciousness of the individual as grey and awful as the memorial to the fallen loomed over the city itself, while Mount Ararat, rose snow-capped, with a special poignancy, just over the Turkish border. Erevan, the capital, seemed a harsh city, with none of the gaiety of Tbilisi. We paid our official calls on the authorities. The head of the Armenian Church, the Katholikos, was away, but we visited his seat at Echmiadzin and were received by a highly sophisticated deputy who soon made us realise the extent to which Armenia and its church were supported by Armenian communities overseas. The visit added much to our understanding of the Republic and to our ability later to

comprehend the bitterness of the struggle with Azerbaidjan over Nagorny Karabakh, but we were not sorry when it was time to leave and drive back past Lake Sevan and through the mountains into Georgia. At Dilijan, just before the border, the car was halted on the mountain road. It was a welcome party from the village. We had a tight timetable, since we were due at an official function in Tbilisi that evening, but hospitality here was warm, genuine and also purposeful. We had no option but to inspect the village and its historic churches before sitting down to an elaborate banquet. The more we mentioned that we were expected in Tbilisi, the more determined our hosts were to ensure that we should stay. The helter-skelter drive down into Tbilisi is better forgotten, but it was all taken in good part and when the time came to leave for Moscow our hosts, having seen us safely onto the train, raced it for fifty miles by car in order to meet us at the next stop with yet more flowers, leaving us eventually in a compartment like a florist's shop.

PROMOTING TRADE

Under the old Soviet system, foreign trade was conducted through an elaborate structure of government controlled trading monopolies, each specialising in a particular sector and it was hard to make contact with end-users. Given this system and given the fact that the foreign trade element in the state plan was open to adjustment in order to reflect underlying intergovernmental relationships, the role of the Embassy assumed particular importance in the promotion of British exports. It was good to be able to deploy the full resources of experienced Russian-speaking staff, backed by my own authority in dealings with Soviet bureaucracy and by the representational use of a fine house in support of our exporters. One way and another, the effort we put into trade promotion was massive, ranging from organising appointments for individual visitors to supporting participation in specialised trade fairs and intervening with Soviet ministries over large contracts. In order to assist in overcoming the mismatch between the Soviet governmental apparatus and the independent British firms, the Joint Economic Commission had been created. Shortly after our return to Moscow Cecil Parkinson arrived, as a newly appointed President of the Board of Trade, to preside over a meeting of the Commission and review the progress of British Soviet trade. I remember the meeting mainly for the explanation of the working of a planned economy given by a Soviet deputy minister. "It's like

this" he said. "Take stockings and socks. We know the population of the Soviet Union. We know the distribution by age and sex and we can break it down to foot sizes. We know the specifications needed for summer wear and winter and we know how long each pair will last. So we know the annual output needed. We plan the production lines, order the machinery and the yarn. And then ... Then you damned British come along and invent tights and our programme is in chaos." Indeed the shortage of tights was a major problem for the authorities. It provoked articles in Pravda. And it meant that the maids in the Embassy craved only one thing by way of a tip - tights. So all tips were kept by the social secretary and when Margaret went back to London on leave she had with her a shopping list of tights, all extra large with gusset.

The story ran parallel to the one I had been told in Berlin and symbolised again the inability of a planned economy to meet all the varied requirements of a consumer society. A similar example was provided by an article in Pravda on light domestic metalware. A member of the public had written to complain about her inability to buy a metal cooking pot. Pravda sent a reporter to investigate at the responsible store. "What? Citizens complaining about lack of cooking pots. Sure I haven't got any. And I haven't any cutlery or frying pans or tin-openers. None come from the factory". So the reporter went to the light domestic metalware factory where he spoke to the manager. "The citizens complain. The store manager complains. What's wrong?" "Very simple. I have a quota to turn out 5,400 tons of light domestic metalware each year. I can most easily meet this quota by making large metal buckets. So large metal buckets I make and if people want fiddly things like corkscrews or cutlery or cooking pots, I'm sorry. If I made those I just couldn't meet my quota." The story was accurate. At that time, most industrial quotas were set by weight, with extraordinary results, such as the production of excessively thick-walled steel pipe and incredibly heavy machine tools. For rail transport the quota was set in ton miles, so that trains were kept running round the Soviet Union by the longest possible route. Every few years the planners would refine the system and produce new indices. Towards the end of my time, they had gone over to a value added system but this was specified in Marxist terms which attributed all added value to labour, so no doubt would have resulted in maximising the labour content of all output. More constructively an edict had been issued under which output had to be sold on the basis

of contracts between supplier and wholesaler. Prior to this, output was counted regardless of whether or not it was saleable. In theory the change was revolutionary, but I doubt whether the ordinary Russian citizen noticed much change. I was hopeful at one stage that a contract might be concluded under which Marks and Spencer would advise on distribution systems, but negotiations broke down when the Soviet authorities began a new wave of repression of Jewish dissidents. The truth was that not merely the distribution, but the whole mentality had to change. Until that happened, life for the individual Russian would be very much like that of a private soldier in the peacetime army; so long as he did what he was told, turned up on parade, saluted the officers and kept out of trouble, he would be housed and clothed and fed, not generously but adequately, and would have a little cash for beer and cigarettes. It was a system which worked after a fashion, but in itself it wholly lacked the capacity to inspire or to stimulate and the doctrine was as tired and stale and corrupt as the men who drove it. Therein lay the seeds of its collapse.

THE "EVIL EMPIRE"

By the end of 1979 I was beginning to feel that I had settled in well and had something of a feel for the country and the way it worked. We had had minor political troubles as a result of the harassment of those, particularly Jews, who were trying to fight for human rights, there had been brushes with the Soviet authorities over their espionage activities in Britain and there was irritation over the British Government's efforts to sell military aircraft to China. This, however, was only par for the course and I could look forward to another three years which would not be easy, but which I hoped would be productive. Then on 27 December came the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN

We had watched the crisis brewing. We had noted Brezhnev's claim that the 1978 revolution which brought a Communist regime into power had created a "qualitatively new situation"; by this he meant that Afghanistan had so consolidated its links with Russia as to bring it within the Soviet imperial ring-fence. For many within the Kremlin, the ring-fence was sacred. They must have argued that if any country, once within it, were allowed to slip away, the whole structure would be in peril. This was the philosophy which had driven the occupation of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The disintegration of the whole imperial structure between 1989 and 1991 showed that these were not idle fears. With Afghanistan, however, there were new considerations. The dividing line between East and West in Europe had been set since 1945 and the opposing military structures defined effective spheres of influence in such a way as to minimise the risk of a miscalculation leading to a direct conflict between the armed forces of the Soviet Union and the NATO countries. Much though the West might regret the maintenance by force of Soviet control over Hungary or Czechoslovakia, it would not use force to break that control. The use of Soviet armed force to sustain a newly established Communist regime in Afghanistan was different in that it represented a direct extension of Soviet imperial power into a previously independent adjoining country. If Afghanistan today, where next in that "arc of instability" on the southern border of the Soviet Union? At a time when the Soviet Union was still in a posture of détente and preparing to show a welcoming face

to the world in the Olympic Games, it had seemed unlikely that the leadership would engage in a course of action which would risk throwing the world back, if not into open conflict, at least into the attitudes of the cold war. I did not then and do not now know precisely what intelligence was available in Western capitals through the monitoring of communications and through satellite photography; they ought not to have been taken by surprise, but it seemed that they were. Certainly, although the Moscow Embassies had seen the risk they had not recognised that action was imminent. When it happened, we were all taken by surprise.

