

BDOHP INTERVIEW

(Peter) Laurence O'Keeffe: career outline (with, on right, relevant page numbers in Interview number one, to the career stage)

Born 9 July 1931

Customs and Excise 1953 (Married Suzanne Marie Jousse 1954)

Entered FO 1962 (p 2)

2nd (later 1st) Secretary (Economics), Bangkok 1962 (p 3)

FO 1965 (Worked in Atomic Energy and Disarmament (pp 3-7)

Department; then Indonesia desk of South-East Asia

Department: most comments here are on Indonesian issues)

1st Secretary, Athens 1968 (pp 7-9)

Counsellor (Commercial), Jakarta 1972 (pp 9-12)

Head, Hong Kong and Indian Ocean Department, FCO, 1975 (pp 12-17)

Head, British Information Services, New York 1976 (pp 17-29)

Counsellor, Nicosia 1978 (pp 29-30)

Sabbatical, Georgetown University 1981 Studied ethnic influences on American foreign policy) (pp 30-34)

Ambassador, Dakar (and non-resident Ambassador to (pp 34-36)

Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde)

Attached to Management and Personnel Office (Civil Service (p 36)

Selection Board) 1985

Head of UK Delegation to the Conference on Security and (pp 36-43)

Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), Vienna 1986

Ambassador, Prague 1988 (concurrent with heading delegation (pp 43-48)

to the CSCE); see also pp 41-43 on Czechoslovakia)

This is Malcolm McBain on the 13 March 1998 interviewing Laurence O'Keeffe.

MM: Laurence, could we start with a brief description of your entry to the Foreign Office? You started in the Customs and Excise from 1953 to 1962 and then joined the FCO. How did that come about?

LO: It happened really because I wasn't born to be a civil servant and I certainly wasn't born to be a tax collector. Having had a geographically disturbed childhood, I joined the civil service only to find that I would be going backwards and forwards to the same office for forty years. I thought this was digging my own grave. I was quite anxious to get out of it and find something to do which had more of the world about it. I happened to be the liaison officer between my old college at Oxford and the Civil Service Commission; the Commission were worried about not having enough recruits because people thought that civil servants were people who drank tea and played, like the fountains in Trafalgar Square, between 10.00 and 4.00. So they thought if some of the younger members of the service went out and talked to undergraduates we might pick up a few better candidates. I should perhaps mention that one of mine was Robin Butler who had a somewhat more glorious career in the business than ever I did. I think he would have joined anyway but he was actually one of the people who asked extremely intelligent questions when I went and lectured the undergraduates at my college in Oxford in 1961 or so. In the course of this appointment I got everything from the Civil Service Commission, all the literature, and one summer I found that they were running a supplementary examination for people who might actually have some specialised knowledge of some interest to the Foreign Service. As I'd spent about five of the seven years I was in the Customs dealing with their international affairs in Bonn, Brussels and Geneva, GATT and all that kind of thing, I thought I might stand a chance of getting in. I also spoke French - I have a French wife - and so I applied to take the examination. So I have taken both the old Method 1 examination to join the home Civil Service and the new Method 2 examination which is now the standard form for all entry to both the Home and the Diplomatic Service. I am virtually the only person I know who passed both Methods at an interval of about eight years.

MM: So the Foreign Office, straight away, sent you off to Bangkok?

LO: Yes, well there was a problem and that was it was during one of those recurrent campaigns for economy. They wanted a Second Secretary in Bangkok to do the economic work instead of a First Secretary. The problem was that I was already a First Secretary in the Home Civil Service and so I had to be demoted to Second Secretary. The Treasury also found some other little clause which said that not only had I to be demoted to Second Secretary but I also had to go on the bottom of the scale for second secretaries which meant I lost a third of my income overnight and the Office said, well never mind you know all about Whitehall anyway, so go off to Bangkok and the allowances will make up for it. So I was sent off to Bangkok. It took seven weeks to get there. It was one of the most wonderful episodes in our entire life - you will remember yourself those wonderful journeys out by sea - and ended up in Bangkok running the Aid programme. I was also our representative on the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. Not a very satisfactory organisation in my view but its parish was enormous. It stretched from Tehran to Tokyo and all the way down to Wellington in New Zealand. So whenever there were conferences held under the auspices of the ECAFE, I found myself going off by aeroplane to these various places. I found it absolutely wonderful. One year I did the equivalent of twice round the world by air and it was then that I lost my fear of flying. It got to the point where I was doing it so often that I thought: it is just ridiculous to be frightened every time you go up in an aeroplane. So I gradually got used to it. It was a good apprenticeship.

One learnt a lot about the Service, a lot about how it works and a lot about how Embassies work and I greatly enjoyed it. I very much enjoyed the Thai way of life and the Thais themselves. So it was what we would call a good introduction.

MM: Yes, indeed. Then you were brought back to the Foreign Office in 1965 and did three years there.

LO: Yes, I did. My Ambassador in Bangkok thought I had done pretty well but he said - he was one of the more powerful Ambassadors in the Service (Anthony Rumbold) - he thought that I was an intellectual sort of chap and that we were lagging behind in our intellectual appreciation of disarmament and nuclear matters and so on as

compared with the Americans. He thought I ought to try and become a disarmament and particularly a nuclear disarmament and so I was sent to the Atomic Energy and Disarmament Department. It was very, very interesting work I thought but I wasn't allowed to do any of it. The Assistant in the Department, the person who stood between me and the Head of the Department, had had my job before and would not let go of it. He was a very strange man who went home to Mum, in Jersey I think, every Friday evening. I spent my entire time going backwards and forwards to the registry collecting the files. So eventually I made representations to Personnel Department who fell on me as if I was manna from heaven because they had three posts they couldn't fill in the Office. In those days there was no system of internal inspection of the Office so they didn't know where the slack was. It's all different now of course. So I was offered this job, to run down Confrontation with Indonesia as the desk officer for Indonesia. It was an absolutely fascinating job and I greatly enjoyed it. South East Asia Department in those days had two major problems, one was the Parliamentary problem with Viet Nam and our role, or non-role there. The other was the rundown of Confrontation with Indonesia and the saving of, what was in those days, a very, very considerable amount of money in military operations. Viet Nam was on the pages of the newspapers every day in one form or another. Catherine Pestell who was the Desk Officer on Viet Nam, (and subsequently the principal of Somerville College, Oxford) had a series of washing lines up in her room to hang the cuttings from all the newspapers in England; Scotland, Ireland, everywhere. She could at any instant pick the right cutting out if a Member of Parliament wrote or telephoned and said I've seen this piece in the Western Mail or the Wick Gazette or something, what's your comment on it? She could pick it off these washing lines. That was how intense was the domestic interest in Viet Nam. The interest in Confrontation on which the taxpayer was spending a great deal of money was nil. There was a small piece in the Financial Times when we successfully negotiated the return of the old rubber estates and the actual ending of Confrontation itself between Malaysia and Indonesia which was at a conference in Bangkok. I think it got three column inches in the Times. It was one of those curious things. What is important in foreign affairs isn't necessarily what you read in the newspapers.

MM: So Confrontation didn't end until about 1968?

LO: No, not as late as that. Confrontation started to come to an end in 1966 when we had notification that the Indonesians were interested in finishing it. Sukarno was still alive but he was a prisoner in Bogor, and Suharto, the new President, was in charge, he being the only one of the senior generals who had survived the massacre by the communists six months before. He appointed Adam Malik as his Foreign Minister and Malik let it be known that he wanted Confrontation to end. The exact sequence rather escapes my memory except that it was arranged that Michael Stewart our Secretary of State was going to meet Adam Malik in July of that year, 1966, in Jakarta, as he was coming back from a SEATO meeting in Canberra. He was actually in Australia when the last of the great military incursions into, I think it was Brunei, by the Indonesians ...

MM: That was no later than 1963, or earlier?

LO: No, no, because I was in charge. In 1963 I was in Bangkok. It was 1966: Michael Butler will be able to confirm this because he correctly interpreted what was going on. We had this large scale incursion. I suppose it was in about June or July of 1966 and the question was, should Michael Stewart go to Jakarta on his way back if, as it seemed, the Indonesians were continuing Confrontation. Michael Butler very cleverly worked out that because of the long lines of communication between Jakarta and the jungles of Borneo the incursion was presumably the result of an order that had been given a long time before which the troops on the ground had only just got round to. On that basis we concluded that it would be safe for Michael Stewart to go to Jakarta to meet Adam Malik and this is what happened. Adam Malik and Michael Stewart stood on the balcony of the Hotel Indonesia which was immediately opposite the Embassy, our burnt out Embassy, and Malik said the first thing we are going to do is restore your Embassy. Of course unfortunately we chose to restore it exactly as it had been before Confrontation as if proper systems of air conditioning had not been invented meanwhile. So the net result was that many years later I found myself in that Embassy with all these clapped-out old air conditioners when really we ought to have made a better effort. I believe it is much more comfortable now.

I always thought then how sure footed the Office was in its direction. If you're doing a job like that, of course, there is an enormous amount of intelligence, military and otherwise, coming across the desk in what was de facto a state of war. It was like the tide, sometimes the intelligence would all be running in the direction that Confrontation was over and at other times it was running that Confrontation was starting up again. I was really quite struck by how secure the Office was in its understanding of the ways of the world. I remember my Under Secretary when I complained about this to him - of course he didn't have to read all this intelligence, he only read what we put out, the summary. I remember complaining about it to him saying I don't know what's going on because one day everything looks fine, the next day it looks terrible. He said, just remember Laurence Confrontation's over and base all your drafting to me on the principle that it's over. And of course he was quite right, it was over.

After that there was the whole process of rebuilding our relations with Indonesia. Once the actual business was over it became a very inspiring job. Indonesia is almost invisible in British history, Java and such. I think our only contact had been when Stamford Raffles had been Governor of Java. I think Napoleon pinched it from the Dutch and we pinched it from Napoleon. Stamford Raffles was the Governor for a while. Eventually we gave Java back to the Dutch as a reward for fighting with us at Waterloo. Stamford Raffles went off and founded Singapore as everybody knows. Even though our contacts were much less than with Malaya or with the sub-continent or Australia or all the area roundabout, it was amazing how many links we actually had with Indonesia which had been broken as a result of Confrontation. Air traffic agreements had to be reactivated, the estates had to be restored, cultural relations had to begin again and so on. There was also a big commercial dispute over a radar chain which Decca were supposed to be putting into Indonesia, which was frustrated by Confrontation. Just endless problems and endless opportunities but it was all pointing in the direction of lets-be-friends. So in way it was a very positive job that I had and greatly enjoyed doing, but, my goodness me, was it work! Catherine Pestell and I were once crossing the park, she with Viet Nam on her mind and I with Indonesia. We were going to a cocktail party organised by the Secretary of State in Carlton Gardens. I can remember us actually physically wringing our hands, in the park, saying we've got to

go to this cocktail party because the Secretary of State's invited us, but how are we going to get through our work today? We will have to go back and work for another two hours, at least.

