ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 2

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First posted in Isaiah Berlin Online and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library 2 June 2023

Last revised 18 December 2023

Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No 2

Conversation date: 26 October 1987
Transcribed by: Donna Shalev (edited and corrected 4 September 1995)

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Side A

IB [?] Chancellor of the University of Bristol,[1] and a lifelong Communist.

GC She too?

IB Absolutely. She liked me, and liked Thomas [?], compared to which [?]. Thomas must have made her. She was the daughter of – you know who she was. She was Crowfoot's daughter: the archaeologist, who worked in Palestine [John Winter Crowfoot].

GC Was she Thomas's wife? She's not the daughter of Hodgkin. Ah, I see.

IB Widow.

GC I see. Well, I thought she was the daughter of the old Hodgkin [?Robert Howard Hodgkin, father of Thomas].

IB No.

GC The sister of Thomas.

IB No. She's the wife[2] of the Crowfoot who used to be an archaeologist in Palestine in the 1930s.

GC Yes, of course.

IB That's the way I met him, when he was Secretary of Agriculture.[3] I remember …

[1] Dorothy Hodgkin, Chancellor of the University of Bristol 1970–88.
[2] This seems muddled. Crowfoot's wife was Grace Mary Crowfoot née Hood.
[3] Crowfoot or Thomas Hodgkin? Garbled?

GC Yes.

IB … economist

GC Yes? Krypton.

IB Exactly. That was … She's a very naive woman, her Communism does account for it.

GC Of course.

IB She's a Chinese – [member?] of the Chinese Academy, not the Russian Academy. Who else? Then he chose Zionism, because he was no longer at Oxford, and nevertheless Oxford. Then he chose Nicholas ['Nicko'] Henderson, simply as a friend. He knew he shouldn't have done. He felt some guilt, he thought it wasn't right. That he doesn't deserve it.

GC I see. Do you know him personally?

IB Very well.

GC Because lately he is highly praised from all quarters.

IB Nicholas?

GC Yes.

IB No. I knew him as a boy. He was a son of the Warden of All Souls, Warden Henderson. I knew him as a schoolboy.

GC In St Paul's?

IB No, at Oxford. I knew his father.

GC Ah, yes.

IB I knew his father, who was a Professor at All Souls after the war. He was a Research Fellow before the war. Hubert Henderson. He was the editor, I recall, of *The Nation* in those days. Difficult boy [Nicko], rebellious, rather bohemian, with Communist inclinations, went to Hertford College, which was not the best, and got a Third. And the father was an economist attached to Moyne. When Moyne went to the West Indies, then Henderson wrote to him. He said to Moyne, 'I need a secretary.' 'Well, I've got a boy, Murtogh will do it.' So he took him on as a secretary. With him, he moved to the Foreign Office in 1939. Still, he served him during the war, not in Cairo. He didn't go to Cairo.

GC For a short while he was in Cairo [1942–4].

IB Henderson?

GC Yes. For a short while.

IB With Moyne?[4]

GC I can't remember.

IB As Moyne's secretary ?

GC Possibly.

IB But then he didn't stay there …

GC Then he was with Eden [1944], and then Bevin [1945].

IB No, that's after the war.

GC So: during the war?

IB Don't know.

[4] Yes.

GC He was a close friend of Bill Deakin, so I thought that it was in the Cairo days. You can't remember?

IB Maybe. Maybe. Not very close.

GC No.

IB Married a Greek lady. Half Greek. And then he came back and did the exam for the Foreign Office, and failed. And then the second time he got through. After the exam he went back, and then he became private secretary …

GC Of many ministers.

IB … of many ministers. Then he wrote this book about foreign secretaries, a very short one.[5] Praises everybody. Then he went to Poland, I don't think in the last war. Maybe he was already – someone else must have done. Then he went to Poland [1969–72], then to Germany [1972–5], then to Paris [1975–9], and finally to Washington [1979–82].

GC After retirement he went to Washington?

IB He made some splendid speech about the Falklands.

GC I see.

IB And he is now the head of the Prince of Wales's office in the Duchy of Cornwall. Who runs the estates. What more can I tell you? He's a [*unclear*]. Likes little girls, not a very faithful husband. Clever, amusing man.

GC I met him once, 25 years ago, when I was interviewing him.

[5] *The Private Office: A Personal View of Five Foreign Secretaries and of Government from the Inside* (London, 1984).

IB Not very solid, but clever and amusing; quick and amusing; rather cynical. [*unclear*] I know him very well.

GC In diaries, when I came across his name, in the last diary I read, it was Colville's diary of the war years with Churchill, Jock Colville, and I read it when he mentions …

IB What did he say?

GC That he's very intelligent. I mean intelligent, loyal, everything.

IB Where did you find him?