The problem with which the Soviet leadership confronted us that December was one of the oldest problems in international relations - the deterrence of aggression. It is the problem which we faced with Hitler; having first tried to evade it, we then confronted him at the price of six years of world war. It is the problem which we answered with military force in Korea and the Falklands and Iraq; it is the problem with which we are today fumbling with economic sanctions against Serbia. When one country, in blatant contravention of the principles of international law and the provisions of the United Nations Charter, sends its armed forces into the territory of one of its neighbours, the international community is faced with a dilemma to which there is no wholly acceptable solution. Prior to such an action, there may be opportunities for deterrence, but it is another matter to try to bring about withdrawal once troops have been committed. The options are all well known. They involve an escalatory route through diplomatic protest, UN resolutions, demonstrations of displeasure by the cancellation of ministerial visits or cultural events, to the blocking of financial credits, progressively tighter economic sanctions, material support for the victim and, in the last resort the commitment of military forces. The earlier stages seem - and often are - futile; they are insignificant in relation to the motivation of the aggressor; they are liable to inflict more damage to those who apply them than to those against whom they are directed; and they can impede the search for a negotiated settlement. Whatever their inadequacy, inaction is even less acceptable. Yet to escalate is to engage in a challenge with increasing stakes. Even a superpower leader faced with a direct challenge may retreat, as Khrushchev did in the Cuban missile crisis, but if he does not, the challenge has either to be pursued to a degree of unacceptable risk or to be abandoned with humiliation at a point short of that which would mean the direct engagement of opposing military forces. It is a problem which

your generation will confront in its turn, perhaps when a new nationalist Russian leadership begins to flex its muscles. The circumstances never repeat themselves precisely and the surest way of getting the response wrong is to base it on a past set of circumstances. But in assessing a new act of aggression it may still be helpful to consider the Western response to the Afghanistan crisis.

In the selection of an appropriate response, we had to take account of the situation in the Soviet Union itself. It was apparent to most observers at the time that this was an imperial power which had passed its peak; the political doctrine was discredited, the leadership ageing, the economy stagnant and the people disaffected. The invasion of Afghanistan was not the thrust of a newly expansionist power. It was more akin to a rogue wave which, breaching the sea defences, will temporarily obscure the fact that the tide has passed its highest point. What matters is to seal the breach until the ebb has fully set in. It seemed to me that the Soviet leadership would expect from the West a rather inadequate response, a degree of verbal blustering, some criticism in the United Nations and a temporary cooling of relations, but probably nothing more. They must have been confident that, even with the advantage of such a hostile terrain, the Afghanis themselves could not withstand the full power of the Soviet armed forces. The initial assessment on the Western side was not dissimilar. It was certainly not realistic to consider meeting Soviet force with Western force in a repetition of the Anglo-Russian wars for control of Afghanistan a century earlier; it was probable that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan would prove irreversible in the short and possibly also the medium term. What was arguably more important than Afghanistan itself was to deter the Soviet Union from any further such adventures either in the countries on its southern border or in Eastern Europe. Consequently, the advice which I gave was that, as seen from Moscow, we needed to devise a response which was rather sharper than the Soviet leadership expected and which, even if it did not induce them to withdraw from Afghanistan, would give them pause for thought. Any such response might seem a setback to the long-term Western interest in détente, but - and this was a crucial factor - there is no point in having a phoney détente. Back to the charladies. Being nice is nicer than being nasty, but it can be healthier, even if more painful, to be firm. We should try to keep open the channel for dialogue with the Soviet Union, but it had to be a dialogue in which we made clear that no sound basis for relations could be built on the foundation of acquiescence in aggression.

Our package of responses had to be co-ordinated among the Western powers and, since this was an attack on a third world country, it was important to secure the support of other third world countries in the United Nations. A condemnatory resolution was passed and individual countries took action in terms of their bilateral relations. The economic sanctions were half-hearted; they take a long time to become effective and the immediate result would be to inflict greater damage on British, French, German and American exporters than on the Soviet economy. The only scheduled Soviet Ministerial visit to Britain was one by the Minister in charge of the coal industry; the visit was cancelled, but as a gesture this was barely noticeable. The texture of British-Soviet bilateral relations was already so threadbare that there was not much room for more demonstrative gestures of ill-will. To the relief of some of the responsible departments, meetings of various bilateral committees were deferred, but public attention was focused largely on the possibility of a boycott of the Moscow Olympics. It is not easy to go against the argument that politics should be kept out of sport, but the Olympics are more than a sporting occasion. For a totalitarian host country they give a boost to national prestige and they meant almost as much to the Soviet Union in 1980 as they did to Germany in 1936. I therefore thought it right that the British Government should recommend that British athletes should boycott the Olympics. It was easier for a Government to recommend this than for athletes to accept it. Not only did they feel strongly about the purity of a sporting occasion, but for many of them this might be the only occasion in their life at which they could be at the peak of performance and capable of winning an Olympic medal. It was not surprising that the response from Britain and from other countries was patchy, but it was sufficient to deprive the Soviet Union of the boost for which it was hoping. I think that, on balance, our response was just sharp enough to cause the Soviet leadership to wonder whether they had perhaps underestimated us; if so, this was what was needed. It would induce caution elsewhere. But in relation to Afghanistan itself the supply of Western arms and equipment to the Afghan guerrilla forces was the critical element. In fact Afghanistan proved to be the last military adventure by the old Soviet Union. The factors which combined to bring about their eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan were complex. The support given to the mujaheddin deprived the Soviet army of the prospect of a swift, clean victory; sheer weariness with the imperial burden and loss of faith in Marxist-Leninist doctrine brought first

the withdrawal from Afghanistan, then the collapse of the Soviet empire and finally the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself.

It naturally fell to me to bring home to the Soviet Government the strength of the British reaction. This required an exchange, as unproductive as ever, with Gromyko. A part of the package of arrangements negotiated by the Wilson Government had been an agreement on political consultation in times of international crisis and this was invoked by Lord Carrington, who came to Moscow for a day of discussions with Gromyko in July 1981. An attempt was made to devise some face-saving formula, but Gromyko would have none of it. The meeting was as unproductive as we had expected, but it was, if anything, even more sterile than it might have been, since Gromyko made no attempt whatever to engage in serious discussion and merely treated Carrington to a repetition of the standard Soviet line that their forces were in Afghanistan by invitation. We had already made such gestures of disapproval as were available. I had been instructed to absent myself from Moscow when the Olympic Games were being held. The Daily Express sent a photographer to capture Margaret and me sitting under an apple tree in the garden at Blockley with a pot of tea while the opening ceremony was taking place in Moscow; we still have the photograph, but were driven off the front page by the death of the Shah of Iran. I was also instructed to boycott the great Soviet celebrations on May Day and on the anniversary of the October Revolution and to reduce my contacts with Soviet officials to the minimum necessary for the conduct of official business. I thought these policies necessary, but still could not help regretting the fact they turned me into a kind of diplomatic "black hole", an ultimate negative factor, the symbolic frown on the British face. There is not much point in frowning if nobody notices, but at least this was not the case with the British gestures. On one occasion, when I went so far as to pass the time of day with Deputy Minister Zemskov, he remarked with surprise that he did not think that I was permitted to speak to such as himself.

POLAND

The frosty relationship brought about by the Afghanistan crisis persisted throughout much of my remaining time in Moscow. It could not be maintained indefinitely, but as we were beginning to move towards some relaxation, the Solidarity crisis erupted

in Poland. As the crisis slowly deepened throughout 1980 and 1981, it seemed that Poland was slipping out of Soviet control. It was a key element in Soviet strategic planning, a vital sector of the defence glacis and the principal link with the Soviet forces in Germany. That position in Germany, backed by control over Poland, was the principal gain which the Soviet Union had made from four years of bitter war. Day by day we read ever more thunderous articles in Pravda, all of which appeared to be preparing the way for an operation designed to reassert control over Poland by military intervention. On this occasion, the political indicators were backed by hard intelligence which left no doubt that the Red Army was ready to move. As days became weeks and weeks months, it seemed that the Politburo were hesitating. Eventually, on 13 December 1981, just two years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, General Jaruzelski imposed martial law. Had he failed, it is possible that the Politburo's last hesitations would have disappeared and the Red Army would have done the job themselves. The West would then have been faced with a crisis graver than that precipitated by the invasion of Afghanistan, but would have had even fewer options by way of response. As it was, Jaruzelski's action, clearly taken as part of a plan co-ordinated with the Soviet Union, brought a further chill in relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers and formal sanctions were imposed against the Soviet Union in February 1982.