MM: Yes, a hectic life. And then you got released from that and went to be Head of Chancery in Athens.

LO: Yes, that's right. I was actually supposed to go to Paris to be on the internal desk which was rather a great compliment in those days but unfortunately *les evenements* took place in May and Christopher Soames didn't want to change the team. I was disappointed at the time of course, but looking back on it the Office was trying to move too many people out of Paris Chancery at the same time. As Christopher Soames was new, he needed the continuity, and of course there were these terrible events, de Gaulle flying off to see the French army in Germany you remember, and all that kind of thing. Having accepted me he turned me down and I was disappointed. I got as a consolation prize nearly four years in Athens.

MM: Do you want to say anything about Athens?

LO: Not a great deal. It was a very interesting job, being Head of Chancery. It's much better now I think, to have the number 2 as Head of Chancery, rather on the American model. I think having an Ambassador and a Counsellor and then a Head of Chancery underneath did cause some problems, and the trouble was that the more you knew about your colleagues' lives and their wives and so on, the more problems you'd see. There was a tendency for, particularly, psychiatrists to think that if someone is having psychological problems, a few years in the sun in Athens would be a good cure. It was a particularly agreeable post but you could imagine people going off to work in the morning leaving wives to their isolation behind, I'm talking about the junior level, the ladies who couldn't even read the signs on the road. We did have quite a lot of trouble shepherding this flock to all point in the same direction. But we had a wonderful flat, which we found ourselves, on the top of the hycabbetos, which is the small hill which you can see if you are standing on the Acropolis, with the little church on the top. We were the highest inhabited people in Athens. We were very sociable and had lots of fun, holding dances in the middle of summer on the roof of Athens, and so on. It was

great, very glamorous and great fun. There were, of course, some very serious problems, mainly the fact that the colonels were in power and this was something which not only was inimical to British public opinion but to the whole of the West really. Incidentally, perhaps ...

MM: It was the days of a Labour government of course?

LO: Of course, that's right but I don't think it would have been much different if it had been a Conservative government. It might have played the hand slightly differently but the fact is the Philhellenic movement, which has its origins going back to Byron and beyond, was still very strong. We never got to the end of the number of people who were interested in the restoration of democracy in Greece. Maurice Bowra, the Warden of Wadham, Peter Calvacoressi who was an important commentator on international affairs at the time; several businessmen of great renown. The whole intellectual establishment was against the colonels and of course they all had links with the intellectual establishment of Athens. So, I think it could have been played slightly differently, but the problem in its essence existed whatever government was in power. It wasn't only us, it was the same for the French, the Americans and everybody else.

So it was a problem but I think for historical purposes I should say this; during this time a first attempt was made to relate what an Embassy does to the objectives of foreign policy. It was a managerial exercise, taken from the business world. (I always thought that because Athens was the first middle sized post starting with an A, we got picked on to run models of all sorts of managerial exercises of which this was one.) I pointed out to the Office then, and I still hold to this to this day, that what the British principal interest in Greece, if you looked at it absolutely coldly, was the continuance of Greece as a member of NATO. But we spent absolutely no time on that at all. You couldn't relate the effort we put in in Athens to this aim of British foreign policy. The colonels were bad news but they had no doubt at all that they wished to remain in NATO, so there was no effort to be made in that direction. It had no relevance because they firmly wanted to be members of NATO. Whereas, what the vast amount of our time politically was spent on was ways of trying, as part of a general western effort, to

persuade the colonels to return to democracy which is what they didn't want to do. There we were very, very carefully examining the political situation to see if there was ever going to be a break in this apparently monolithic dictatorship. Of course Greeks are very quarrelsome amongst themselves and this junta was no more united than any other group of Greeks in public life. So there was absolutely no correlation between the effort of the Embassy and our political objectives. Everything depends on circumstance in these relationships with countries; and certainly although many, many attempts have been made to relate effort to objective it can't be done.

MM: That was Athens. A very enjoyable interlude and then you went on to Jakarta, the first time en poste?

LO: Yes, I did. I went there as the number two and that's where I did my commercial work. Everybody in the Service has to do commercial work at least once and obviously there are specialists in it but everybody no matter what their interests has to do it. I remember the Chairman of ICI came out to Indonesia when I was there. He told me that when he was Export Director of ICI he'd gone to Tehran and had asked to pay his respects to the Ambassador. (This took place twenty years before in the bad old days). The Ambassador replied that it was not his custom to receive commercial gentlemen but if the Director was the son of the Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford then he would be happy to see him. This is a little embellished but as it happened the Director's father did have the right academic credentials so the Director was received by the Ambassador.

MM: Who was ..?

LO: He didn't tell me and I don't think I want to know. There was undoubtedly great snobbery about the old Service and the fact that we are a trading nation was often forgotten. Nowadays we all have a) to learn how commerce is done and b) to help where we can. I found it very instructive and useful. I had one regret and that was that the Office, to please some local lobby in London and to emphasise what importance was attached to commercial work, had told me to go out there as the Commercial and Economic Councillor when there was no Political Councillor as well. Every other

principal foreign power there had two councillors, one of whom was the one who took charge when the Ambassador was away, thus emphasising that the country's interest in Indonesia was over the total range of diplomatic relations. Whereas there was I as the only Councillor. As an Australian said to me, that you should do the work we can understand but that the British of all people should advertise the fact that their interest in Indonesia is only commercial and economic and not over the whole range seems to us to be inexplicable. I was also wiggled about this by the Governor of Surabaya when I went down there. He told me that he couldn't understand why we didn't want the total relationship that all other western countries did. I was saved, when I used to be in charge when the Ambassador was away, by the fact that the Head of the Western European Department of the Ministry with whom we had dealings was Anglophile to the last degree. So he would receive me in just the same way as he would receive any councillor from any ...

MM: This is Sudio Gan.

LO: This was Sudio Gandarum, and the reason for that is something I think I would like to put on record. When Sudio had been a young Third Secretary of the newly emergent Indonesia he and his wife had been sent to Baghdad. There in Baghdad was Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, our Ambassador and a very grand figure indeed, and Sir Humphrey and his wife had taken a paternal interest in this young Indonesian couple, who were obviously out of their depth. Almost as a hobby he took Sudio on board and Lady Trevelyan took Mrs Gandarum, and together they steered them in the right direction, always made sure they talked to them at parties, showed them who was important and who wasn't, who they should know and who they shouldn't. In short they gave them a sort of lesson in diplomacy in the way that I got a lesson in Bangkok. But this time the Trevelyans did it for purely altruistic reasons. It certainly paid off when we had made what I think was a diplomatic error in my appointment, not the work but my actual designation, and Sudio treated me probably with more consideration than I deserved.

MM: One up to the old school.

LO: One up to the old school, absolutely.

MM: Did you not say to me that you had some interesting observations to make about the Pertamina affair?

LO: Oh yes, I think the most useful part of my commercial work there, in which I think our commercial visitors were teaching me more than I was teaching them, was to react when the IMF representative in Indonesia had discovered that the nationalised oil company, Pertamina, was borrowing at a very reckless rate on the basis of having a small oil deposit of its own of 150,000 barrels per day. There was a much bigger deposit owned, I think by Caltex, but the actual nationalised oil company had this small flow of oil and had borrowed a vast amount of money on the basis of this. Moreover they had done it on illegal paper. Technically under the rules requests for foreign borrowing in Indonesia at the time had to have the signature of the Economic Prime Minister (his technical title was something else but he was the Economic Prime Minister) and the Governor of the Bank of Indonesia, two gentlemen I had known very well in my days running down Confrontation. Pertamina's paper was being issued without their signatures on it, it was unauthorised paper, and yet many banks, all over the world, were lending money against this. Again, it was quite worrying because either the Banks knew something that we didn't know or we knew something that the Banks ought to have known. It was quite difficult to work out which was which. My Ambassador was a very splendid chap and a great expert on commercial and economic matters - he had been Under Secretary for commercial and economic affairs - told me ...

MM: Who was that?

LO: That was Willis Coombes, a New Zealander and an excellent man, and he used to say to me; "Laurence, you must always remember two and two equals four. There's 150,000 barrels a day and that's all there is." We concocted a letter to the Board of Trade saying that we were very worried at the exposure of British banks, mostly merchant banks, bearing in mind the inadequacy of the supply of oil on which the borrowing was based. The Board of Trade told the Governor of the Bank of England

who raised his eyebrows, in those days that is what the Governors of the Bank of England used to do, and eventually the flow of funds, at least from London, dried up.

It was in the course of all this that I found myself home on leave and I was invited by virtually every merchant bank in London to lunch. Undoubtedly the greatest gastronomic feat of my life, I had to go round for three weeks having City lunches. The bankers kept saying, tell us about Pertamina. And I would say: well no, you tell me first why you are lending money to Pertamina on this basis. The answer was, well, it's sovereign risk, if Pertamina goes bust the Indonesian Government will have to pay. And I would say, well the Indonesian government hasn't got any money either so who is actually going to honour this paper, particularly as the Indonesian government can say it's not even legal, it hasn't got the proper signatures on it? But I needn't have worried because when we thought we'd done a good job on all this there was then the first oil crisis which put up the price of oil by a factor of something like four, the details escape me now.

MM: I think it was three ...

LO: Three was it? In 1972, but then came the second one which I think was in 1974 or even 1975 and the price of oil went up from a price of \$1.50 per barrel to \$15.00 a barrel and so everybody got their money back. I remember my very last acts in Indonesia were going to tell the Indonesians that this was an extremely worrying development, this OPEC cartel and so on, and I was received by gentlemen with smiles, like the cat who had seen the cream.

MM: So that brings you to the end of Jakarta and you then returned to the Foreign Office to be Head of Hong Kong and Indian Ocean Department.