GC Colville?

IB No. Where was Henderson?

GC At the time, I can't remember. But the first time he mentions him it's quite gossipy. Jock Colville was madly in love with Gay Margesson, the daughter of [David] Margesson, Martin [Charteris]'s wife. And apparently Nicholas Henderson was also madly in love with her.

IB Along with fourteen other people.

GC Were in love with her?

IB Fourteen others.

GC She?

IB No, he.

GC I see. But he once confessed to Colville that if Gay will not marry him, he will never marry. And Colville replied, 'The same with

me', and they both married other ladies, better people. Happily married.

IB Yes. I remember her very well, before the war, Gay.

GC Yes.

IB When she was still gay. She wasn't that attractive. And now she's just an old lady. Now she's become like a nice old lady.

GC But apparently when she was young, she had radical ideas …

IB Hmm …

GC Yes. Colville discusses the conversations with her.

IB She was in Oxford in 1939.

GC Yes.

IB Not as a student.

GC And he describes going with her to the meadow, and speaking, or quarrelling, about socialism, and everything.

IB Nothing really serious.

GC That's what I thought. I know her well.

IB Even Colville, who was a reactionary. He was pro-Chamberlain.

GC Yes.

IB Anti-Churchill, [even he] says all that. To him Gay appeared radical. Her radicalism didn't go very deep.

GC Yes, I see. He's very candid in his memoirs.

IB Who, Colville?

GC Yes. Very candid.

IB That he is, yes.

GC But it's two huge volumes, it takes time to read, but you find very interesting small passages, that's all. But for me, it was …

IB He is not a very intelligent man.

GC I know. He wants to have the reputation of an intellectual man.

IB Oho! Intellectual.

GC He wants to, yes.

IB That's the beginning. He's also social, smart, very good with the important people. Good secretary to the Queen.

GC Yes.

IB All that.

GC But well read, apparently.

IB Son of some noble lady [Lady Helen Cynthia Colville]. Well born.

GC Noble, but poor.

IB Poor, yes.

GC I mean, youth of poor aristocracy.

IB That's right!

GC He describes it quite …

IB His mother was a friend of the Queen.

GC Yes. His mother or the grandmother.

IB Lady-in-waiting.

GC He describes it in detail.

IB He was in Cambridge, wasn't he?

GC Yes. And read history.

IB He's perfect for Nicko Henderson.

GC I can see why.

IB He's a great friend of Weidenfeld, Henderson. Absolutely adores him. Adores Weidenfeld. He goes to every party he ever gives.

GC Adore Weidenfeld!

IB Adores him. The only man I ever met who really does. I tell you, he goes to all the parties, flirts with all the ladies, plays charades, he's not a great man. He's a jolly, amusing, quick, clever sort of careerist.

GC He is a careerist.

IB Yes, he is.

***

GC All right, I think we shall start. Today I want to clarify something we brought up in the last meeting. Then, I mean, in one of the future meetings, we'll try to do something chronological, but I'm not sure we'll manage.

IB Anything you like.

GC We'll see.

GC But beforehand, did Henry Hardy collect all your articles he could get his hands on?

IB Yes.

GC Including all those that he didn't publish?

IB Yes.

GC And where is this?

IB He just did the bibliography. He hasn't got the copies.[6]

GC Ah, the bibliography I know by heart. I know. But he didn't collect them, I see.

IB As far as I know, no.

GC I see. Where is he, by the way?

IB Oxford University Press.

GC He is in Oxford University Press? I see. Is he an amiable man? I mean, can I …?

IB No, he's not an amiable man. Nice man, but not amiable. He's rather quirky, he's stiffish. He can be quite [?]. He's absolutely honest, and extremely decent, he's a gentleman, he's perfectly all right. But he's brusque. And if I ask him to talk to you he would. All

[6] In fact I of course made copies of everything I found. IB had no idea of the details of my work, which I didn't burden him with.

his life he's looked for a biographer, and kept up things from a distance. He's one of the people who keeps on producing candidates.

GC Really? I see.

IB Bundles and bundles.

GC I see. So maybe it's not a good idea to approach him. We'll see.

IB He was in Wolfson, you see.

GC I remember.

IB What do you want to approach him about?

GC To ask him if he could help me to get access to small articles that I haven't had the opportunity to …

IB I could help you. You know where they are?

GC When he compiled the bibliography.

IB The references.

GC I see. Well, I consult you when to get them. All right.

IB I don't know.

GC Where is All Souls Magazine, by the way?

IB What?

GC The magazine that you wrote for in the 1930s in Oxford?

IB Oh. *Oxford Outlook*. In the Bodleian.

GC In the Bodleian. Then I can find it. All right. Well, I'll try in the Bodleian.

IB Bodleiana, Bodleiana.