THE FALKLANDS

The third international crisis which marked the last months of my stay in Moscow was the Falklands War. The Soviet Union saw this as an opportunity to recover a little lost ground in terms of world opinion by trumpeting old slogans about the wickedness of the British colonialist aggressors. However, Argentina made a less than convincing ally and the trumpets emitted a somewhat cracked tone. In private most Russian officials and, I believe, the Russian public were sympathetic to the British position. Two remarks summed up their view. One official commented: "In your place we would have done exactly the same - except that we would have kept enough troops there to ensure that the Argentines didn't start anything." The other comment came from Suslov. I had a number of mildly difficult exchanges with him, during which I had, for instance, to warn him that it would be prudent for Soviet submarines to keep clear of the exclusion zone around the islands. At the end of one such meeting,

having given me the official line, he added: "All I really want to say is - do get it over quickly." Suslov was a difficult, but on the whole courteous interlocutor, although with an irritating habit of interspersing his remarks with incomprehensible insinuations about members of my staff. At one meeting, however, he was accompanied by a subordinate who interjected a particularly sneering remark about British policy. I rounded on him and savaged him in the presence of his master, who with no attempt to defend the luckless man, remarked: "I haven't seen you angry before, Ambassador." The episode was worth while and our subsequent relationship, both personal and professional, showed some improvement. Knowing that I collected mineral specimens on my travels, he began to come up with gifts of rather fine pieces of crystalline quartz which he said he had obtained from a "geologist friend" who worked in Siberia. Assuming that this "friend" was probably a KGB employee, I thought it prudent to respond with gifts of pieces of Wedgwood.

Towards the end of the Falklands War, I paid a long-overdue visit to Azerbaidjan. I had wanted to meet Aliev, the local party chief, a former KGB man, but normal Soviet protocol did not permit this. However I persisted and, having visited the sights of Baku, was told at half an hour's notice that there would be a "visit to an important personality", but that I must go alone. (It is a little like the Oriental courtesy of never referring directly to the mighty). At the appointed hour I entered a long room reminding me of Hitler's chancellery, at the end of which was the great man's desk. We had a long discussion, without interpreter, in which we ranged over the political scene and the internal problems of the Soviet Union; on the way out, he accompanied me to the door and I remarked on an enormous globe which stood near it. "Yes" he said "Look. Here is Moscow. Here", moving his finger a few inches, "is Kabul. And here", with his arm at full stretch towards the floor, "is Port Stanley". I could only remark that it showed the difference between a land-power and a sea-power. I was impressed by Aliev's ability. He had a nasty record, but it was not surprising that he should be one of the few survivors of the Brezhnev era.

After inspecting the Baku oil installations, we took a train which runs up from Iran and northwards along the western shore of the Caspian. Our plan was to take a look at Derbent, the ancient Daghestan city at the junction of Europe and Asia, where the mountains rise steeply from a narrow coastal strip. The town, dominated by an

ancient castle, had been the scene of many ferocious battles as Russia strove to wrest from Persia the gateway to the East. Now, with few visitors from far-away Moscow and none from the West, it slumbered peacefully, a half-forgotten outpost of the Soviet empire. We had asked for a room to be booked at an establishment alleged to be the town's one hotel. It was dark when we clambered down onto the tracks at Derbent. There was no sign of life, but eventually a car appeared from the darkness and took us away for some miles to a pleasant villa where we appeared to be the only occupants. In our room the price tags were still on the bed-linen and the carpets and it dawned on us that such was the shame of the authorities at the state of the so-called Derbent Hotel that this establishment had been created for our benefit, probably from a dacha owned by the Party. The following day we toured the town, clambering over the battlements, watching the carpet-sellers and inspecting the baths (alternate days for men and women) which had barely changed over the past five centuries. Laden with the vast pot of yoghurt and the bag of plums which our hosts had pressed on us, we clambered back onto the train for the thirty hour journey back to Moscow.

On another journey we had explored Kirghizia, travelling far up a valley in the Tien Shan mountains, the 'Mountains of the Moon' bordering on China, to a feast in a yurt, the traditional abode of the wandering herdsmen of Central Asia, to sample kumis, the national beverage of fermented mare's milk, with its delicate bouquet of rotting hay. In Frunze, the capital, we saw a display of horsemanship by men whose ancestors must have learnt their skills in the legions of Genghis Khan. Now they too were vassals of the Soviet state, their colonial status brought home to me when I tried a few words of Kirghiz on my neighbour at dinner, a Minister in the Kirghiz Government, only to receive an apology that, as a Russian, he had not learned the local language. Yet, as colonial administrations go, it did not seem a bad one and the market would have put to shame many in the independent states of Asia. On these journeys it was necessary to go to the capital of the Republic and call on the local administrators, but we tried as far as possible to get off the beaten track. So, having flown to Tashkent, a dull Soviet style city rebuilt after the great earthquake, we went by train from the silk mills of the Fergana valley to the blue domed mosques of Samarkand, a journey where we shared a compartment with a man returning from the celebration of his son's circumcision and were disturbed only by an old woman going up and down the corridor selling photographs of Stalin. At that time the Russians felt that they could

live with the remnants of established Islam, but were concerned at the growth of fundamentalist influence in the villages. In retrospect one can understand why that colonial regime collapsed, but to us at that time it looked as though it had some decades yet to run.

THE KGB

A thread of KGB activity runs through every posting in Moscow. I knew well enough from my time in Security Department and my posting in East Berlin what to expect and what precautions to take. In their essentials, the precautions are simple. Nowadays the Embassies of major powers are all equipped with safe speech rooms and there are secure cypher systems for communication with capitals and with other missions. It is axiomatic that any conversation conducted in any part of a building to which local staff at any time have access is insecure and that any papers left unguarded in such a part of the building must be regarded as compromised. One does not, therefore, conduct conversations which one does not wish to have overheard, one puts papers away in a secure area and one does not dictate confidential letters in insecure rooms. The movement of staff has to be strictly controlled in order to ensure a total control of access to the safe areas. None of this is in itself difficult, but it does require a degree of discipline which is not easy to sustain by all staff at all times. The scientific techniques employed have grown progressively more sophisticated, but for the most part their effectiveness still requires some lapse of security on the part of those who are under attack.

A large part of the KGB effort is therefore devoted to a close study of the personality of every member of the Embassy staff, from the Ambassador to the most junior recruit, with a view to the detection of weaknesses which may provide an opening for blackmail. The initial approach may be based upon an attempt to establish some personal rapport through a common interest or may be a fairly crude exploitation of normal human weaknesses, leading, for instance, to an offer to suppress compromising photographs in exchange for apparently innocuous information, the production of which then provides a fresh basis for subsequent pressure. This is a peculiarly unpleasant process which, in my time, put a severe strain on some individuals. I knew of at least two cases in which there was good reason to suppose

that drinks had been doctored with an emetic in order to provide evidence of "hooliganism", with a photographer conveniently present. The notorious case of Vassall, the clerk who had been recruited as a result of homosexual blackmail, had happened before my time; as had the more remarkable incident of the Ambassador who had been compromised by one of the maids. The knowledge that compromise was a standard technique induced a suspicion of normal friendly approaches and itself played its part in KGB policy, by acting both as a source of additional stress and as a disincentive to contact with private Russian citizens.