LO: That's right. Yes I did and I didn't do it very long for reasons which will become clear, but it was an absolutely fascinating exercise. I hadn't appreciated until then, although I'd had extensive experience in the Far East, that Hong Kong was run on behalf of others by the British government and we were the people who least benefited from this act of colonial enterprise. We had to do a planning paper at some point in my

time there from which it emerged that the Chinese had the greatest commercial and economic interest in the place and it was also of course, their opening, their window on the world. Secondly the people who benefited most from the existence of Hong Kong were the Japanese and the Americans and to a lesser degree I think, even the Australians. But the big Hong's, the big so-called 'British' companies were based in Hong Kong and did not pay British tax. They were not acting on behalf of British interests but specifically their own. The problem was that we were holding the baby and there was absolutely no way that we could drop it at that time. This came as a bit of a surprise to me. I had hitherto always assumed that the colonies were run for the benefit of the colonisers from which the colonised actually got some benefits too in terms of peace and prosperity. It had never occurred to me that we would actually be holding on to something where we were the least favoured.

MM: I suspect this is one reason why it was decided to offer up the leases.

LO: Well, I don't know about that. I have to say myself that we knew that the Chinese at the time did not want to take back the colony. We had very strong indications, which I had perhaps better not go into, that they did not want to take the territory back. I don't think myself that all those communist refugees who had fled from China and had taken up residence there under the British flag could have been handed back, as it were, unless it was absolutely necessary. I accept it was eventually necessary but at the time I couldn't see any British government voluntarily handing over Hong Kong and all those millions of refugees back into a communist system of government. I don't think it was even remotely possible that we would have done that and entirely deplorable if we had tried.

MM: Even if they were all illegal immigrants?

LO: Yes, some of them were and some of them weren't. The big influx was in 1948, I don't think anyone could claim they were illegal immigrants and of course they brought with them all those phenomenal entrepreneurial skills, concentrated in Shanghai. And they brought an immense amount of capital with them too, Hong Kong really took off as a major commercial and industrial place following that. Before then it had been a

prosperous, fairly small, colony but becoming a powerhouse in the Far East following the influx from Shanghai. Some of the statistics of the time are extraordinary. I remember that we also worked out, for the purposes of this planning paper, that these little few square miles of territory that had no resources at all, not even water, were exporting more a year than the whole of the Indian subcontinent. That's a great tribute it seems to me, a) to the strength of the British colonial administration and the strength of our colonial tradition and b) of phenomenal energy and enterprise of the Chinese. It was really quite inspiring to go there and see all this happening.

But I can't say that relations between Hong Kong and London at the time were very good. Again, we had a Labour government, whether that had anything to do with it I am not quite sure, but certainly there was a great deal of friction between the two sides. The British government of the time couldn't imagine why Hong Kong couldn't increase its income tax ceiling from I think, 15% to 18%. Again the figures escape me. The government also couldn't understand why, during one of the recessions just before then, Hong Kong had almost got to the point at which the soup kitchens had come back onto the streets. A commercial centre like Hong Kong is uniquely vulnerable to movements in trade cycle so there are times of absolutely fantastic prosperity and then times where everything has got very, very tight indeed. The government of the time thought that Hong Kong should be putting something by for a rainy day and improving its services, of one kind or another, to the population. This was bitterly resented by the colonial administration. It reminded me of one of ... I can't remember who said it, but it was said that the British government, when dealing with Curzon in India, thought they were dealing with a foreign, and not entirely friendly, power. I think that friction between the colonial perspective and the metropolitan perspective was part of the general history of colonialism. Hong Kong was no exception.

MM: Yes, I suspect of British colonialism. Of course the Labour government of the mid-1970's started to make the Hong Kong government pay a share, and a large share, towards the cost of its own defence.

LO: Yes. I was the Foreign Office representative on that negotiation which was conducted by Bill Rodgers, now Lord Rodgers of Quarrybank. That was an extremely

tense and difficult negotiation. I think the Governor of the time had a rather terrifying manner.

MM: Who was that?

LO: Murray Macle hose, and dealing with him was a bit like dealing with Lord Reith in some ways. They were the same size and they had the same gritty Scottish approach to life. I think in my whole career nobody has insulted me quite so comprehensively as Murray Macle hose did. When we were leaving he didn't think I had stood up for Hong Kong to the degree which he thought was necessary.

MM: But you were representing the British government ...

LO: Well, this was the fundamental problem about it all, as a matter of fact. Maybe I can reveal this as it's all history now. Macle hose's style as Governor was entirely honourable I feel. But he had a way of talking to the British government, speaking for his people, as he saw them, in a way that made no compromise with what the perceived position might be in Britain. By chance, by mistake, the record of one of his meetings, with I think the Executive Council, was put in the wrong envelope and sent to me in London. In this Macle hose was talking to the members and representing the British government's position absolutely straight. You'd think he'd gone over, as it were, what was the old phrase, "gone native", when he was talking to us but talking to his own people he was telling it like it was. It was a rather terrifying style of administration I have to say. We did actually make them pay for a large part of their defence. I think it was absolutely right that should happen. And, of course, they could afford it.

MM: At the time of independence they had a higher per capita gross domestic product than the people in this country.

LO: Repeat after me, it wasn't at the time of independence, it was the time of return ...

MM: The time of return, yes. Correct.

LO: I fear he also often saw me as the enemy. I do remember vis à vis the House of Commons, or the House of Lords, we used to write the speeches for Ministers, defending the position of Hong Kong against its many critics. Meanwhile of course we were writing to Hong Kong expressing the views of British Ministers, and always remember the Secretary of State was constitutionally responsible to Parliament, for the conduct of the administration in Hong Kong. It was James Callaghan at the time and he had certain pronounced views which we were passing on correctly to Hong Kong. The impression got about that somehow or another the Head of Hong Kong Department had some particular animus against Hong Kong. Here were Ministers saying all the right things in Parliament and here was this terrible little tick, down below, sending them instructions which they didn't agree with. It all came to a head at the funeral of the then Deputy Governor, or Colonial Secretary, actually down here in Wiltshire. He must have been the Deputy Colonial Secretary because they sent the Colonial Secretary to the funeral to represent the Administration. The funeral was held in the chapel of Wardour Castle, which as you know is a Catholic chapel. Afterwards I walked up and down a bit taking in that incomparable view that you get at Wardour there, walking up and down with the Colonial Secretary saying the situation was precisely the opposite of what they thought. It wasn't Ministers making some brilliant defence of Hong Kong in Parliament because they believed all was well. These speeches were drafted by us. But equally when we wrote to them we weren't representing our own views but the views of Ministers, and that was our bounden duty to do. We agreed to meet on the Monday in the Office where we would discuss the matter further. By this time Mr Callaghan, as he then was, had become Prime Minister. His Political Secretary, Tom McNally now Lord McNally, and I worked on these problems together. I can't quite remember ... he rang me up about something and I told him that the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong was coming in and that I was trying to explain to him what Ministers' position was. He said: well, I tell you what, why don't you bring him over here to No. 10 and I'll tell him what Ministers really think. So we went over to No. 10, a terrible hot afternoon I remember. Tom allowed me to sit in Marcia Falkender's seat which was his seat by this time but in the process he went out at some point as the Prime Minister wanted to see him. He came back and said: look, the Prime Minister's got Princess Ashraf, the Shah's sister, to tea but it's so hot that

they've gone out into the garden and he wants me to scour the highways and byways to make up a little impromptu cocktail party. So we were taken out to form part of this little cocktail party, the Colonial Secretary and I. Eventually they got about fifty people there and it really did look quite like a cocktail party. Anyway, we then went inside whereupon Tom McCaffrey, the Press Secretary, Tom McNally and the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister whose name I can't remember, all shouted at the poor Colonial Secretary saying you don't understand. We cannot tell you too often that it is not the Prime Minister or the government's view that we should be running an industrial slum in Hong Kong. It really got quite heated one way or another: Hong Kong was not exactly an industrial slum although it certainly had very severe slum problems. While we hoped that this might have at least have cleared the air a bit I don't honestly think it ever did.

However, that was as maybe. What happened then was that I was sitting in my office working on Hong Kong affairs when one of my chaps came in and said: Mr Wilson's gone off to the Palace to hand in his resignation. I said that's very interesting but I do have this Parliamentary Question to do, or whatever, and I really have no time to be gassing now. But as a direct result of Wilson's resignation I found myself in New York in the autumn. When James Callaghan had taken over at No. 10 and Antony Crosland became Secretary of State Callaghan had taken Tom McCaffrey as press man over with him and Crosland wanted the head of British Information Service in New York, Ham Whyte, to come and be Head of News Department and thus the Foreign Office spokesman. Ham was a very close friend of mine, alas now dead, and when asked who should take his place in New York said: you'd better have Laurence, I think he's the best candidate. Ham came to dinner that night, he'd come over to talk to the new Foreign Secretary before leaving New York, and he went on and on over dinner about the wonders of New York. After he'd left I said to my wife: you can say whatever you like about Ham but he's not a bore. What was he going on about New York so much for? She said, he's telling you something of course and of course he was. He was telling me I was shortly to find myself in the Big Apple and that's what happened.

MM: But you didn't stay long in the Big Apple did you?

LO: No, I was only there for two years. Again it was the death of Tony Crosland and the appointment of David Owen that led to the removal of the then Ambassador, Peter Ramsbotham, in Washington. Peter Ramsbotham evidently liked what I was doing and had no complaints about it. But then of course he was succeeded by Peter Jay and Peter Jay and I had a well known, well publicised, falling out which on the whole I don't terribly want to go in to.

MM: What was it about?

LO: Essentially what it was about was that he wanted BIS to be run as though it were USIS in London, serving him as the economic editor of the Times which he had been before. BIS had other functions which he never understood and indeed never wanted to have explained to him. I can't honestly say that we ever had a really serious discussion. He just simply laid down this as his view. It wouldn't work and the reasons are very, very complex.