GC All right. Yes.

IB I have no copies.[7]

GC That I know. [11:03] Now, when he compiled the bibliography, did you help him? Or did he go and …

IB Oh, I think I told him all I knew. But he discovered much more.

GC He discovered much more, by going through the …

IB I don't know how.

GC Well, probably friends of yours, from the 1930s and the 1940s, sometimes remembered articles that you didn't.

IB I have no idea. He attributed – he found articles that were not by me at all, which he attributed to me.

GC Really?

IB Anonymous articles …

GC Yes, I know.

IB … that he was sure I had written, through internal evidence.

GC The ones in the TLS that are anonymous, two or three are attributed to you.

[7] He did have copies of some of them in a cupboard of offprints, but was characteristically unaware of this.

IB They are by me, that's quite right.

GC Now, Isaiah, after our last conversation, I came to the conclusion, or hypothesis, that your travel to America during the war was a much more real event in your life, more than I thought. I mean one gets the impression that it starts a new era.

IB Correct.

GC Now, is it because you were taken by America, by the American people, or was there any sense of liberation? You got out of Oxford and all the family.

IB Not consciously.

GC Not consciously, but looking at it retrospectively.

IB Retrospectively, yes. When I went to America, particularly in – even 1940. I went for six weeks, for two months. Completely different world.

GC Yes.

IB Completely. The whole world of embassies, politics, Americans, was a totally different atmosphere. I am naturally pretty adaptable. So I adapted quite easily. It was quite exciting. And I had a very – rather miserable year in New York in 1941.

GC It was miserable?

IB Yes. Well, I did my work. First of all, there was nothing to do in the job of the Americans[?]. The idea of doing propaganda, Jews, Catholics …

GC Trade Unions?

IB Trade Unions. But on the whole, it didn't take up the whole day. There was a lot of free time. I didn't know anyone. I had some friends in New York. One or two. In Columbia one or two. In the office. But broadly, nobody, really. Washington was ten times, a thousand times more interesting. In every respect.

GC But one gets the feeling that there is something more to that. That, apparently, it is the first time that you left family.

IB It was a wider world.

GC And that All Souls was in a way to closed, too …

IB It was not too closed.

GC Maybe in a way too pressing.

IB No, I don't agree. I was not in the least pressed. When I did go, I enjoyed it. I didn't feel that there was a memory of something narrow. It may have been so, but it wasn't a conscious, subjective feeling at all. I wouldn't have said, 'I do feel liberated.' No.

GC Well, maybe 'liberated' is too strong a word.

IB No, no! It's not!

GC But, looking retrospectively …

IB People [*unclear*] were liberated by the war. I was not.

GC That I can see.

IB I was quite happy there, too.

GC Yes. That's for sure.

IB I was interested in philosophy. I was a very Oxford philosopher.

GC I know.

IB I had no Jewish friends.

GC At that time.

IB None. I was the only one. That was [*an unclear name*].

GC I have a question about it.

IB I knew him. But he wasn't a friend. And I knew a man called Abie [Abiram] Halpern, who was Georg Halpern's son, who was half Jewish, and was killed in the war, in the Battle of Britain. [15:06] [?] And I otherwise had no Jewish friends. Except for this man I talked about, Rachmilevich. He was a Jew.

GC Yes.

IB That was all.

GC He was in London.

IB London. Used to come to Oxford.

GC I see. Now, had you agreed that it was in a sense a new free era.

IB It was.

GC I would have asked you: one gets the feeling you were very happy in Oxford?

IB I was.

GC But maybe …

IB It was not confined. I was not hemmed in.

GC Aha. But away from family?

IB That, yes. That I liked. I was liberated and I came to Oxford. Not where I lived. But I left my family. I left my parents' house to come to Oxford as a student: that was a liberation.

GC Aha.

IB Away from my parents' house, yes. And after that I didn't see them very much.

GC Funny.

IB I stayed in vacations. When I was a don, I saw them less and less.

GC I see. But you were a very devoted son.

IB I was.

GC You would come to your parents.

IB Certainly. Without any effort. I enjoyed staying there. Our relationship was perhaps easier, completely natural and easy, but I lived in Oxford. There I went on vacation.

GC Now is there something in it that you enjoyed, practical, like doing things?

IB Such as?

GC Diplomacy. Not only teaching.

IB I did a lot of diplomacy.

GC Because you said something: that when you came back from Washington, had you been offered a post in the Foreign Office, you might have …

IB I was!

GC You told me that you were not.

IB I was! I certainly was. I was offered a job while I was in Washington, and after.

GC So I got you wrong.