I was interested to see how they would approach me and was disposed to credit them with a degree of originality. At a reception given by the 2nd European Department, Suslov introduced me to an individual - let us call him Mr. P. - whom he described as a consultant with IMEMO, a theoretically independent foreign affairs institute. We chatted briefly and parted. A month or so later at a national day reception, up popped Mr. P. and, after talking for a time, suggested lunch. I agreed and the lunch duly took place in a private room in one of the main hotels, a heavily panelled room with a table laden with caviar and brandy which might well have been the film set for a rather over-staged seduction scene. After discussing this and that, Mr. P. remarked that, if I wished, he would be glad to help me to visit some interesting places and meet more interesting people than those whom I could meet through officials such as "that dull fellow Suslov." In response to a question about the locations and individuals he had in mind, I was amused that he mentioned Zagorsk, where the Monastery of St Sergei and the Orthodox seminary were a major tourist attraction and a KGB haunt. Then, remarking that he knew of my interest in the history of British-Russian relations, he asked if I knew what had happened to King Harold's daughter after that unfortunate affair with the arrow at Hastings. I admitted that I did not and he informed me that the wife and daughter had made their way via Scandinavia to Kiev, where the daughter had married Vladimir Monomakh, one of the ancestors of the Russian tsars. I was intrigued and he undertook to send me details. After a little more conversation, he remarked that, knowing my wife to be a Scot, he would like to present to her a Soviet postage stamp of Robert Burns. "There aren't many of them left and they are becoming quite valuable". I thanked him and we parted. The stamp went with my report to those responsible in London, who confirmed their knowledge of Mr. P. as a cheeky operator. A week or so later, a letter came from him with more details about

King Harold's daughter and he received a polite reply from my secretary, thanking him for the interesting information, which had been duly noted. I thought I had seen the last of him, but a few weeks later, as Margaret and I were shopping in one of the markets, we suddenly found him alongside us: "Fancy meeting you here, Ambassador. Look, I have just been doing my shopping". Opening a large shopping bag, he displayed a single daffodil, a bloom which by this time seemed almost as sinister as Mr. P. himself. I do not know whether he then gave up. We thought we saw him on the platform when we were about to leave on a tour, but we could not be sure and gradually we ceased to be on the look out for him. It had been a simple and unsuccessful attempt to establish contact. I knew that some Ambassadors of other countries had responded to similar approaches and felt that they gained from them, but I did not want to play the KGB's game on their home ground by their rules.

The attack on individuals was of course matched by a highly sophisticated technical repertoire. At one end of the scale was the elaborate wiring system which was so thoroughly built into the new American Embassy building that demolition seemed the only solution; at the other end were stories such as that told by one of the Asian Ambassadors who was with a group of colleagues being entertained by Russians at an open air party when he felt something in his lap and, looking down, discovered that a recording device which had been fastened under the table had come loose. Hard wired system were of course supplemented by microwave and other means of eavesdropping. At one time the KGB use of microwave equipment caused anxiety in the American Embassy and to a lesser extent in my own about damaging health implications. Tests were done and it seemed that there was no radiation danger, but this is an area where it is very hard to be certain either about the nature of the attack or the long-term physiological consequences and the constant uncertainty added to the other strains of life in Moscow. After a couple of years I developed an irritating facial tic and consulted a doctor in London. He said that there was no sign of disease; I must be suffering from strain. I replied, genuinely, that I did not feel under any strain, but he must have been right, because it disappeared when we left Moscow.

Although we accepted that all the domestic staff were required to work for the KGB, it was still interesting when one of them, our driver Konstantin, decided to tell his story to the press. Konstantin was an endearing, untidy, erratic character who had

narrowly escaped dismissal by a succession of Ambassadors. He wore the badge of a master of sport which he had gained for his skill in motor-cycle racing on ice, a sport which was less dangerous than it sounds. He was also, in his spare time a stunt driver for films and as we went round Moscow would point out where he had done a chase round the market stalls or staged a head-on crash with a bus, but he was very absent minded and there were times when we felt that his hobby spilled over into his driving of the Rolls-Royce. We came to know his wife Larissa, a teacher, the sons of whom he was very proud and his mother who lived in a little house in Klin, the town where Tchaikovsky lived and where Konstantin and Larissa had met when she was working as a guide in the Tchaikovsky museum. On one occasion Konstantin decided that it would be a good idea for mother to keep chickens, so bought her forty baby chicks and a book on rearing them; we called on her some months later and found the house almost submerged in chickens. After eating a large bowl of hard-boiled eggs washed down with copious draughts of brandy we went on our way. The first instalment of Konstantin's published story covered his upbringing as the child of a KGB officer, his training with Intourist, his first assignment with American tourists and the rather unsuccessful operation against religious dissidents which ended with his being arrested by the regular militia. We were looking forward to later instalments, but there were rumours of KGB harassment, Konstantin disappeared and there were no more articles. This was the way of Moscow. One day my Russian teacher, after an absence of a couple of days, came back in tears. She would not say what was wrong: "Don't ask me. They are terrible people". And she was gone.

One well known feature of the Moscow landscape was Victor Louis, notionally a stringer for the London Evening News as long as it lasted, but in reality some form of KGB employee. Every member of the KGB seems to be given the courtesy title of 'Colonel' in Western literature. What his actual description was I have no idea, but of his role as an agent there could be little doubt. His wife had been nanny to one of the British naval attaches and remained a pillar of the English Church. I recollect being invited to a wedding anniversary party in his house, a dacha in a fashionable area on the edge of Moscow, with a Mercedes and a Bentley in the garage, the rooms decorated with ikons, the tables laden with salmon and caviare and the TV showing a video of "Match of the Day" sent from Britain by his mother-in-law. He was said to have made his money as the channel by which Khrushchev's memoirs had been

passed to the West, but I do not think this can have been his only source of income. He was just a part of that whole sub-world of the Soviet Union, a kind of under-water jungle which you might observe as through a glass-bottomed boat, but into which you dived at your peril, for, as an old chart might have shown it "Here be strange sea-monsters". And they were liable to come up from the depths to swallow the unwary.

It was part of the propaganda of the Soviet state to pretend that the crimes which afflicted bourgeois society were unknown under socialism. This was nonsense. It is true, though, that different societies breed different crimes. For some reason windscreen wipers were hard to come by and in Moscow theft was so prevalent that it was normal practice to keep them under the dashboard when not in use; a sudden shower would see cars halted while the drivers scurried round to fix them in place. Corruption was rife, the most celebrated case being the one which ended with the Fisheries Minister being shot and a number of officials going to prison for an elaborate fraud involving the export of caviare in tins labelled as cod; all went well until one consignment went astray. Drunkenness was extreme and, somehow, Russian drunks contrived to behave like stage drunks as they staggered along the pavement before the police van caught up and took them off to the sobering up station. Drunkenness in turn led to violence. But, for all this, life in Moscow was more secure than in many Western capitals. Each evening, summer and winter, Margaret and I would try to make time for a walk along the embankment, across one of the bridges, through Red Square, round the Kremlin and back across the next bridge; today I would fear the muggers on the darker parts of that walk, but in those days we never gave a thought to physical attack.

The Embassy had a pleasant garden which was useful for informal entertaining and a tennis court which we used a lot during the summer. In winter it was flooded and used for broomball, a form of ice-hockey in which the players wear tennis shoes and hit a ball with a broom made of a small bundle of twigs; it sounds relatively harmless, but was played with great determination by a league which included such formidable teams as the US Marines; such was the casualty rate and such was the exuberance of the spectators that some Embassies closed their courts to broomball, but, like so many sports, it was a British invention and we persevered, though not victoriously. I did not play. Margaret and I preferred to join the many Muscovites who spent their winter

weekends with cross country skis in the woods and fields around Moscow; sometimes we would travel 80 miles or so to Zavidovo where we could rent a room for the weekend in an establishment run by the organisation - KGB controlled of course - which provided facilities for diplomats. Here we could trudge along the frozen Volga on our skis and then clamber up the bank and make our way back through a village and across the fields to the guest-house.

"WHOEVER HEARD OF A HERBERT"

One result of the freezing of relations after the Afghan and Polish crises was that a large part of my normal work was virtually eliminated. The absence of visits by Ministers and other delegations meant a sharp reduction in the opportunities for contact with their Russian opposite numbers and instead of struggling my hardest to break down Soviet barriers to normal contact I found myself having to erect them. Travelling to other parts of the Soviet Union also became more difficult, since although Margaret and I were free to travel throughout most of the country, I needed the help of the Foreign Ministry to make appointments and, on arrival, I was entertained by the local authorities. It was difficult to accept hospitality and to engage in mutual toasts to friendship while at the same time demonstrating disapproval.