In England all the major newspapers are produced in one place which is London and that is where the seat of government is. The role of USIS, I suppose it has outreaches in the country, but insofar as it is seeking to influence British policy it's trying to influence it in London. Do you follow? It's also a fact that the United States is much more important to us than we are to the United States. There are very many other competitive pressures on America's time than British views. It is something people don't remember very often. Another thing they don't remember is that in the United States there are, I think, only two places in the entire country that produce two newspapers or more than two newspapers a day. One is New York and I think the other is Los Angeles although it could be somewhere odd like Sacramento. I wasn't there long enough to study the media situation in the south west but Baltimore has *The Sun* and Philadelphia *The Enquirer* and St Louis the *Post Dispatch* and so on. So we were feeding information over this vast country to very disparate places. Of course I wasn't so stupid as to believe that because we did it, it was any good. I went to see all these newspapers in turn and I do remember the answer of the editor of the *Baltimore Sun* to whom I talked. I said look, you know, we put out all this information and we also put out the BBC World Service's summary of the British Press, which is often

critical of us and also of the American Government and this is something many people can't understand.

We put this out as a service which didn't bind the BBC or us to the views expressed. But if they wanted to know what their colleagues in Fleet Street were writing about they could have it. The summary served a very useful purpose from my point of view in that there is no point in trying to explain a policy of one democracy to another unless you can actually explain to them what the argument is about. The argument was obviously set out with great brio by the British press so if someone got a BIS document on North Sea oil they could actually read what the British papers had been saying about North Sea oil at the same time. They could thus see where the argument lay as to what the Government should be doing with the revenue or whatever. They would actually understand how this democracy works and what our concerns were. But the summary was a piece of paper which Peter Jay thought was wholly unnecessary for Americans and they shouldn't have it and ...

MM: Probably counter productive in his view.

LO: I don't think that was it but it may have been represented as such. But from his point of view it was a very unwise move to offend the BBC by saying that their wonderful summary of the press in London should not be given to an American audience (who can't hear the World Service). He was offending the BBC by saying they should not have it and he was offending every newspaper in London who thought that their wonderful views on whatever the issues of the day were should be given to a wider American audience. So, politically it was an extraordinarily stupid move. I have to say in all honesty we never discussed these issues but he thought the operation could be run on a shoestring and that the whole of this institution, the British Information Service, which was set up at the beginning of the war ...

MM: At the end of the war.

LO: Not exactly, it was somewhere in the middle. What happened was we'd had, as a result of the First World War, we decided that we hadn't handled our information effort

in the United States properly. There were too many people saying too many contradictory things. So we set up an organisation called the British Library Service. This was very well run for its purposes. It was a bit like a British Council. They had tremendous links with American universities and the WASP establishment and so on. But they must have guessed that something was wrong because when we declared war on 3 September, 1939, everybody went to the office to receive calls asking why we were going to war. They received not one single call in the course of the day. So it was quite clear that there was something wrong with information services and the Government then set up another organisation called the British Press Office. These two were merged at some point in the war, I can't remember. When I was in New York there was still the remnants of the Library, a very, very useful resource, and this was the origins of it. I remember a document about this, this was not my own experience, but I did read some document about the origins of BIS. I believe that the person who was principally responsible for organising all this was a former Consul-General in Chicago who was supposed to be very well versed in American affairs. He was married to a Miss Morrow, daughter of an American Ambassador I think to Mexico, and the irony of this situation was that Miss Morrow had a sister called Ann Morrow who was married to Lindbergh of the Spirit of St Louis and the leading isolationist of the time. So in the same family, one side was trying to keep America out of the war and the other side was trying to interest America in joining the war, if you follow. BIS thus had a long and distinguished history. It also proved its worth in my time when we were suffering a huge financial crisis just before the IMF loan.

MM: The 1970s?

LO: In the 1970s. We were having this most dreadful period and it was actually a piece of paper put out by my office, not by me personally, that had steadied banking opinion in New York. The head of the Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Gabriel Haughé, an ex-Rhodes scholar, had organised a large loan to tide the British government over until the Labour Party could be persuaded of the merits of the IMF solution. Callaghan at that Labour Party Conference that year had, in the course of a very long speech, said something to the effect that we have run out of time, run out of money and so on and I tell you my brothers we cannot go on like this.

MM: We used to think we could spend our way out of this situation ...

LO: Yes, you remember all that? Well, the editors in BIS had taken a speech which was presumably 32 pages long, had found this bit, had taken it out, had reproduced it on BIS paper and had sent it round the circuit. Gabriel Haughé with his British connections and so on used to read BIS stuff and of course he was a very important and busy banker. He suddenly came across this piece of paper where James Callaghan was laying it on the line and as he had organised this consortium of banks to support us he actually rang up the office. He knew the lady who'd done it by name and asked Elspeth could he have thirty copies. She sent him the thirty copies which he circulated to all the bank presidents to show them that the British government was coming round to the IMF's solution.

Now then, this seems to me the most brilliant piece of information work I've ever heard of. At a time when the New York banks were pretty nervous about us and the British government had a message, it was put out - just the bit that mattered - to a busy man who was then sufficiently interested to get hold of copies and distribute them himself to the other bankers. That seems to me to be a perfect example of how you use the information service for your government's purposes. Yet it was precisely these editors Peter Jay wanted to get rid of because he said as economics editor of *The Times* he always wanted the whole of these speeches. Well you couldn't send 32 pages of a speech, mainly about domestic things to a busy banker like Haughé. He wouldn't have been able to read it. The editors took out the bit that was of relevance to him, and relevance to Anglo-American relations, and put it out. Yet these were precisely the people that Peter Jay wanted to get rid of. Well, I was right but he was Ambassador, so there you are. That's how it ended.

In general, looking back on it I have to say that it was perhaps the least satisfactory of the jobs I did, partly because I was detached from the Embassy. This was by design, because within walking distance of my office in Manhattan, was the *New York Times*, the CBS, NBC, ABC, you name it, then of course there was the *Wall Street Journal* downtown and *Time*, *Newsweek*, they were all in a line from my office. We had to be

there, that was where the media were, but the trouble was that's not where the telegrams were. The telegrams were from London to Washington and because we ran an open office, and had to run an open office under the rules of the game in America, we couldn't see the telegrams. So in a way we were cut off from the absolutely essential life blood of a diplomat, which is the telegrams.

MM: Yes. Of course you did get the ... well, you weren't too far away from the UN Mission telegrams ...

LO: Well, they were of no use because the UN had their own spokesman, in my day David Brighty, who succeeded me in Prague incidentally. We shared a house in the country at the weekends in New York, but UN business is not Anglo-American relations, only a specialised branch of them, I suppose, so this was the problem. Being cut off from the telegrams meant that I was, really to a serious degree, unsighted. You got a lot of guidance, but guidance never deals with the issues which journalists are really interested in.

MM: However it did in the economic guidance telegrams because those were precisely the ones that contained those neat little snippets.

LO: Oh yes, but it was more like propaganda, I have to say that we only found out how acute the crisis was, the economic crisis we were undergoing at the time, through an episode whereby the Embassy realised that a Cabinet Minister was coming to have a Press conference in the cinema in BIS at a very, very delicate moment in these negotiations. They had to brief me on the telephone as to what precisely was going on so that I could brief the Minister so that he would know, in case some journalist got up and asked him an awkward question.

Awkward questions were not in fact asked but it was only in those circumstances we were made privy to the actual kernel of the issue. Until one could be absolutely sure that the IMF deal was in the bag we were in an extremely difficult position. You remember that Denis Healey was actually pulled back from London airport at one point. I don't think I can say, even at this stage - it is too delicate to talk about - what

precisely was going on but I had to be told in order that this Cabinet Minister shouldn't be embarrassed in public. I was usually at two removes from the scene and although, of course, no Information Officer worth his salt was going to tell the press more than he should, nonetheless he has to have the background in his mind because you can be damn well sure that the Economics Editor of the *New York Times* had that background in his mind, because he had been talking to important financial figures in Washington.

It was extremely exciting though and we knew virtually all the major figures in the American media at the time. They all came to dinner and they were very amusing. We had Walter Cronkite to dinner, we had him once every couple of months I suppose, but we had him to dinner the night after he had returned from that historic mission he went on with Anwar Sadat to see Mr Begin. Walter had asked Anwar Sadat, on CBS television, if he would go to Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv, and Anwar Sadat said he would if Begin would invite him. Walter then got on to Begin the following night and said would you invite Anwar Sadat and Begin agreed. So the meeting was fixed up on open American television. Walter Cronkite went with Anwar Sadat in his aeroplane and did a whole piece on it. Well he, Walter Cronkite, came to dinner with us the night after he came back from that thing and of course he regaled us all with the details. It was very exciting and very amusing.

The American media were, in my experience, very, very pro-British, not pro, that's the wrong word, Anglophile is perhaps the word. I think I could see why. That was that as young men they'd all been in London at the time of the blitz, which was the number one story of the time, and they naturally all found themselves in Britain covering it: Charles Cunningham, Eric Sevareid and all these famous figures, in American media terms, and above all Ed Murrow, who was the father figure of them all. All these figures were in London as young men when I assume, although no-one ever said it to me out loud, it was a) a tremendous story and b) there was a sense of guilt that America was not there alongside Britain in its hour of need, and c) they had a tremendous admiration for the people of Britain under pressure. So they had a natural affinity for Britain. It is a fact that a leading figure of the time who was the President of the American Society of Editors, or whatever it was called, told me that he only saw two people from Government Information Services. One was the Israelis for obvious

reasons, New York being the largest Jewish city in the world. The other was me from the British Information Services, and he also asked - who's paying for lunch but me? So we did have unparalleled access.

I must tell you one further story for historical purposes. It might otherwise get lost. I met Theodore White, the greatest figure in the world of American political journalism, at a party. He was a small little man, and I happened to back into his drink at this party. I turned round and I said to him; "I'm very pleased to meet you, I know why you're important to us but why are we important to you?" He said: "That's a very good question, but I can't do it at a cocktail party, come and have lunch." We had lunch at the top of the Time Life building. (When Theodore White lost his job with *Time*, he was their first foreign correspondent and he fell out with Luce over policy over China, he nonetheless retained his dining rights in the *Time Life*.) At this lunch he gave me all the guidance I needed for how to conduct our information effort in the United States. We became very quite close friends. He told me that he had a special regard for BIS and always kept in touch with us because when he was at the bottom of his fortunes during the McCarthyite times he was working for some small news agency in Paris as the European correspondent at the time of the founding of NATO. There he had fallen in with Arnold Hall-Patch, who was our negotiator of these NATO arrangements. Arnold Hall-Patch had taken to Teddy and had briefed him every night on the evolution of the negotiations and so on. The net result was Teddy White's dispatches from Paris became the authoritative source for America for a lot of this. This is another example of where a British diplomat had done something for someone which had produced long term rewards for us many, many years later. It was quite interesting for me, for instance, at the time of the Reagan Presidential election to see Tom Brokaw interviewing Teddy White, as one of the commentators on this election night special, and knowing that I had actually introduced Tom Brokaw to Teddy White. So it was glamorous in that sense. But ultimately it was, I hope my American friends will forgive me, a kind of social prostitution really. You did spend a lot of time just being agreeable, I hope agreeable, and hoping to influence American opinion, but it wasn't an immensely rewarding job from that point of view. What was astonishing though, returning to the ...