IB Absolutely. I said there was. I was offered a job. When I was in Washington, the job that I was offered was to be the head librarian of the Foreign Office, in succession to whoever it was. The man was Stephen Gaselee, I think. I was told that I was to leave if I was made out [*unclear*]. In a year or two I would certainly become part of the service, and be sent abroad. They said it all in a straightforward way: to be absorbed into the Foreign Office or the establishment. They offered that quite formally by the head of the Foreign Office, who was then Cadogan, in the war years.[8]

GC And after the war it was Cadogan.

IB During the war.

GC The last year. During the war he was Deputy.

IB Who was Deputy?

GC Or maybe it was Cadogan? Yes, it was Cadogan.

[8] Sir Alexander Cadogan was Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs 1938–46. The head of the FO was the Foreign Secretary, in these years Lord Halifax (1938–40), Anthony Eden (1940–5) and Ernest Bevin (from 1945).

IB During the war it was Cadogan.

GC It was Cadogan.

IB Cadogan was since 1940.

GC Yes, you are quite right.

IB Was succeeded by Orme Sargent …

GC Yes, Orme Sargent.

IB … whom I knew very well. Orme Sargent repeated this offer. Also a man called David Scott,[9] who is alive. [*unclear*] something of that order, who was an under-secretary. And he repeated this offer to me in 1946. And Michael Wright took it in 1946, of all people.

GC You met in Russia?

IB No, in Washington. He was a translator. He was never in Russia. [*unclear*] Zionist affairs, it wasn't easy. He knew my views, and I knew his views. I was never shown the Middle East documents.

GC You were not?

IB Not as such. They sent telegraphs, as you know, and I was never given memoranda, or actual correspondence. If there was such in the State Department, the Foreign Office, I never saw anything of the sort. I had no connections at all. I did not do anything for the position. I was a mere reporter. A memorandum writer. That's all I was. I did not negotiate with anyone about anything. But I was then offered the job and they were really surprised that I didn't accept. I refused despite the invitation, for two perfectly good reasons: one was that I didn't want to be discreet for the rest of my life. I didn't want to lead two lives.

[9] Sir David John Montagu-Douglas-Scott (1887–1986).

GC I couldn't – that's why I didn't accept. Pinhas Sadeh was …

IB Two lives. Not being able to talk about things. I realised I would be caught, sooner or later. There would be complicated positions. I couldn't say, 'I don't agree with this!' or 'I'm not interested', or 'Give it to somebody else.' I could not do it. But I didn't have to. For me to work in the Foreign Office I would have to have an immensely clear conscience. That is why this man, this famous Jew, who worked for the Misrad ha-Chutz [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] …

GC Yes, Neville Mandel. Several times.

IB Mad, mad, mad.

GC It's surrealistic.

IB Of course he was an anti-Zionist, a perfect Jew.

GC I know.

IB Terribly mad.

GC It's really incredible. I can't see why our Foreign Office accepted it, but …

IB Oh, it would. What is he doing now?

GC He is now in the embassy in Washington. He was in the United Nations.

IB He's awful. Has no views.

GC No. All right, but to go directly from one Foreign Office to another, we shouldn't have given our hand to it. I don't know …

IB It also made a bad impression on the British.

GC That's what I mean. I don't understand.

IB There are no more Jews after this.

GC There are no more.

IB As far as I know, none. Consulates may have them maybe. I don't know. The nearest case was the man in Saudi Arabia.

GC I remember, yes, of course.

IB I was liberated in 1928. So when I went to Washington, in New York first, in 1940, and afterwards Washington, that was a very muddled period in my life, I didn't do anything. I'll tell you a story about it.

GC Yes, but you didn't tell me …

IB This is not for the machine. [*laughter*] What happened was this. Let us start with the whole business about Burgess.

GC All right.

IB I'd be glad to. [*laughter*] [Dadie] Rylands and my plight in Washington was due indirectly to my friendship with Guy Burgess. I knew him: he was a bright young man at Cambridge, and I met him at lunch at Oxford. He was sent to Oxford [?] by a friend, [22:25] Maurice Bowra, who was a [?] brilliant classical tutor in Wadham, who knew a lot of people – artists and literary people and so on – and who enjoyed the society of clever young men. And Mr Rylands, from King's College, Cambridge, who was a literary don, [?] literary don, sent him to Oxford as an amusing person. I met him at lunch and he was very amusing. We talked about this and that. Then he came to Oxford about two months later, I don't know why. He rang me up and said, 'Will you have lunch with me?' and I said 'Yes. Oh, thank you.' I found him to be very good company. He

talked, and I had no idea he was a Communist. Just a very scholarly undergraduate at Cambridge. Round about 1933. He was still a still a student. We talked about literature, we talked about eighteenth-century literature, we talked about Cambridge gossip, we talked about English politics. I realised he was left-wing. But not more left-wing than anybody else I knew. I mean, at first I was certain, perfectly happily. Perfectly [*unclear*].