We could still take advantage of such purely informal contacts as were open. Odd moments linger in the memory. We picnicked at Zagorsk on a grassy spot above the river, by the monastery and a man emerged from a little wooden house, curious about our identity. We chatted and were invited in. It was a comfortable little place which he had built himself and he showed us with pride the shower which he had built, explaining that his water came from the real spring of St. Sergei, not like the allegedly miraculous water in the monastery which came from the municipal pipes. On another occasion we had driven ourselves in our Range Rover, without Konstantin, to the little town of Suzdal to look at the local Kremlin and the famed churches. I asked a militia man where I could park and was directed to a muddy open space the size of a football field, occupied by a single derelict bus. I parked tidily alongside it and we were walking away when a one-legged man came stumping through the mud. He beckoned me towards a hut. We entered and seating himself behind a large desk he invited me also to sit. I assumed he wanted a parking fee rather than a social occasion, so

remained standing while I fumbled for some small change. Sternly this time, he commanded me to sit. I did so and the interrogation began. "Name?" "Keeble". "No such name" was the surprising response. I took a piece of paper and wrote it for him in Cyrillic script. He regarded it with disbelief. "Make of car?" Having had Keeble rejected, I was disinclined to try Range Rover and replied "An English car". "No good. Papers!" I produced my diplomatic pass. He examined it, turned it upside down, examined it again and rejected it. I offered a Russian driving licence, which bore my full name. At this point a drunk intervened. He had emerged from a corner of the hut and was watching fixedly. Now, with shaking hand and slurred voice, he pointed to the licence and said "Look. It says the make of car there. It's a Herbert". "Nonsense" said the one-legged man. "Whoever heard of a Herbert". But he duly registered the car as a Herbert, demanded twenty kopecks, wrote out a receipt and urged me to take good care of it. I did. On leaving, the operation was repeated. I signed his book to confirm that I had taken delivery of my car. Picking up his cap, he stumped out, still accompanied by the drunk. The pair stood unsteadily to attention and gave a wavering salute as we left. Somehow that incident summed up so much of Soviet bureaucracy. Ludicrous in its clumsy inefficiency, it did somehow function: it provided employment for many people at a minimal wage; if you went along with it, you could eventually make it deliver the goods; but, challenged, it would seize up totally. Later, when Gorbachev began his perestroika with the dream of giving the Soviet Union a modern market-oriented economy, I could not help thinking that this was the material he had to work with.

Surrounding Moscow is the "Golden Ring" of ancient fortified towns on the old trading routes which had built up their prosperity between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries and which, despite all the neglect, the decay, the shoddy industrialisation and the standardised multi-storey flats of the Soviet era, still carried in their richly decorated churches and the ruins of their kremlin walls, some feeling for the days of their greatness. I managed a painting of the golden domes of Rostov the Great seen in the distance across the lake, but our fondest memory is of Kostroma, a little town on the Volga, closed at that time to foreigners. We managed to visit it and found a church with a lion and a unicorn carved into the stone walls. The priest explained that English ships used to trade indigo for flax and that on one occasion, when the cargo had been unloaded a bag of gold had been found, apparently forgotten. The

merchants of Kostroma had communicated with the shippers, who had replied, thanking them and asking that the gold should be devoted to some good cause. So Kostroma had built that church and had carved the coat of arms on the wall. The story sounded unlikely, but there was no doubt about the coat of arms and, if it was not true, it deserved to be.

Because of the strain of a Moscow posting, it was normal practice to take a period of leave in Britain each year. The sense of relief as we boarded a British Airways plane at Moscow or drove through the border crossing was quite remarkable. We felt it especially on the drive out to Finland where the road seems to grow gradually more empty and forbidding as one approaches the border. Then eventually the frontier control post on the Russian side, the slow, unsmiling scrutiny of passports and at last, as one is waved on, the sense of light-heartedness. It made one realise what freedom felt like. I used to think that if we, who had all the privileges of accredited diplomats in Moscow and no logical reason to fear trouble at the border, felt like that, what must it have been like for those with whom the KGB were free to play any cat and mouse games they chose. It was interesting to use the various sea routes home. The most direct was from Helsinki to Purfleet, but once we took the train to Helsinki and then a bus the whole length of Finland and into Norway at Kirkenaes, just across the border from Murmansk. From there we took a coastal steamer round northern Norway and down to Bergen, a train from Bergen to Oslo and a flight back to London. If ever you have the chance to take that trip round the Norwegian coast, don't miss it. The steamer is rather like a country bus, stopping off at each isolated little port, delivering passengers, mail and parcels and then, with only the briefest pause, scurrying on its way. Most of the time it is using the fjords and sheltered coastal waters, so you have magnificent views, not too much rough sea and, if you do it in mid-summer, the midnight sun of the Arctic Circle. On another occasion we went the other way round, taking the train to Odessa and catching a boat which sailed from there to Venice, repeating the journeys I had made some thirty years earlier on the Staffordshire. Sadly, a normal leave could scarcely stretch to a sea journey home via Vladivostok.

SIBERIA

At one point, when relations were beginning to be a little bit easier, I planned an exploratory visit to Siberia. Here lay the great mineral resources of the Soviet Union and the construction of the BAM, the new trans-Siberian railway line, had begun. My plan was to go to Tomsk, where a British firm was building an industrial plant, from there to Irkutsk, the centre of eastern Siberia, north to Yakutsk and from there to a remote mining settlement on the BAM, before making my way back to Irkutsk and taking the train on to Peking to stay for a few days with the Ambassador before returning to Moscow. The first part of the journey went well. In Tomsk, a town normally closed to foreigners, a large crowd had turned out to see our arrival. I was puzzled, but our hosts explained that this was the first time in the history of Tomsk that any Ambassador had visited the town. We visited the plant and were encouraged to find that Siberian metal erectors were working well with a British firm. Irkutsk was very different. There was not much direct commercial interest here, but for Margaret it was linked with the revolutionaries of 1825, the Decembrists, as idealistic as they were unsuccessful, some of whom were executed and others exiled to Siberia. Several of the wives, choosing to share their husbands' exile, had made the terrible journey through the Siberian wilderness to Irkutsk, where they had introduced a civilising cultural influence which had persisted through a century of Tsarist repression and sixty years of Communist ideology. We visited the rather touching little museum recalling their exploits before flying 1200 miles north east to Yakutsk, the main town of north-eastern Siberia, built on permafrost beside the mighty Lena River which flows nearly 3000 miles from Irkutsk to the Arctic. Lena Goldfields were a big British investment in Tsarist Russia and today gold is still a major industry in the area, while in winter the frozen Lena is the nearest approach to a motorway for lorry traffic in the largely roadless waste of Siberia. From Yakutsk another aircraft took us 600 miles south-east to the BAM spur at BirKakit and the great open cast coal mine at Nyurengri.

So far all had gone well and I began to think that I understood something of the problems which the Russians faced in unlocking Siberia's resources. The operation at Nyurengri was very like the kind of operations which I had seen in Australia, where international companies were extracting mineral resources from a hostile, unpopulated

environment. There was the same kind of massive earth-moving machinery, the company town, with the same prefabricated houses, the school, the crèche and the store. Even the general manager, a keen young engineer, would have fitted well into an Australian environment. With coal, there was no option but to transport it to where it was needed. With other resources there was a problem in deciding how far to take local production. Two factors determined this. First the lack of local demand in an unpopulated area. Second the cost of transportation on the Trans-Siberian. Taking these two together, it made sense to process locally only to the point which achieved the maximum of freight saving in terms of volume. As one manager put it to me: "Think of a plastic tube. There's no demand for plastic tubing here and no point in shipping a tube full of air from here to Moscow." As with the multinationals, pay was the inducement which brought workers to Siberia. Rates were graduated with premia according to distance from civilisation and beastliness of climate up to about treble the Moscow rate. Even so it was hard to get enough workers. So the premia were increased. But this brought a net outflow. Puzzled, the authorities investigated, eventually discovering that the less time it took a worker to save the cost of a car, the less time he needed to stay in Siberia.

It was early October and at Nyurengri the snow began. All day and most of the night we sat eating and drinking in a guest house with Michael Shipster upholding Britain's honour by taking on the local Russians at chess. From time to time we would ask about the prospect of escape. But the airstrip was closed and the road, such as it was, impassable. Finally, news came that we could take off for Yakutsk. At Yakutsk, no aircraft to Irkutsk. We went to the local hotel and every hour or so there would be a progress report - "The aircraft will arrive in an hour", "The aircraft is still at Irkutsk", The aircraft is about to leave. Hurry. We go to the airport." "The aircraft could not leave Irkutsk". Finally, "The aircraft is ready for departure". We boarded and arrived in Irkutsk at 2 p.m. The train to Peking had left at noon. The next one would go the following week. To fly to Peking would mean returning half way across Asia, 3000 miles to Moscow and starting out again. Would we prefer to spend the week in Irkutsk? Interested though we were in Siberia, I could not justify another week away from the Embassy before even starting the 2,500-mile rail journey to Peking and back across the Gobi desert and through Mongolia. So we had managed to learn a little

about Siberia. We had seen places which very few Muscovites had ever seen. But to this day we have never set foot in China.