MM: Did your novel writing have any sort of impact on your job at that stage, I mean the fact that you were a accredited novelist?

LO: Yes, I suppose it did, but it didn't start like that, you see. My first novel had been published in London and was going the rounds in New York. It was eventually taken up by St Martin's Press about six months after I got there by a young man called Adrian Zacheim, who was on his first job in the New York publishing world. By an extraordinary coincidence his mother Elizabeth, happened to work for BIS.

MM: That's right, yes, I remember the name ...

LO: And she came into the office one day and said, are you the person that my son Adrian's going on about with a book called *Simultaneous Equations*? I said, yes, as a matter of fact I am. She said that Adrian knew that the author was somebody who'd just arrived in New York, someone who'd written this novel he wanted to publish. No, he wasn't working for St Martin's Press, he was working for somebody else then. They wouldn't take this book on so he left whatever it was and went to St Martin's Press. From there he rang me up and said he was so fed up with that decision that he had decided to move and get a job at St Martin's Press.

"Now," he said "I've got my own list and I want you to be my first author." I naturally said I'd give him lunch. So that's how it started. But it came out virtually when I was leaving the United States and by then of course I had an agent in New York and there had been a bit of talk about it, so people knew I had a bit of form I suppose. Also of course, what a wonderful position it was to be in. Everybody who came through New York of cultural interest, Bridget Riley, Michael Tippett or Peter Schaffer or whoever, always happy to go to a party to meet interesting people. They added great lustre to our parties as well, so altogether it was all fantastically glamorous and so on. But I don't think I was born, as the Americans would say, a celeb. and I didn't find the role a very attractive one. I suppose at the end of the day there is more to diplomacy than having nice parties.

One thing I did also notice which was perhaps interesting ... I'll go back to the

Baltimore Sun where I asked the editor did he read our stuff? He said, not only do I read it but I also believe it, which is more than I can say for the products of my own government. Of course credibility is the whole art of information and this quite puzzled me. American journalists and politicians have the same kind of adversarial relationship as they have here but worse. The explanation came to me when I did a tour of the west coast. I used to lecture, of course on Britain and so on, to various institutions up and down the United States. Some of them were extraordinarily unrewarding, some undergraduate class or other where someone would say, where are you from? Britain? Where's that? But some were fantastically interesting.

I think the absolutely two best were, first, the post graduate School of Journalism at Berkeley in San Francisco which consisted of God-like creatures, I have never in all my life seen such beautiful people, blond and looking as if they had just stepped off a surf board. I'm not terribly interested in the chaps but the girls were absolutely stunning. They all sat in this auditorium and I said, what do you want to know? I can make a speech but I'm finding on this tour that sometimes I'm supposed to speak like someone who is a university professor and sometimes talking like a primary school teacher. Just tell me what you want and I'll try to answer if I can. So they started and said, do you ever lie for your government? I said, of course not. I admit freely that the government has a point of view and I represent it. But I also make sure that we put up the argument as a whole so that people as a whole can see why the government is taking the view that it does. The second question everyone asks is, will that government policy work? To which the answer is that I haven't the faintest idea. Even the government doesn't know if it's going to work. You hope it's going to work but human life isn't like that. This is the best policy that can be devised given the circumstances and we hope its going to turn out all right.

Anyway, they went on and on about lying. Let's take Rhodesia, one asked, now suppose you disagree with your government about Rhodesia, would you resign? I said: the people who run the Rhodesia policy are friends of mine in London. My job is here, their job is running the Rhodesia policy, and I assume they know a hell of a lot more about Rhodesia than I do. They are decent, honourable people. I've worked with them, they tell the truth and it's not my job to have a view on Rhodesia other than the view of

the government as it evolves. I couldn't have a separate view because I don't have enough information to take a different view, and certainly not information to rival theirs.

They went on like this for about an hour and eventually I said, this is very interesting but all you want to know about is this question of truth and lies. I said, it's so irrelevant to what I do that I want to know why you keep asking these questions? One of these God-like creatures said, because our government lied to us over the Gulf of Tomkin incident, and the body bags came back through here in San Francisco, that's why we are interested. Our government lied to us and the result was a disaster.

That's a very serious point and I think that single decision of Johnson's did more ...

MM: Johnson's ...

LO: It was Johnson's decision, the Gulf of Tomkin incident.

MM: Ah, that particular incident ...

LO: Yes, it was not only to manufacture it but then to persist in the lie which led to the Americans landing in force in Viet Nam. It was that single incident which broke the compact between the electors and the elected in the United States. I ardently hope that it is finished now but I think there will always be a lurking suspicion in American minds that the government isn't playing straight. And, of course, there's a lurking suspicion in this country that the government isn't playing straight either. Basically governments do. All governments set forth their policies in the most fetching colours, that's just part of the deal, and the opposition, of course, paints it all as black as possible so you have to make up your own mind. Anyway, this was the most interesting encounter that I had in the west coast and taught me more about the soul of America than anything else that happened to me.

The second good meeting was rather more amusing. This was when I lectured the Hoover Institute in Stanford University. By this time I was getting very wary about

these audiences and so the night before, when the Consul General had a dinner party in San Francisco, the Director of the Hoover Institute was there. I said to him: I do have this problem that I can't tell what kind of audience I'm going to get and so I don't know what to say. I don't know at what level to pitch my talk. Should it be Light Programme? Or should it be Third programme? Or something in between? The Director said: relax, this is California. They're just a load of musty old scholars. We give them tea sometimes so they will get their noses out of the books. So I went into this meeting to talk about the current state of British policy or whatever, politics and economics, and the first person I was introduced to ... "oh this is Dr Edward Teller", (who developed the first hydrogen bomb) and "this is Mr Robert Conquest", (author of *The Great Terror* and a political adviser to Mrs Thatcher). So here were all these enormously eminent people, "and professor Milton Friedman is very sorry he won't be here to listen to your discussion of the British economic situation today but he had an unbreakable engagement. He particularly asked us to say how sorry he was that he wasn't going to be here." So I threw my notes away and told them what I thought the situation was. It seemed to go down very well but at the end Dr Teller asked me a question about nuclear policy. I said to him that life has many rich experiences but I never thought once in my life I would ever be asked a question about atomic energy by Dr Edward Teller. He said, don't apologise, I don't expect you to know how they work. It was a very amusing incident.

It was thus a fun job but at the end of the day I don't think it would have been good for my soul if I had stayed too long. You get that way, you get a bit of a social climbing feeling, you know. You are constantly assessing whether you knew the right people. There was something slightly seductive about it ... It's seductive but I don't think it's what we were put on the earth to do. Anyway, that was that ...

MM: And so from there you went on to Nicosia.

LO: Actually what happened was ... as I say, we never had a serious discussion of what information policy in the United States should be. Peter Jay had his view of what policy should be, in the course of that he offended and caused great hardship to people in the British Information Services. They were very good at information work and if

their jobs were being threatened you could be damn well sure that they would do their best to make his life difficult. He had offended his information arm in the United States, he had offended the BBC, he had offended every newspaper in London over this review of the British press and so the net result was they were all saying ...

MM: And he had offended society ...

LO: Yes, and of course we were coming up to an election and what is the new British Ambassador, a political appointee, doing trying to suppress the views of the opposition by having this review suppressed? He wants to turn British Information Services into a propaganda machine for the Labour government. This was the line ...

MM: By whom ...

LO: ... in London, and politically, in my view, he had been extremely foolish. I feel Peter Jay was someone who, at least in those days, was more prepared to talk than to listen. You don't go into a job like the Ambassador in the United States without at least trying to find out what the job entails. But that's all water under the bridge now ... then I went to Nicosia.

MM: And what did you do there?

LO: I was number two in the Embassy there, or the High Commission, and there's not a great deal to be said about that, really. It was a time of relative calm and there wasn't a great deal of excitement about. It was an extraordinary place though, Nicosia. The problems are two, I think. One is that Cyprus is so insular, a tiny little island with a few people, and of course necessarily divided ethnically. That was one of the problems. They really seriously thought that the world only thought about Cyprus. You know, you'd get - I invent one for the purposes of argument - Reagan meeting Gorbachev in Reykjavik. The Nicosia newspapers would all report that "it is understood that Cyprus was discussed". You know, this kind of thing. They really did seriously believe that the whole world thought about Cyprus and nothing else. The second thing that I thought was, they really desperately needed a university because of

the leaven a university provides, the existence of people thinking about abstract things, history, sociology and even classics, mathematics, anything. Virtually all the intelligentsia or the elite of Cyprus had been to English universities where they had studied things like the law or the kind of practical things, accountancy and so on. They weren't given to speculative thought. Certainly the Greek Cypriots were extremely good at making money and very nice, honourable people they were, but it did get very, very wearing to have to go to dinner parties every night where everybody talked about the Cyprus problem. This was years after the division of the island – years afterwards. It was the same night after night. Once when we'd come back from leave I thought I'd just try if I could do something about this. So at the first dinner we went to a very nice Nicosia lady asked me what we had done on holiday. I said I particularly enjoyed a concert I went to. It featured Richard Rodney Bennett's latest work which, I can't remember, was a tone poem about a move to the Orkneys or something. I told her he was writing these masterpieces about nature and so on, incorporating the sounds of nature, (I did it as a dare to see what would happen). She looked at me, her eyes glazed over and she said "It's just like the Cyprus problem." That's all they ever wanted to talk about, the Cyprus problem. It was pretty hermetic in that respect.

I know the island is beautiful, a very nice place to live and I like them. I felt sorry for them all because they had got themselves into this mind-set but there is not much to be said about it because in fact nothing much happened. Everybody was trying to solve the Cyprus problem but they never actually did. They were all co-operating with the Secretary-General of the United Nations except when he actually suggested that they do something whereupon of course nothing whatever happened.

MM: So from there to West Africa.