And then he did not get the degree, a proper degree in Cambridge. He studied History. Was a great friend of Keynes, was a friend of E. M. Forster, of course. When [?] homosexual, I don't know. That I knew, maybe later. [?], till he absconded, even that he was a member of the Party, that he was an agent[?]. Everybody else knew he was a Communist except me. I can't tell you why. I didn't know Christopher Hill was an open Communist. He was at All Souls, I made friends with him. He went to Russia, stayed a year, came back exactly as he went, and still I didn't know. Oh, I knew he was left-wing, but a member of the Party, no. And then he got an attack. He had to do three papers and an examination, and he had fallen ill. The papers were good enough to get you a pass without a class. Not a First, not a Second, not a Third, not a Fourth.
Enough not to make you re-examine. That's what he got. The next job he had was with the Conservative Central Office, the head of which was Mr Neville Chamberlain, and his colleagues. I don't know how long he stayed [*unclear*].

Then he began writing the City Letter of Stocks and Shares. Where he got that information from I don't know, probably Communist friends in Brazil, anything you like. Then Victor Rothschild's mother used to take it [to check her?] investments. By this time he looked like [*unclear*]. It was obvious he was homosexual. He had no steady relations with anybody. Completely promiscuous. I have never been in this situation in my life. And he used to come to Oxford once a year, perhaps every two years. He would telephone me and say 'How are you doing? This is [Guy]. Can I come in after dinner?' I'd say 'Yes.' 'Can I bring my Swedish friend?' He would then come alone, and buy a bottle of whisky. He talked about Defoe, English literature in the eighteenth century. He talked about George Eliot, talked about the Cambridge literature school, about Leavis,

talked about Keynes, talked about Forster. We talked about common friends. Never about politics at all. Then, about 1937, I heard he became a member of a gang called Britannia Youth, which was an organisation led by the Mayor of Hove,[10] whoever he was, of Brighton. He would take young students to Nuremberg to the Parteitag. So, he had become a Nazi. I took it almost literally. Possibly he had been planted just as Philby [was] in Spain for a time, on Franco's side. I broke relations with him. When he telephoned me I said 'No, I don't want to see you.' Came 1939. The patron of Guy Burgess at all times was Harold Nicholson.

GC Harold Nicholson?

IB Got him every job he ever had. Before the war, Lord Perth, who had been the British Ambassador in Rome and Secretary of Information – Sir Eric Drummond – was entrusted by the Government with the task, in the event of war, of creating a unit from which would come, on the one hand, the Ministry of Information, and on the other hand, SOE. They looked for recruits. Harold Nicholson said, 'There's a very bright young man called Guy Burgess, perfect for it.' So he was put to use. Naturally, when he was asked to choose between Information and SOE, he said SOE. SOE didn't exist in 1940.

GC It was Section D.

IB In 1941. It is SIS.[11]

GC SIS? Or Section D?

IB Inside, it was SIS.

[10] H. C. Andrews, who founded Britannia Youth, was a Hove Councillor at the time; he was Mayor of the Borough of Hove 1945–7.

[11] It was both: Section D (for 'destruction') was part of SIS (Secret Intelligence Service), also known as MI6 (Military Intelligence, section 6, whose codename was 'the Passport Control Department').

GC It was called Section D.

IB But at home it was SIS. I had no job in the war, because I was born abroad. The Civil Service couldn't take me, officially. All my colleagues were in various Government departments. I sat in Oxford teaching. In June I was in New College, doing nothing much. The war was not in any good state. About mid June, July perhaps, there was a knock on my door in College, where I was a Fellow. I left All Souls in the end of 1938, and became a Fellow of New College. You ask me why? Because I didn't want constantly to – I was a Research Fellow at All Souls – I did not want constant examination, whether I was doing research or not, and if it was any good. If I became a teaching Fellow I would do my duty if I taught and lectured: what I did in my free time was my affair. I just didn't enjoy being supervised, in the sense of having each five years to say how much was published and so on, or have I written this or that book? I just didn't want to have – I am by nature idle. I had published the book on Karl Marx, which was not the official topic of my research, which was Hume. I lectured on Hume, I wrote on all kinds of philosophers, but to have to constantly given account of what I was doing … I enjoyed teaching. Crossman was sacked for adultery.

GC Really?

IB Certainly. He went off with his – oh, it is a long story.

GC Not now.

IB He went off with another don's wife, and the Warden, Fisher, said to him, 'All dons in Oxford are appointed for a fixed number of years, and have to be reappointed. And when you come to the end of your period in 1938, we'll not reappoint you. Wasn't sacked on the spot, but he was told he would not be reappointed. He didn't say, 'There are various articles on [*unclear*].'