LEAVING THE EVIL EMPIRE

It is possible to sustain a chill in diplomatic relations for a time, possibly a year or so, but once the gesture has been made, it begins to lose effect. The country whom you are trying to snub knows this. Its leaders know that they have only to wait and in course of time purely practical considerations will bring a gradual return to something like normality. This was the case towards the end of my time in Moscow. There were solid reasons for contact with Moscow. One was our commercial interest in the market. The Russians, with a totally state-controlled economy, could use trade as a political weapon and had long done so; in a market economy this is much more difficult. The political case for contact was strong too. The Soviet Union was beginning to show the characteristics of a dying empire. Our political interest lay in pursuing the CSCE process, securing respect for human rights, opening up East-West exchanges, furthering arms control negotiations. During the frozen immobility of the cold war the risks, massive though they were, were calculable; neither side wanted to precipitate war and both understood the conventions which had to be observed. As the empire began to crumble, with everything becoming fluid and uncertain, the need for effective, meaningful dialogue would be greater.

In the first years of the Reagan administration, the rhetorical denunciation of the "evil empire" set the tone of relations - or more accurately of non-relations. As a description of the Soviet Union it was entirely accurate and well deserved. But merely standing back and hurling epithets - a practice in which every Communist is well skilled - does not, of itself, make a policy. It was clear that the ageing Soviet leadership could not survive much longer. From month to month, as Brezhnev failed, we expected his death. It seemed probable that he would be succeeded by either Andropov or Chernenko, but the former was known to be sick and the latter an elderly nonentity, so it would not be long before a younger generation took over. A simple process of analysing the possible contenders led one's eye to Gorbachev and Romanov; neither was well known in the West, but what was known of Romanov, the Leningrad party boss, suggested that Gorbachev would get the better of him. The

important thing was that we should begin to get closer to this next generation and it was hard to do this without some political dialogue. Back in London on leave, I had a long talk with Margaret Thatcher. She asked a number of shrewd questions about the Soviet Union and ended the discussion by saying: "Ah. I see. We must be more subtle". British policy did indeed become more subtle, though the opportunity for progress did not come until Brezhnev and his two successors, Andropov and Chernenko had both died in the space of less than three years, leaving Gorbachev free to introduce the reform process. By then we were back in Thames Ditton.

Retirement from the Diplomatic Service comes promptly on one's sixtieth birthday, so I knew well in advance that on 18 September 1992 I should be back in Britain, having already used up any leave which was due to me. We both felt that it was time to go. The Service had given me a better life than I had ever expected. I remember thinking when I started that perhaps, if I were lucky, I might end up as a Consul or even a Consul-General. I remember, rather later, Robert Maxwell saying to me: "I suppose in your modest way you might do quite well." I had not seen myself as likely to become an Ambassador and certainly not Ambassador in one of the major capitals. The CMG in Australia had been followed by the Knighthood when we took up the Moscow Embassy and the 'G' at the end of our time there. Everyone has some regrets. Ours were not in terms of what we might have done or where we might have gone in the Service, but rather of what we had given up. We had been much luckier than most of our colleagues in the Service in that we had been able to spend so much time in London, leading a normal family life. But even so we had missed so much of the formative years of your mother and your aunts, so much of the fun of our own family and so much of the last years of our parents. And that is what life is really about.

We had a wonderful send-off from Moscow. We used the white and gold ballroom as it was meant to be used, for a farewell ball and the Embassy staff chartered a Russian boat for an evening cruise on the Moscow River, the high spot being when I satisfied a fifty year old ambition by taking over the drums. When I was back in London somebody asked what it was like, giving up all the pomp and ceremony of a grand Embassy. I said: "It's very easy. The show is over. The curtain is down. The lights

are out. The make-up and the costumes come off. You put on a raincoat and take the bus home. It's been loads of fun, but it's good to be home again."

EPILOGUE

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THE EMBASSY NEGOTIATIONS

Shortly after I retired I was invited to handle negotiations for a reciprocal deal with the Soviet Union under which the two countries would build new Embassies in London and Moscow. While I was in Moscow, I had fought hard to keep our magnificent old building, but the lease had long expired and the Russians were adamant that we must move. The Russian leases in London were also close to expiry. We delayed as long as we could, but Ministers eventually conceded that the present Embassy buildings in both capitals should be vacated and new buildings erected on cleared sites. The first stage of the negotiation was to agree on sites. For the Soviet Government which controlled all the land in Moscow it was simply a matter of allocating sites which we were prepared to accept; we eventually found one for a house for the Ambassador and a second one for the offices. In London, the situation was rather different. The Foreign Office controlled no land and the Government itself had only a limited number of spare sites in the capital. Moreover, we could not offer a site to the Russians until we knew that we should be able to acquire it at an acceptable cost and we could not acquire it until we knew that it was acceptable to the Russians. The Foreign Secretary had to be armed with legal authority to acquire land for the purpose of housing a foreign Embassy. We then considered the sites which were likely to be on the market, checked on probable cost, excluded some such as a redundant gas works opposite Kew and eventually conducted the Russians round a short list, from which they selected a former Territorial Army site on Warwick Road and a large plot at the northern entrance to Kensington Palace Gardens. We bought the freehold of the former for just over £1 million and paid a premium of just over £8 million to the Crown Estate for the latter. This enabled us to conclude an intergovernmental agreement on the exchange, but we were concerned not to give the Russians a free hand on construction in London until we had secured a free hand in

Moscow. The agreement, signed on the occasion of Margaret Thatcher's visit to Moscow in 1987 therefore provided that the sites would not be handed over until all the construction arrangements had been agreed and the plans approved. An advisory group was appointed under the chairmanship of the Duke of Gloucester to monitor the design work and we began to move ahead. The US Government had already been engaged for some years on a similar project and discovered that the new Embassy which they had permitted the Russians to build for them in Moscow was riddled with so many in-built eavesdropping devices that it was unusable; we were therefore reinforced in our determination that the central core of the new British Embassy should be wholly British built with British labour and materials. The Russians were equally determined to frustrate this.

At this point Mikhail Gorbachev took over the leadership of the Soviet Union and the climate of bilateral relations was transformed. In a private conversation with Margaret Thatcher, he agreed that the two Ambassadors should continue to live in their present houses. In order to make this possible in London, I had to negotiate with the Crown Estate to secure a 99-year lease of the Soviet Embassy house for which the Foreign Office paid £23 million in order to give it to the Russians for £1 a year in exchange for the British house in Moscow at one rouble a year. We still needed the new offices in both capitals. While we laboured on, Ambassadors came and went, Thatcher and Gorbachev were ejected from office, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, new Embassies were set up in former Soviet republics and the Moscow Embassy was redesigned. Now, as I write, a team is setting off to Moscow to set in hand the definitive (we hope) plans for design and construction. It has taken longer to conduct these negotiations than it took to design and build the Channel Tunnel. The only consolation is that we might have moved much faster and fared much worse. The result of our persistence is that we have kept the superb old building facing the Kremlin and the new offices will be based on an improved design at a much lower cost than originally envisaged. It has been an interesting exercise and the end result will be an Embassy which will enable British Ambassadors to hold their head high in Moscow long after I have gone.