LO: No, I then did a year in the United States. I wrote a book on ethnic influences on American foreign policy which had been stimulated by the fact that when I was in New York and I did appear occasionally on television, not any of the grand television stations, but I wasn't important enough and nor were the things that Britain did. The big boys would interview David Owen and the Prime Minister but that was about it. But I did speak on local television stations in New York and so on and I can remember

on one occasion the telephone rang the following morning, about Ireland. My position on Ireland in those days was that it is not the function of the spokesman for the British government, at least in the United States, to take the side either of the nationalists or the unionists. The position we were in was to defend the position of Britain and particularly the British army in Northern Ireland. The Army had been sent in at the request of the nationalist catholic community and things had worked out differently. But the role of the Army was still a decent and honourable one and it was our job to defend that role. Well, this is what I did on some occasion and the following morning the telephone rang and it was someone bellowing at me, some member of the Irish American community saying: "you're a disgrace to your name." It was only then that I realised - O'Keefe, you see - even though I am a quarter American, a quarter English and only half Irish. But I am entirely English. Not only British but English. I am an Englishman really. My father was before me and we've served the British government since 1906. It never occurred to me that I was anything but English but you see we are English in a way that Irish-Americans aren't American. The same is true of other hyphenated Americans.

MM: That's right.

LO: The Office wanted me to go to West Africa in the following year, 1982. There was a year's gap to fill in. I found myself a place at Georgetown University which the Foreign Office very kindly paid for. I took as my subject the 1974 invasion, or whatever it is called, by the Turks, of Cyprus which was a crisis which I knew. Having been in Athens and Nicosia, I knew the subject backwards. The American Congress had passed some sort of act putting an embargo on arms sales to Turkey as a result of that incident. That's the first time in history that one ally has put an arms embargo on another ally in respect of an action that that ally had taken in a third country which wasn't even particularly friendly to either. Makarios was non-aligned in more senses than one. I told the story of the 1974 incidents and I went on to describe the subsequent legislative action in Congress. There were two struggles going on, one in Washington and one in Cyprus and they only had a very contingent relationship one with the other. The bit that was of interest was that the Turkish intervention took place just before the mid-term elections in the United States when every member of the

House of Representatives has his job on the line again. The Greek American community arranged for the entire population of Greek Americans to descend on Washington, flying on their cars, not the flag of the United States which is the flag to which they have been pledging allegiance ever since they were children but the flag of Greece. They badgered and bullied and so on and eventually frightened the Congress into imposing this arms embargo which took nearly four years to take off. This was similar to the Irish American case I quoted earlier. Greek Americans are not Americans, like I'm English. You follow me ...

MM: Yes, they are a lobby.

LO: It only comes out when their interests as Greeks are affected. Normally they would act like Americans except in a matter touching on Greece. I then tried to write about why American society is so arranged and it's not difficult to see why. Britain has been at least as important a country of immigration as the United States, taking into account the size of the two countries. People who come here become Brits. No-one ever thinks of Clare Bloom as a Lithuanian Brit or least of all a Lithuanian Jewish Brit. She's an English actress. Malcolm Rifkind is an Edinburgh lawyer, a Scotsman. So ethnic origins have far less influence in this country than they do in America, partly because their immigration took place over a very short period, in vast numbers and of course involved a lot of the people didn't speak English. It was a society in the making. It wasn't a settled society, the United States, so when they say the United States is a nation of immigrants it doesn't mean quite the same thing as it would do here. Anyway, I examined all that and also the way the Congress works. The relationship between the three branches of government also have their effect.

A Greek lobby did try to organise here and a special Select Committee of the House criticised the British government enormously over what we did in 1974, after the Turkish intervention. Their report died the death because it was realised that it was written by a number of MPs, all of whom had Greek Cypriots in their constituencies. The rest of the country simply took no notice of it. In America you can apply these pressures very, very selectively, and this is what happened.

Anyway, I then went on in my book to talk about the Irish Americans, the Polish Americans and so on. I came across a number of curiosities. One was that the major reason, or at least a principal reason, for the failure of the United States to ratify the League of Nations convention was a coalition of Republicans and Irish American congressmen and senators who were opposed. This was because Ireland wasn't granted its independence as part of the Versailles Treaty. In fact the Irish-American congress had sent a couple of people to lobby Wilson in Paris to get Irish self-determination included and he hadn't even talked to them. Of course the Irish-Americans concluded that this was because he was of Ulster origin. The Isolationists League which you think of as purely American was set up by the German American Association, the BUND and the Clan na Gael in Philadelphia in 1907. They could see the war was coming and they wanted to make sure that the Brits got a bloody nose as a result. They couldn't attack the problem head-on but took some words of George Washington's farewell dispatch about not getting involved in foreign adventures and so on as their basic text. Here was the father of the country saying Americans shouldn't be involved; and of course the appeal was immensely powerful as we all know. Always remember that Roosevelt didn't declare war on Hitler, it was the other way round.

Another thing I found out was that the famous Polish corridor which was the immediate cause of the outbreak of the Second World War came about as a result of Polish American pressure on Wilson. He was all in favour of the Poles having self-determination. It was one of the 14 points which says that Poland should have "access to the sea" which the Poles interpreted as meaning they could take a slice of German land to the Baltic. Wilson said no, that's not what it means; it means "access to the sea". But Wilson gave way with the results we all know. Thus both the immediate cause of the Second World War and the fact that America had not joined in the collective search for peace were the result of ethnic influence on politics. This is not the whole explanation of course but these were very, very prominent influences on the result. All this is known even though the evidence is scattered around in books. No less a person than Thomas Dewey who was the presidential candidate in 1940, I think, was actually at the meeting when the Isolationist League was set up, the coming together of the German/Irish American groups. He reported to Washington that it was the most unpatriotic thing he had ever witnessed. Of course he, I presume, was an

ethnic Brit and could therefore have had ethnic prejudices of his own. I came to believe that there isn't such a thing as a neutral in these matters.

Anyway, this was the work I wrote at that wonderful time. We had a nice little house, and I met a large number of Congressmen and Senators. They, of course, many of them, were extremely cautious on the subject of ethnicity. Ethnicity was almost as difficult for them, I think, almost like class in this country. They would say, well we won't talk about ethnic groups per se but we will talk about lobbying or whatever; but eventually a few people would open up, so we got an insight into the situation. Very interesting. Anyway, that's what I did.

Then I went to Dakar when my time was up, I went there and lived the life of a nomad. We had this nice house overlooking the sea in Dakar. Suzanne built a beautiful garden and I represented us over an area which stretched from the borders of Chad to the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and all the way from the borders of Algeria down to the forests of Guinea. There were British interests in each of the six countries to which I was accredited. More in Senegal than the others.

MM: All French speaking?

LO: Well, French was what we spoke but two of them were Lusitphone. One was Guinea Bissau and the other the Cape Verde Islands. Africa is very interesting to anyone who was curious about the formation of society, tribalism and all this sort of thing. Also very interesting was the effect of Islam on the region and the subversive activities of Gadaffi. In every difficulty there was Gadaffi at work somewhere. Perhaps the most interesting thing in that whole period was a struggle for influence, in which I think I've never seen the slightest reference to, in Britain, between the what you might call the moderate Islamic states, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Gulf States, and Saudi Arabia on the one side and the subversives on the other, mainly Libya and Iraq. It was the battle for the soul of African Islam. The King of Saudi Arabia has two funds or rather the government has a fund for normal economic development and the King has a personal fund for the setting up of mosques in Africa. Of course these mosques had Imams who preached moderate Islam and not subversive, revolutionary

Islam. This struggle had led the Malaysian government to appoint, as part of the deal between the moderate states, an ambassador to West Africa but, unlike most ambassadors, his Embassy was not in Dakar but in Mali, Bamako, the geographical centre of the African Muslim world. I went to call on him once and he showed me that, next to his office, as you went in through Reception, there was a room for prayer. This was because one of the lessons he was preaching to Malians, and indeed to other West Africans who called there, was that Malaysians are also pious Muslims - and indeed he was - but they don't think it's a very good idea to blow up aeroplanes.

So that was the most interesting lesson I learned there but Dakar was essentially, I suppose, an apprentice job. Our principal British interest as such was - and this happened in my predecessor's time - was that during the Falklands War, because the United Nations had passed a resolution supporting the British effort to recover the Falkland Islands, because of this - and Senegal is an ardent member of the United Nations - when my predecessor went to President Diouf to ask for permission to use the airport as a staging point for the RAF on the way south, he gave that permission straight away. So all through the Falklands crisis, and indeed until such times as the RAF had jumbo jets, we used Dakar airport. There was a little British RAF contingent there. The first commandant was flying to keep his hours up and we were constantly using him as a kind of chauffeur to "drive" us around this immense territory. We had wonderful trips into the desert to see various things of British interest, like the huge mountain of iron ore up in Mauritania which is, I think, the source of 40% of the ore used by British Steel. It was discovered by those intrepid French flyers, of whom the most famous was Antoine de St Exupéry. They discovered it because when their aeroplanes were going over the desert the compasses started to go crazy over this site. When this was examined on the ground it was found to be just a huge mountain of iron. Extraction has become a huge industry. We went up there to show the flag to the people who were producing it, on behalf of the consumers. There was a little bit of interest everywhere. Britain is one of those countries that does have interests everywhere but I have to say that there wasn't enough to keep an Ambassador busy if he had only one of those territories to deal with at a time.

If I'm allowed a personal observation on the BBC overseas services. I'm, of course, a

tremendous admirer. I think it's one of our fundamental assets and one which we must never, never lose. But it was a curiosity that the French service is kept up essentially, I think, for influencing Francophone countries, or reaching out to Francophone countries, in the Third World. (I don't think it has any influence whatever on France, just as France doesn't broadcast to us). But the argument that it extends our influence to Francophone Africa was not in my experience justified. Francophone Africa listened essentially to the French overseas services and in so far as there was a feedback in letters and so on to the BBC, these were invariably in Arabic. The letters are collected in the Embassies for onward transmission to the BBC and out of curiosity once, I looked into the pigeon hole where they were kept. There were about thirty letters, it was a big response you know, for a single day, about thirty or forty letters there, but every single one of them was in Arabic. There wasn't a single one in French.

MM: And they were listening in Arabic?

LO: They were listening to the Arabic services of the BBC and not to the French service. I mention this for historical purposes.

MM: So that was ...