GC No. He put it in a different way. As if he asked Fisher whether to opt for Politics.

IB Not true. An absolute lie. Because Fisher told me. Fisher told me he sent for him, and he said Fisher would not [?] that he was approved … sexual matters were steamy. No question about that. He was denounced, Crossman, by somebody who lived in the same village, another don of New College, for living in sin behind his back, with the wife of a zoologist called Baker, I can't remember. Fisher made it quite clear. Before the war, if you were caught sleeping with someone else's wife, you were sacked. Sometimes after the war, too. Now, no longer. It stopped with Trevor-Roper, it's a long story, I'll tell you another time. [*unclear*] When Crossman left, I was appointed in his place. Crossman taught Ancient History and Philosophy in New College. I taught the second half of philosophy. He was half and I was half. When he left, I quietly succeeded him, my part and his part, so there was a full teaching load. And I think I was the first teaching Fellow of a College in Oxford who was a Jew.

GC Yes.

IB Since Alexander.[12]

GC Since Alexander.

IB Which was in the 1890s. Whom I can recall. Between us, no Fellow or Tutor. Goodhart was a Professor, a year before me. He was a Fellow of a College, but not a Fellow with teaching.

GC Alexander was a Fellow and Tutor?

IB I think.

[12] Samuel Alexander (1859–1938), Fellow of Lincoln College 1882–93.

GC And you were? And in between there were no Jews? We'll discuss it later.

IB Lecturers, but not Fellows. Eytan (Ettinghausen).

GC Yes, that's true.

IB In German. Some of the refugees, of course. The German refugees.

GC Eduard Fraenkel.

IB For example. Yes. He was a Fellow at Corpus. Some of the physicists. No. Some of the German refugees were given Fellowships. Simon, who was a physicist; Kuhn, who was a physicist. Others. No, there were refugee physicists. But in humanities, I don't think. Einstein, of course, was named a Student [i.e. Fellow] at Christ Church for a year or two. Any other people? Let me see. I think there was, in non-scientific subjects. There were such people: Jacob Stein, Jacoby, elite scholars. Any more? I don't think. Yes, Dr Wellesz, he was a musicologist, from Vienna, he ended up in Paris, typical, Fellow at Lincoln.

GC Who was …

IB Head of the Boys' School Choir in Vienna [the Vienna Boys' Choir].

GC Who was a musicologist.

IB He was a Jew, a professing Jew.

GC I see.

IB Egon Wellesz! Famous musicologist. These were exotic ones.

GC Yes. Well, I don't want to interfere, but did you teach Greek Philosophy then too when you did succeed …

IB Yes.

GC You did.

IB Well, Crossman taught me about it.

GC Yes. But you …

IB When he left I did it.

GC Because Greek philosophy is a major question, and I want to ask you, not now.

IB Any way you want.

GC Your attitude to Classics in general, it's intriguing, but not now.

IB Not now. Back to Burgess. Suddenly there was a tap on my door. Enter Burgess. And he said, 'I know what you must think of me, of which I have much admiration, that I'm mad, unstable, that I did awful things, but now I'm quite all again, I've recovered. I'm a member of the Secret Service.' And I believed him. And then he went on, 'And they want good men who are completely devoted to this country and are patriotic' – all this sort of thing.' Would you like to be a press attaché to Moscow?' So I said, 'Look, it's [*unclear*]. Why, haven't they got …?' 'No, they haven't.' It's quite true, they didn't. So he said, 'Nobody else can speak Russian. It was the end of June 1940. The idea of taking small bits of British propaganda, or connecting with Soviet institutions during the Russo–German pact doesn't seem to me a very practical [pro?]position. He said, 'Never mind, it's very important someone should go who speaks Russian. Harold Nicholson was number 2 now in the Ministry of Information. Thinks it's very important. Will you go and talk to him?' I went and talked to him. He said, 'Yes, Guy Burgess is quite

right. We must send you to Moscow.' I said, 'I'm hopeless at it' [*unclear*] 'Well, go and see a young man named Gladwyn Jebb. He's Private Secretary of Cadogan, in the Foreign Office. Presently the offices are run jointly. The Foreign Office and the Ministry. So I went, and I saw him, and [he said], 'It's a jolly good idea. How would you like to go? United States and Japan, or South Africa and Persia?' All the other countries were at war. So I said, 'Thank you. I didn't [sc. don't?] want to see South Africa, and the Trans-Siberian Railway sounds like an agreeable idea.' [*laughter*] He said: 'OK, we'll fix that.' And then he said, 'Now, only one other thing, and that is, Guy Burgess wants to come with you as your deputy. You needn't know what he's doing. That's his affair. He's in the Secret Service: don't ask him what he's doing.'

GC That's [what] Nicholson said?

IB No.

GC Ah, no, Jebb, sorry.