CARROLL

One day in 1988 I was lecturing to a group of businessmen about trade with Russia. At the end of lunch Ewen Broadbent came up to me. I had known him as my opposite number in the Ministry of Defence where he was Second Permanent Secretary responsible for all staff matters when I was Chief Clerk. He said that he was working with something called the Carroll Group. They wanted to undertake a major hotel and office development in Moscow and he wondered whether I was interested in joining them. I went along to Carroll House and discussed the project. The upshot was that I was asked to join them as a consultant with a view to taking on the chairmanship of the company which they would set up for the Moscow project. Having confirmed that the Foreign Office saw no objection to my doing this at the same time as I was handling the Embassy negotiations, I agreed. With Gerald Carroll, I visited Moscow. It was the first time I had taken part in a negotiation between a stolid Communist bureaucrat and a young Irish entrepreneur. By the end of it, I would say that the relationship was something less than harmonious, but in substance Gerald got what he wanted, an excellent site, the central area of the square with the monument to the 1905 revolution. (I suppose the London equivalent would be something like Trafalgar Square located at the junction of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road). I returned from Moscow far from certain that I wanted to stay with Carroll, but the project was exciting in its concept and sound in its essentials, so I thought that if the price was a degree of waywardness in negotiating methods I could probably put up with this. A company was formed, the Anglo-Soviet Development Corporation, design work was pushed ahead, lease negotiations were carried through, a joint venture was set up with the Moscow City Association of Hotels, a hotel operator was found and negotiations were undertaken with Bouygues for the construction work which was to be financed by Credit Lyonnais. The DTI provided a loan of £250,000 for the initial design work. I chaired one meeting of the Anglo-Soviet board, but it only took one meeting for me to conclude that I should not be able to exercise the responsibility of a chairman. The company would effectively be run by Gerald. I attended two more meetings as a member, but then decided that I was not even prepared to take that degree of responsibility. As a non-executive director of a company owned and controlled by one headstrong individual, one takes responsibility

without being able to exercise it. I did not want to be in this exposed position and so I reverted to working as a consultant.

It was as a consultant to Carroll that I paid a further visit to Moscow with Gerald to try to push ahead the Trade Centre project. To our surprise we were invited to call at the Kremlin, where Vice-President Rutskoy asked for help with a project to restore the Russian sugar beet industry. The project was a sound one, since the Russians have a sweet tooth. The old Soviet Union was spending about $1000 million a year buying sugar on the world market. It was perfectly capable of replacing this with home-grown beet sugar. It had good growing conditions, but yields of sugar at two tons for every hectare sown with beet were only one-third of the British level. If Gerald would help with this project, the sugar would be sold in Russia and the counterpart could be made available in a variety of forms including output from the defence sector, high quality ball-bearings, minerals or timber. Gerald took on the challenge. We assembled a group of experts and carried out a two day inspection tour of the Kursk area, flying with Rutskoy in his vice-presidential aircraft, staying in a palatial Communist Party guest house, being greeted and feted by the local population and, finally, signing an agreement under which Carroll would invest £20 million in equipment and know-how for five trial plots of 300 hectares each and new instrumentation for one of the factories. The £20 million was to be recouped not by sugar but by a forward contract for Siberian oil which Shell were prepared to take. In the event Shell's bankers refused to fund oil 6 months forward and Rutskoy could not provide a spot contract. Indeed he did not even provide a 6 month forward contract. So nothing happened. It was a pity, because the scheme was eminently sensible, but the conditions in Russia were so uncertain that nobody could take the risk of putting up £20 million and Rutskoy could not work with the Harvard-trained economists in his own Government, whom he described as "the boys in pink pants".

A further Russian scheme which came to nothing was launched in response to an invitation by the Russians to market one of their giant helicopters and help with the upgrading of their military aircraft. Gerald told me that he had given them my name as director of a joint venture which would have a 50% stake in the great Rostov helicopter plant. But by this time I had had enough and said that I was not even prepared to continue as a consultant.

ACCOUNTANCY

In the autumn of 1992 I had just severed my connexion with Carroll and was feeling that I had free time, when I received a letter from Michael Palliser asking whether I would be interested in a project to help the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet republics to develop accountancy professions capable of handling the transition to a market economy. The project looked interesting. Everything I had seen of the working of Soviet-style planned economies suggested that they would never be able to reform until they were able to base their management decisions on proper financial considerations rather than centrally imposed quantitative targets. I said I was prepared to take the job on provided the accountancy profession would muster the funds. So the professional institutes got together to provide office facilities and the salary of an executive and a secretary, a group of major firms undertook to contribute £5,000 a year each for projects, the Foundation for Accountancy and Financial Management was set up with myself as chairman and a board composed of representatives of the profession and off we went. I was back in the profession which I had left 52 years earlier for my digression into diplomacy.

THE BOOKS

Before I left Moscow, Donald Watt, the Director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, had invited me to edit a book on the links between domestic and foreign policy in the Soviet Union, so I took this on and worked with a distinguished group of academics. We worked out a framework, each contributed a chapter and I did my best to tie them together. The result was "The Soviet State", published in 1984. Looking back on it, the project was a good one. We did identify the weakness of the system and we drew the right conclusions in terms of the pressure for caution in Soviet foreign policy. In the final chapter I wrote that the Soviet Union "presented the image of a cautious, unadventurous society, a society with waning faith in its ideology, a society whose stability testifies more to a lack of dynamism than to any positive faith, an imperial power extended up to and probably a little beyond the practical limit of its capacity, a state hostile to most of the ideals of the Western democracies but with a need for stability in its relations with them." I

suggested that a country which had in the past produced leaders of frightening and erratic power could, despite the odds, produce another giant of good or evil, but that, in the last resort, it would be the people who would determine the evolution of the state; the Communist Party had moulded the state but it had signally failed to mould the people and if the day were to come when the Soviet Union would act as a partner rather than an adversary it would be when the policies of the state came to reflect the people rather than the ideology. What none of us predicted was the total collapse of the system. We all assumed that the Communist Party would retain its hold on power and that, while Soviet policies would evolve, the Soviet State would survive.

I had taken little part in the work of Chatham House since joining it in 1947, but now I felt able to be much more active and was delighted when I was elected as a member of their Council. I think we did a good job in setting the Institute's funds on a sounder footing and expanding the research programme in such a way as to attract corporate funding. The first book had given me a taste for writing, but the trouble with editing a collective work is that the contributors receive only a minimal fee and tend to produce work which they have already done, with the result that the book ends up more as a collection of separate essays than a single work. "The Soviet State" was well reviewed and sold well, but I vowed that if ever I were to write anything else it would be my own work from beginning to end. The book I wanted to do was one analysing the course of British policy towards the Soviet Union from the time of the October Revolution in 1917 up to the present day. It was with some hesitancy that I started on this. I got in touch with Macmillan, but their editor left to set up a new publishing venture between Waterstone and Sidgwick. She invited me to let them publish the book and I agreed, but Sidgwick were bought by Forte and sold on to Macmillan, with the result that I found myself back in the Macmillan stable and signed a contract with them. I had been warned that Macmillan would content themselves with selling a couple of thousand copies at a high price. This was tiresome, since I was writing for a general rather than a specialist audience and I did my best to make this clear to them. But it was to no avail.

As I got into my stride, consulting Chatham House Library, the British Library and the FCO Library and delving into the old papers in the Public Record Office, I became fascinated by the work and had a hard time preventing all the interesting

byways from leading me away from the central theme. If I were to deal adequately with the development of the bilateral British-Soviet relationship, I had to follow it through all the great international events in the seventy years or so after 1917. At some periods my theme was dominant. Then other broader themes would take over and it would be submerged before surfacing again. This meant that I had to deal with major issues such as the arms control negotiations in order to establish the context, but could do so in only the most cursory fashion. I intended to cover the period up to the end of 1987, but the research itself was a long process and then it took a long time to deal with points such as securing permission to quote from Record Office documents, clearing the text with the Foreign Office, checking the references, researching the photographs, agreeing the layout and making the index.

While I was labouring away, Gorbachev had come to power and was starting the process of perestroika. This, I thought, would make for an optimistic final chapter in which I could look forward to the creation of a new, stable and productive relationship with the Soviet Union, a relationship reflecting a move from confrontation to co-operation. But events were rushing ahead of my drafting. As I embarked on the final chapter Gorbachev was hesitating in his economic reforms while around him, and above all in Eastern Europe, his empire was crumbling. Finally consigning the text to the printers in July 1989 I wrote that we were at one of history's brief moments of flux, when the old patterns might be broken. I urged that at this point the British Government should play as important a part in shaping the response to the positive challenge of Soviet reform as it had in meeting the negative challenge of Soviet power. I could foresee the end of old-style Soviet socialism. But I could not foresee that another thirty months would see the end of the Soviet empire, of the whole structure of Communist Party control of the Soviet Union and finally of the state itself.