LO: That was Senegal, a kind of an apprentice role. I rather hoped from there they would send me somewhere scenic like Morocco. I would have quite liked to have done a nice Mediterranean post in Africa but in fact I was asked to run the British Delegation to, I'll use the popular term, the Vienna meeting to review the Helsinki Final Act, or what's generally called the Helsinki process. These are the words in popular use but there are more official titles for these things. I suppose if it's for an historical record that I should say it was the Vienna follow-up meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

MM: But before we get onto that, did you want to say anything about your being a chairman of the Civil Service Selection committee?

LO: No, except that it was a very good job, I enjoyed doing it. You are very much

coasting along in neutral I think, at that point ...

MM: In that case perhaps we should move straight on to your seminar at St Antony's College, Oxford, which I would like to append to the transcript in full, subject to one or two questions which I would like to put to you. I see from page two of the transcript you were saying that you really required no qualifications and no experience for the job. That seems to me that it might need a little amplification.

LO: Yes, how clever of you. It was, of course, meant to be a joke; in all lectures you've got to have one joke at the beginning, one joke in the middle and one joke at the end otherwise people fall asleep; and there is a little bit more to it than that which may be of some historical interest. The meeting that I went to in Vienna came after a meeting in Stockholm, which had gone on for a long time, on military confidence-building measures between East and West. The Western requirements for confidence building measures were two; one was the acknowledgment that the Soviet Union had far more conventional arms in Europe than the Western alliance (which had been constantly denied); and secondly, that any confidence-building measures that were made, notification of troop manoeuvres and so on, had to be subject to verification. If things were happening in the East then the West should be able to verify what was happening on the ground. That point was conceded, actually in June, I think, of 1986 at the Stockholm meeting. By chance I happened to be in Stockholm to observe what was going on and the Head of the Soviet Delegation was coming back that very day, hot foot, it was said, from a meeting of the Politburo itself where this point had been conceded. It was the first sign I think that things were beginning to move in East-West relations.

The head of our delegation in Stockholm naturally had an interest in the next meeting because he did have the relevant experience and he wanted to go to Vienna. He had a young family and a young wife and so he didn't want to go to the post to which he had been assigned. I had a friend in Personnel Department at the time, a long standing friend, whose wife was also a very close friend of mine when she first became a Foreign Office officer. I had guided her infant steps when she came into the Office, showing her what kind of paper to use and all that and how to do the various tasks. I

had generally looked after her for a bit so we were very close. Her husband was Christopher Long who is just about to retire from Budapest as Ambassador. He was Deputy Chief Clerk at the time of the meeting to decide who should go to Vienna. The claims of the Stockholm candidate were considered but Christopher suggested that it would be a good idea if there was a fresh face at the next Vienna stage. This was largely because these East-West meetings were extremely rough, and a lot of personal frictions developed between delegations. It would be better, Christopher said, to start with someone with a clean slate. This was accepted by the Office, by his seniors, largely because he himself had experience of this Helsinki process.

When asked who should get the job he said that I should and so this is how I actually got it. The person who was disappointed on this occasion actually went to Vienna after me to do the next part of the military side of the Helsinki process so he had a spell in Vienna too - but after me. It was just one of those hazards of life. Occasionally, for all the monolithic appearance of the Office, personal relations do play a part. On the other hand I have to say that all the major delegations to Vienna all had fresh faces so perhaps the choice was more than personal; it was actually something that all participants perceived to be right. The Russian was new, the American was new, the Frenchman was new, I was new and so on. I think there was possibly more sense in the decision to send me and that it wasn't just purely personal.

MM: Thank you very much for that. On page 11, paragraph 3, there is a reference to the fact that we had enough problems with our own side, which were almost as intractable as those the others suffered from, what exactly were our own problems?

LO: Ah, yes indeed. In a Helsinki meeting of this kind there is the Eastern bloc and there is the West; and in the middle there is the group of neutral and non-aligned delegations who traditionally act as the umpire between East and West. They had personal problems of their own, the neutral and non-aligned. The Eastern delegations also had the problems which I refer to in this paper. Our problems were very curious, because the West as a whole have an identical view of what human rights are; what the obligations of governments are in ensuring these human rights are preserved in their countries; and what human rights they wanted the Eastern Europeans to implement.

The problem was that the European Union also had aspirations to have a foreign policy of its own, a common policy. The thing I could never be happy with was the fact that some EU colleagues were trying to establish this policy, almost in opposition to the other members of the West like Canada and the United States. It seemed to some that in order for the EU to have a foreign policy of our own on Helsinki we would have had to, somehow or another, decide policy for everybody else. The Americans particularly were deeply resentful of anything that seemed to imply; 'well, Europe's decided this, there's the dotted line, please sign on it'. And of course their resentment was perfectly understandable when you bear in mind that the main object of interest for the Russians in all this was the United States. It was the two super-powers that counted with everybody else, as it were, assisting on the sidelines. Under a good European Union chairman, we could gloss over the difficulty. Then the European Union delegations would decide what policy they would like (and traditionally they met before the general meeting of the West) and then they would propose this policy to the rest, but if there were objections or modifications or whatever - the Americans or the Canadians or the Norwegians or anybody wanting to modify the draft - then we would accept it. If we didn't like what the others were proposing we would go away again and have an EU caucus and think about it again. But there were, unfortunately, a couple of delegations, who would persist in presenting the rest of the West with a *fait accompli* and this was not conducive to good relations between the delegations. I fear that this was particularly true of the heads of the Belgian and French delegations. In the case of the French it was certainly an aspect of the anti-Americanism which is unfortunately a feature of French policy. The thing about French diplomacy, I always find, is it all starts off slightly suspect but when the chips are down they do come round. They have an instinct to want to go off on their own in some way, but when it comes down to it they are really quite solid. The trouble is they have caused an enormous amount of distress meanwhile. In the middle of the conference the Head of the French delegation was changed - we then had one of the most accomplished diplomats I have ever met in my life, someone with a glowing reputation from his time as their representative at NATO, where the French position was also very difficult. He was put in and within three or four weeks he had used his immense prestige, authority and so on to get his views across to ministers with more effect than the hotheads in Paris. He used to say to us, when we put a point to him: yes, well he agreed with that but it required "un certain

temps pour reconcilier les esprits a Paris" which I always thought was a most wonderful phrase. That was the principal problem.

There was also a problem in trying to formulate a single EU policy at all. For instance we invented a mechanism for carrying on the Vienna Conference afterwards through a series of meetings which went under the rubric of the Human Dimension: these were meetings at which countries could take other countries to task for failing in some way to honour their commitments to Helsinki and Vienna. The trouble was that there were at least three EU countries, EU foreign ministers, who had different views as to how this mechanism should work. No delegate dared go back and say that his minister's view had not found favour with the rest, whereas one of his colleagues' ideas had. So the net result was that we put together a sort of composite mechanism in which the ideas of all three ministers were incorporated. I thought it was the most dreadful dog's dinner myself but because the Americans took a very, I have to say a very, tolerant view of this, it was accepted. They liked the idea but they didn't terribly like the way it was put together. Also by this time - mid 1988 - the Russians were very keen on it too. The Gorbachevian revolution was then reaching a critical stage and they wanted an end to the Vienna conference, in order that they could get on to the next stage, the reduction of conventional arms in Europe which they could no longer afford. I believe that mechanism has now been greatly simplified but you can see the problem. It looked like a common European policy but what it was in fact is a fusion of three different national policies. It was not a common policy of any kind. These were the sort of problems we had which, you know, were eventually resolved. To take the other side of the house, while all this human rights stuff was going on, there was a parallel meeting going on working out the terms of reference for the next meeting which was going to be about conventional arms in Europe. To give you an example of how difficult it becomes, under the rules governing arms control negotiations generally Turkey has an exception for those parts of its armed forces that face into the Middle East whereas negotiations in the east/west context related purely to the European theatre. So certain parts of certain military districts in Anatolia were within the terms of our arms negotiations and certain parts were excluded. The exclusion zone, I think, was worked out as being 100 km from Antioch. (This may not be entirely exact because this meeting was parallel to my negotiation and not within my direct

experience. I think it was 100 km from Antioch.) The trouble about that was that that meant the line ran as near as makes no difference to the little town of Mersin which was the place from which the Turkish forces had embarked for Cyprus in 1974. The problem was that the zone of inspection of arms either did or did not include the town of Mersin depending on this arbitrarily chosen limit. You can be absolutely certain that the Greeks wanted Mersin in the zone of inspection and the Turks wanted it out, by definition. So an ingenious formula was found to find the line to within 10 km of the Mediterranean and then the formula was "and thence to the sea", which left open whether Mersin was or was not in the zone.

I told our negotiator while all this was going on that I could not see an answer because, you know, it was a black and white situation: Mersin was in or it wasn't in. I underestimated the ingenuity of diplomats. Some immensely complicated formula was eventually found with exchanges of Notes and so on which kept everybody on board. I wouldn't have liked to have been the Greek delegate on this occasion because the Athens newspapers had headlines about this "traitor" in Vienna who was betraying the cause of Hellenism. Nor would I have liked to be in the position of the Turkish delegate who was so frightened of what was going on that it was in fact the British Ambassador in Ankara who had to put the proposition to the Turks because the delegate was too frightened to do it himself. These are the problems that you see in a conference of this kind. Everybody is coming from a different place.

MM: That's fascinating, really. Page 13 of the text says you were giving this address to a distinguished gathering of the Prague School of Economics and you had a reputation for being unkind about everyone present while you were in Vienna. Why do you think that the Czechs chose you to give this particular address?

LO: Oh, I think the reason was because I was an expert and the only Ambassador around who knew the score. Those who asked me to say my piece knew perfectly well that the Praesidium were not proposing to honour the agreement reached in Vienna. It was perfectly obvious. They were going to interpret it in a way which would enable them to go on exactly as they had before. The reformist group obviously wanted change and as I was the only person among the ambassadors who knew the score I was

put up to bat. I also think, because of what I say somewhere else, that Lennart, when he talked to me about Munich some weeks before, the betrayal of Czechoslovakia by the west at Munich in 1938, was surprised by my response. When he said the Munich Agreement was the reason for the country being so economically backward I replied that I didn't think this could be the case. I said if you think that we did you harm in 1938, think what we did to the Germans between 1943-45. We bombed everything that moved and the whole place was a complete wreck by the time we had finished. And now here's Germany, a western federal republic, the most prosperous country in Europe. So there must be something other than what we did that was responsible for the economic state you are in. I think he had probably worked this out for himself but the fact that I said it to him sort of confirmed in some strange sort of way his own suspicions that they had chosen the wrong economic model. I think these were the reasons why I was asked to speak as I did but the reason why ...