IB Sorry. Nothing to do with Nicholson. And Guy said, 'Well, look, when would you like to come and have lunch with me? I've got a man [*unclear*] ought to know him.' So I came and had lunch with a very stupid man called Colonel Grant, I think.

GC Yes. That's it. Lawrence Grant.

IB Grant. Pretty stupid. Quite nice. He said, 'My dear, we must get you to Russia. Where are we now? The Caucasus is the place, that's where they're getting the oil now. You ought to get in there. The Germans will get in there, quite dangerous, people like you have got to stop it. We are still in a position to stop it. He took [*unclear*] looks.

GC But he was SOE.

IB He was Burgess's master.

GC Yes. In SOE.

IB There was no SOE.

GC I mean, the Secret …

IB What became SOE.

GC Yes, Section D, yes.

IB Exactly so. That's right. That's why [*unclear*]. So in the end I felt a little bad about going, 'Why am I going?' [*unclear*] So he said, 'Look, we'll make you a courier; you'll need a courier's visa.' I said, 'No, I'd rather not. I was born in Russia, they might very well not keep the Tsarist visa. Unless you give me a diplomatic visa' – 'gibt sich an [eitza]'[13] in Yiddish. So I said, 'Oh well, I tell you what we'll do. You can't get me one of Mike Straight's visas.' Mike Straight gave a diplomatic visa to Postan.

GC Michael Postan

IB Who went to Cripps.

GC Did Postan go to Cripps?

IB He never got there. Although Mike had gotten him a visa, he was stopped in Romania, and he had to go back.

GC Really?

IB At that time – it was not yet the end of the war, you see – through Italy.

GC Yes.

[13] 'There is a remedy.'

IB Through Romania.

GC Yes.

IB At that time he was stopped.

GC What did Cripps want him for?

IB Oh, I don't know, advisory – political advisor.

GC How interesting.

IB I don't really know. Cripps somehow, somewhere, trapped him. 'Let's have a look, let me have a look at it. Now, the only man we are going through is Oumansky. From Washington. His reasons for having it were much better than Mike Straight's.' Nice and all that, but strictly Foreign Office. I never went to the Northern Department. I never thought I had to go; they didn't require it. The head of that was a man called [Sir Lawrence] Collier. Number 2 was Fitzroy Maclean [*unclear*]. In the Northern Department. And [*unclear*] all these people. I said, 'Very good. I was put on this little ship, a boat, a Cunard ship, called *Antonia*, with Burgess, with a courier's visa. Until I could get another visa in Washington, from Oumansky. So I got into the boat. It took ten days to get to Quebec. We saw icebergs, we were torpedoed, didn't sink, torpedo went off somehow or other, didn't hit the boat, one way or another, and we got to Quebec. From Quebec Burgess and I flew to Montréal. From there to New York. I went too. In New York, we immediately went to see Michael Straight.

IB Who was?

IB You don't know who Michael Straight was?

GC I am not sure.

IB Michael Straight was the son of a very rich American man, son of a very rich American family. He went to Cambridge, he was a Communist. A friend of Burgess. An [*unclear*] agent. And he exposed Blunt. He reported Blunt.

GC Ah, yes. Now I remember. In Peter Wright's book? Yes.

IB He was a poor little rich boy. A lot of people like to find out about him.

GC Of course.

IB Anyway, the son of a man called Whitney Straight – [*corrects himself*] his brother was Whitney Straight, who was notorious in all kinds of things. And what happened was this. He was rather an idealistic young socialist, and Kennedy wanted to appoint him to be – I don't know what – some cultural post. That meant that he had to be clear with the idea. Before he did it, we told him, you know Cambridge, Communist Keynes, my friend etc. Blunt recruited him.

GC Blunt recruited him to the Party or to the …

IB Agency.

GC Oh.

IB He went over once. Then he came back to America. He was an agent, but he refused to be called, and somehow got out of it. Anyway, they said, 'Are you ready to talk to Mr Blunt about this?' 'Yes.' He was the official exposer. After that, Blunt couldn't retain his … Anyway, he was the man Burgess stayed with. I went to Washington, stayed with my friend John Foster, who was a legal adviser.

GC In the embassy.

IB In the embassy. And Fellow at All Souls, with whom I went to Palestine, the first time, in 1934.

GC Yes. What made him go to Palestine in 1934?

IB Nothing much.

GC Being your friend?

IB No. Had business.

GC Ah, he had already business. He was a lawyer?

IB He was a lawyer employed by the Treasury in the famous Ottoman heirs case.

GC Ah.

IB Which went on for years. You know the story.

GC Yes.

IB Ottoman heirs wanted to claim all the private property of the Sultan in the entire Middle East.

GC Of course. It went on for decades.

IB Is that true?