While working on the books I was invited to join the Council of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. The Director, Michael Branch, was very alive to the need to make the work of the School more relevant to the contemporary scene. In Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union we were witnessing one of the great periods of European history and SSEES, the primary British institution specifically devoted to the study of this area, was ideally placed to take the lead in working on it.

Unfortunately, much of the School's work seemed to be still rooted in ancient history, linguistics and the literature of earlier centuries. Michael's efforts were in large measure successful and he was lucky to have the support of people like Geoffrey Hosking, one of the country's leading experts on contemporary Russia. It is not easy to wean academics from a lifetime of specialisation or to reshape the habits of an academic institution and it has been a great pleasure to see the success which Michael has already achieved.

I had a taste of the rather different atmosphere of American universities when I was invited to lecture at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana and built around this visit a series of lectures, some in New York and Chicago to businessmen and foreign affairs experts, others at universities and one at the military academy at West Point. In Moscow, Gorbachev was asserting his power and my main theme was the opportunity which this gave for a transformation in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The degree of interest was quite staggering. Questions went on and on and I can still remember how Margaret and I, finally retiring to bed, were pursued into the lift by students still eager to carry on the discussion. In New York we stayed in Tom Watson's flat and he suggested I should use his aircraft to fly up to Rhode Island for a lecture at Brown University. I duly reported to the airport where the pilot greeted me and said: "Do you want to fly this thing, or shall I?" "I've never flown anything in my life." "Don't let that worry you. I'm a qualified instructor. I'll take it off the ground and put it down again and you can have it in between". So I climbed into the pilot's seat and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. He fortunately took care of the air traffic control, but it was still mildly disconcerting to hear a voice come over: "There's a 747 coming up astern of you. Just let him overtake and land in front of you." We managed a side trip to Washington where we looked at our old house, but it was something of a disappointment. The house looked smaller and generally less impressive than it had been thirty years earlier and the centre of the city, bereft of its main department stores, struck us as shabby and litter strewn.

THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

In 1985 I was invited to help the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons with an inquiry into the state of bilateral relations between the United

Kingdom and the Soviet Union. This took place just after Mr. Gorbachev's successful visit to Britain in 1984 and his assumption of the office of General Secretary in succession to Chernenko. It was therefore a time of cautious optimism about the future of relations. My part in the proceedings was to assist in the framing of questions to be put to those giving evidence and in the drafting of the report. (If you want to see my main contribution, get hold of a copy of Foreign Affairs Committee Session 1985-86: UK-Soviet Relations Volume I Appendix A). The Soviet armed forces were still engaged in a bitter conflict in Afghanistan, but the thrust of the report was to call for a better dialogue with the new leadership. The recommendations set out the broad objective in a passage for which I was responsible: "The problem which faces us now, at the beginning of a new cycle in the relationship, is how best to ensure that future tensions are contained, that those interests which Britain and the Soviet Union have in common are exploited to the full, that distrust is not aggravated by misunderstanding and that the risk of armed conflict, and particularly nuclear conflict, is eliminated." Early in 1989 the Committee carried out a wider study on relations with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On this occasion I submitted in my capacity as Chairman of the Great-Britain USSR Association a memorandum which you will find in their report published on 21 March 1989 and gave some oral evidence (Pages 213 - 219). In the four years since the earlier report, events had moved on and our recommendations had been proved correct. At the end of my evidence, the Chairman asked if I wanted to make a general point and I replied: "The process which has taken place is, I believe, deeply significant. In a sense it is this moving from the reality of a confrontational relationship to the chance of one based more on co-operation, but it is not the kind of absolute change that one can effect by signing some magnificent international instrument. It is something that is going to take a great deal of time. It is dependent primarily upon change in the Soviet Union, because the confrontation has stemmed from Soviet policies and Soviet doctrines pursued over many years. So we have to look to them for the process of continuing change. My hope would be that where we can give support we should do so." With that I summed up what I felt about the relationship with which I had struggled in Moscow and which now, at last, seemed to be changing for the better.

THE NEW RUSSIA

It was my continuing interest in Russia which had led me to accept the chairmanship of the Great-Britain USSR Association, the body which had been created to foster personal and professional contacts between Britain and the Soviet Union through channels which were free from the taint of the KGB. I said I would only take it on if the Association could be assured of continued support from the Foreign Office. This assurance was given and was fully honoured. We were fortunate in that Lord Whitelaw agreed to take on the Presidency of the Association and we had a distinguished group of Vice-Presidents, including in particular Frank Roberts and Fitzroy Maclean. When Gorbachev began his attempt to convert the Soviet Union from a society governed by the Party to one governed by the law we organised a joint seminar on legal systems and in 1990, with massive financial support from the Foreign Office, we put on in Kiev a series of major presentations of aspects of British life which was opened by Margaret Thatcher. When the Soviet Union broke up we considered the future of the Association and concluded that it still had a useful job to do, so, renamed as the Britain-Russia Centre and with a sister body The British East-West Centre to deal with the Republics other than Russia, we pressed on with the task of supporting by every means we could those who were trying to create out of the ruins of the old Soviet Union a new, open, democratic society.

There was a logic to this. Throughout the whole of my career, the dominant feature of the international scene was the conflict between the Western democracies and the ideologically-based power structure of Soviet Communism. The dissolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself at the end of 1991, marked the end of an era in international relations. It came after a much longer and potentially even more dangerous struggle than the one we had waged against Nazi Germany and her allies; and the peaceful victory of 1991 raised more complex problems than those raised by the military victory of 1945.

In the space of a very few years after 1945 the development of a new Germany was initiated by allied military occupation, the new structure of international relations was defined by the formation of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the GATT, the Western alliance by NATO, the transatlantic

economic partnership by the OEEC and the process of European integration by the Council of Europe, the Coal and Steel Community, Euratom and, in 1956, the Treaty of Rome. By comparison with the short life of Nazi Germany - it now seems to have been a very short-lived phenomenon, a matter of only a dozen years - Soviet Communism, with seventy-four years of life behind it, left a void which was more difficult to fill. We now face three broad groups of problems, not dissimilar in character from those of 1945: the conduct of relations with the new Russia and the other republics of the former Soviet Union; the redefinition of the framework of global politics; and the resurgence of half-suppressed old nationalism. If Russia is genuinely prepared to make common cause with us in searching to resolve international problems, the world wide organisations now have the prospect of working as their founders envisaged. But the problem now lies less in the international organisations than in Russia itself and in the unstable political debris of the collapsed imperial structure of the Soviet Union.

At present Russia is poised as Germany was in the late twenties. The attempt to drive hard ahead to a market economy has been rejected by an impoverished people. The parliamentarians bicker, while Yeltsin tries to appease industrialists and farmers who long for the subsidies of the Communist years without the control of the state planners. Law and order have broken down and only the mafia flourish. What could be bought for one rouble when I left Moscow costs a thousand roubles today. By the end of this year it may cost two thousand, ten thousand or fifty thousand. Zhirinovsky, leading 14% of the deputies in a state duma dominated by communists and nationalists, mouths obscenities which make Hitler seem meek, while waiting for the final collapse of the economy to bring the call for a national saviour. I was hopeful when I was in Moscow. Since leaving, I have remained hopeful throughout a troubled decade. If I search hard, I still can glean scraps of hope in that neither industry nor agriculture has suffered total collapse, that genuinely fair elections have been held and that the resilience of the Russian people may bring them through this crisis as it brought them through many horrors over the past centuries. But I have given up the attempt at prophecy. Only the Russian people can decide the path they want to tread. I hope they will decide they want one leading to a prosperous, democratic, peace-loving, law-abiding new Russia. I fear they will not reach that goal in my lifetime. I hope they may in yours ... If they do not, your generation may pay a

worse price than mine paid in 1939-45. So, if there are still ways in which I can help them down that road, I shall do so.

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