MM: Well, because you had pointed the finger firmly at Czechoslovakia as responsible for their own troubles.

LO: To Lennart. But in Vienna I had this reputation of being the hammer of the Czechoslovaks and this, purely for fortuitous reasons. We had a couple of excellent diplomats in Prague at the time, Stephen Barratt who was the Ambassador and John McGregor who was the number two, and who will in my view be one of the stars of the next generation. They kept feeding us with all this wonderful information about what was happening on the human rights situation in Czechoslovakia. In Russia by this time things had moved on very, very fast in the right direction. A lot of the things we had been complaining about at the beginning of the conference Gorbachev had attended to, the recalling from exile of Sakharov in December 1986, the de-jamming of the BBC just after Christmas that year, and this sort of thing. The Czechoslovaks in contrast were still being recalcitrant as late as 1988. All the information we had about abuses of human rights were coming from Romania, from Czechoslovakia and East Germany by this time. But because we were so well served by Prague we got more on Prague than we did on any of the others. So the net result was that on regurgitating this information in Vienna I got this reputation as being the hammer of the Czechoslovaks.

The eastern delegations thought that the western camp had divided up the work so that the British delegation was given the dossier on Czechoslovakia, but it wasn't like that. It was the fact that we were getting all this absolutely priceless stuff about abuses of human rights in Czechoslovakia. As a result I never thought they would give agreement to my appointment in Czechoslovakia when I was eventually appointed there. Indeed, towards the end of the Vienna meeting when I was going to be the Ambassador and everybody knew I was going to be the Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, I wrote a telegram to the Office to say: well, look, nobody ever says anything disagreeable about the place to which he is going as an Ambassador. You know, you are always "Looking forward to the challenge and to living in this beautiful city" etc., and there was I thumping away the whole time in Vienna. I said, what do you want me to do? I got the shortest telegram I think I ever got in my service saying, your job is to defend the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, so get on with it. I thought then, if the Czechoslovaks turn me down as a result, the Office will have to find me another post. Indeed, when I got to Prague, the then Foreign Minister said in my introductory meeting, "we didn't terribly like what you were saying about us in Vienna" so they had noted it. I think for all these reasons I was seen as the person who had the most authoritative voice on this particular issue. I am not saying I was the most authoritative voice compared with my other diplomatic colleagues in other ways; just in this particular field which happened to be central at the time.

MM: Then of course the excellent John McGregor, your number two, stayed on and opened many doors.

LO: Oh yes, perhaps I ought to put that on the record. When I got to Prague - I was supposed to go about six months before, there was a great gap while the Vienna meeting finished - and he was in charge throughout that period. So when I got there he simply pointed me, quietly and effectively, in all the right directions. So by the time the revolution began I knew personally virtually all the actors, not only in Prague but also in Bratislava. It's evidence for me that a good number two is worth his weight in gold. He was absolutely wonderful.

MM: Well, we're almost at the end now but on page 18 you have this intriguing story

about Dienstbier.

LO: Yes, as I have said just before, John and Juliet McGregor had this party for dissident friends to say goodbye because they were going off to Paris. It happened to coincide with the opening of the Velvet Revolution, the student demonstration which started the whole thing off. As I record here, I took the Dienstbiers and the Urbans back in the car ...

MM: Were they diplomatic colleagues?

LO: No, no they were dissidents. It's all explained here that Urban ended up as the chap who ran the first democratic elections since 1948 and won on behalf of the democratic forces while Dienstbier ended up as foreign minister. Our diplomatic Jaguars may look very impressive but by the time all the armour has been put on them and so on they are not very big inside. I didn't have my driver with me on this occasion. I drove it myself and my wife sat next to me. There was only room in the back for two husbands, with two wives on their knees, if you follow, and I drove them home. Six weeks later - I didn't see them for six weeks - they ended up as Foreign Minister and head of the Civic Forum. Dienstbier on becoming Foreign Minister was formally introduced to the Corps, the Corps Diplomatique, in the great reception hall in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague. This is, I think, the most impressive Ministry of Foreign Affairs anywhere. It was an old palace built by a Count Cernin who ruined himself doing it in the 18th century. It's a vast great thing and it's got great reception rooms and in one of these there we were, all the Corps, all the Ambassadors, Heads of Mission, in order of precedence which is of course decided by the date on which we presented our Letters. I ended up in my place, something like 36th, in this list. It was an unfortunate thing that the person who presented just before me was the Representative of the PLO, which in those days we didn't recognise, so I was not allowed to talk to him. I could only talk to the person on my left but fortunately the chap from the PLO was so small that I could actually talk to his neighbour over his head, you know, without disturbing the poor chap. I am very glad that that period is over too, if I may say so, but anyway those were the rules.

So Dienstbier came in and there was the Head of Protocol who took him round to shake hands with all the Heads of Mission. I have slightly shortened it in this account. What technically happened was that Dienstbier went all the way round and shook hands with everybody and then drinks were served, champagne. It was at that point that I was asked to come and talk to him over a drink. He leant forward and said to me, "I feel rather foolish." The reason for this was he'd been a janitor the day before he became Minister. He was a little late coming on his first day because he had to find someone to be janitor in his place, so he could take over the job of Foreign Minister. Anyway, two or three days later at the introduction to the Corps he said to me "I feel rather peculiar." "I feel rather inadequate" or some phrase like this. I said to him, "you'll grow into the job I feel sure." So we had a little laugh. I was the only person in the room that he knew personally because John McGregor had made sure that I knew him and we had had dinner together on the day the revolution broke out. It's only chance that it happened to be the same day but as they say about photography, chance comes to the clever photographer.

MM: I think maybe we could finish with a story about Mrs Thatcher.

LO: You mean on page 21, the wave of Anglophilia?

MM: Yes.

LO: In my farewell dispatch I said that any Ambassador who, on leaving a post, says that relations between his country and the country to which he is accredited are much better on his departure than they had been on his arrival earns the undying contempt of his colleagues. But it was indeed a fact in this case. One hopes one personally had had some small role in it, but there were much more profound reasons than that. The fact is that post revolutionary Czechoslovakia, new democratic Czechoslovakia, did go through this patch when Britain was regarded as the model on which everything should be based. This was partly because there's a kind of affinity especially between Czechs and the English. I think we understand each other in a strange sort of way, just on an ordinary human level. We have a sense of humour in common. We're also rather pessimistic, but they are the world champions in pessimism: we couldn't even begin to

get near them for pessimism.

The real reasons I think were two. One was the fact that the centre of opposition throughout that period of communist rule was the English faculties of the universities. As I say in my piece, with the absorption of the language comes the absorption of values which students of English believed were better than the values under which they were living, and my goodness me was that true. At all sorts of strange places. Olmutz, an historic town in northern Moravia, has a famous university, and when the revolution began in Prague it took a few days before anybody would react in Olmutz. But who actually took the lead? The Dean of the Faculty of English. He led the revolution in Olmutz and he became Rector of the university, the same was true throughout the country. It was also the fact that we, particularly the BBC, represented the values of truth and so on which the Czechoslovaks thought had been mislaid by forty years of lying on the part of the communists.

Then there was the influence of Mrs Thatcher, and one has to say this for historic accuracy and fairness. She was the idol of eastern Europe. She was seen as the person to whom Gorbachev had first appealed. She had been seen as the conduit between east and west in the new Gorbachevian era. Everyone had noticed that when Gorbachev went to Washington he stopped off, not in London but at an air base outside, when they had lunch together. (The discussions on that occasion I believe were all about the jury system, nothing to do with what was going to take place in Washington, at least that was what one eye witness told me.) This meeting was noted in eastern Europe and since Gorbachev eventually was the instrument by which the whole of eastern Europe was liberated, so Mrs Thatcher enjoyed this extraordinary reputation as their political saviour. It had been known she had supported Solidarnose. It was known that she had received Lech Walesa and she had received the successor to the communists in Hungary. She looked to be the sort of Queen Victoria of the time. She was seen as the person who was presiding over this great thing.

I saw this myself that first Christmas after the revolution. A coalition government had been set up to prepare for the elections and the most innocent of the communists was put in as Prime Minister. His name was Marian Calfa. Calfa called me in over the

Christmas break, the Christmas holiday period, within days, four or five days, of the formation of the new government. I was the first Ambassador he saw: he should have seen us in the usual protocol order. It became perfectly clear that what he wanted to see me about was the possibility of an invitation to London to call at number 10 Downing Street thereby establishing his credentials for the job. This was an extraordinary thing and one which future generations may find difficult to accept but it was so.

To illustrate this point about the Anglophilia: the British Council representative in the spring after the revolution, that was the spring of 1990, went around the country setting up cultural centres. (They were called resource centres but I think of them as libraries). He had money for this and he was a very energetic chap and so he got these centres set up in maybe twenty, maybe more, provincial towns. Everywhere he went he was met by these people, smiling people, welcoming him, offering him free premises usually in great historic buildings. In Olmutz, for instance, he was offered a couple of beautiful medieval rooms above the Students Union, that is at the very heart of the university. The Rector, whose expertise was American literature, was only too happy to help. In one of the towns in Slovakia he was offered some rooms in the place President Benes had used as his summer residence. In Brno in Moravia he was offered rooms in the old medieval town hall, right in the centre of the town for free, for nothing you know, just so long as the Council would come. Other people from other towns were coming to him saying: well, you're doing it for Martin or wherever, why can't you do it for us? He had to reply that he simply did not have any more money.

It was a very, very wonderful period. To go out on a wave of Anglophilia like that was very good, particularly as we had this guilty conscience over what happened in Munich in 1938. They had forgiven us and all I can say is that it was characteristic generosity on their part. Munich was certainly always at the back of my mind: that all this mess had been caused by us taking the wrong view in 1938. Mrs Thatcher when she was showing President Havel round number 10 Downing Street, showed him the Cabinet room. "I sit over there," she said, pointing to the famous chair in the middle of the room with the back to the fireplace. She added: "That was where Neville Chamberlain gave away a country he didn't actually own in 1938." So she was in no doubt as to

who's responsibility it was.

MM: Well, thank you very much indeed for that. I think your wind-up comments are really only equalled by your story about the Spitfire in the paper. Thank you very much indeed.