GC Yes.

IB Goldmine for lawyers.

GC That's true.

IB And he was employed by the British Attaché. He had some Armenian roots in Haifa. That was his reason. And then he was

curious. Was a tremendous Judaeomaniac. Adored Jews, you see. Saw [*unclear name*]. I don't know how he arranged to do it. But he did. So I went with him.

GC And it was your first visit?

IB Yes.

GC We'll come to it.

IB 1934, I think.

GC We'll come to it later.

IB 1935. Anyway, he was in Washington as a legal adviser. So I stayed with him, naturally. Took me around to various Americans that he knew. I met Joe Alsop when I stayed with him.

GC Joe Alsop you knew already.

IB No, I met him the first time there.

GC Ah. At John Foster's.

IB 1940.

GC You knew Frankfurter?

IB Then, in 1940, about two days later, Burgess was recalled. Why he was recalled I don't know. He was caught up with – he wasn't – he was sacked by the SOE. I suppose it must be – it was nothing against him – somebody must have said he wasn't reliable. Probably Victor Rothschild. Well, anyway. So then he wanted me to go back with him. I enquired with Foster, 'Should I go back?' He said, 'No, there's nobody else in Russia, why shouldn't you go?' I was convinced. Then I went – I sent a telegram to – I had another

friend, called Anthony Rodman [*name unclear*: Rumbold?]. Son of the …

GC [*unclear*]

IB Exactly. Who was the second secretary.

GC In Washington.

IB In Washington. A great friend of mine. Before he died.

GC I see.

IB And so …

GC You knew him from Oxford?

IB It was through him, I think, that I met von Trott in 1931.

GC 1931 already? That early?

IB He was a Rhodes scholar.

GC Ah, yes.

IB And so then I telephoned again. The telegram was sent. There was no answer. Too late. I had nothing to do. I was then persuaded by Ben Cohen, whom I met through Frankfurter, who had dealings with the Department of the Interior, working very closely with the Secretary of the Interior. They knew the Russian Ambassador, and I said to the Embassy, 'Could you get me a visa through Oumansky?' They said, 'We can't do anything.' I said, 'I find that very odd.' So they said, 'All right, I'll try to see what happens. So I was invited to lunch with Oumansky, very common, very good. Ben Cohen, who was undersecretary of the Department of the Interior, who dealt with Oumansky. The Big Diomede and Little Diomede, islands off Alaska, which was of some dispute of Russia, and so on.

GC And America.

IB That's why I went to Oscar Chapman, who was undersecretary of the Interior. He gave the lunch. So Ben Cohen brought me. Oumansky was there. No. We all went to lunch in the Embassy.

GC Yes.

IB Oumansky was a horrible man He was a Jew, and he worked, I think, in Chicago, in the KGB before that he was killed in an air crash in Mexico, just after the war. He was Ambassador …

Side B

GC So you went to the lunch.

IB I went to the lunch. He said, 'You seem to object to [our] entering Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. This was 1940. [*raises voice in falsetto and continues imitation of Oumansky*] 'I don't know why. New Deal for Latvia, New Deal for Estonia, just like Roosevelt!' We had some fish. He said, 'This is a very rare fish, it comes from the Caspian, my Governor knows I'm a great gourmet.' It was very difficult to get at that time. It had come in leaden boxes. At this point the waiter, the butler with long whiskers, said, 'You are mistaken, Sir, it is bass.' Anyway, I loved it. Then he said, 'You need a visa. I can enquire Moscow, London.' I couldn't understand why I had to wait. Meanwhile I had nothing to do, so I went to stay with Frankfurter i in Heath – there's a [*unclear*], where he always went for the summer, where I met Samuel [sc. Reinhold?] Niebuhr, who was a friend of Cripps's, who sent Cripps a telegram, saying how lucky he was that such a splendid person as me [was] in his staff. That was the first that Cripps had ever heard of me.

GC Yes. [*laughter*]

IB Cripps then sent a telegram to the Foreign Office which said he didn't want …

GC 'I don't need him!'

IB 'I don't need Latvians.' That's what he said. And Felix Frankfurter came and said, 'It is a ridiculous letter! Don't get insulted. So I got a telegram coming from London saying, 'It is not desired that Mr Berlin should proceed to Moscow.' I then sent a telegram saying, 'Do you desire me to come to you?' And his answer was, 'As he is not yet in our service, we have no advice to give you.' That's what he said. Then I felt terrible: I've got something to do in Moscow, something to do in Oxford, but I was in Washington, by pure accident. Some people did stay in that way. And then I began to be offered jobs. I realised exactly what was happening. John Foster and Tony [*unclear name*: Rumbold?] were convinced, as everyone was, that England might be invaded. We are in late June, no in July 1940. Second half of July. If I go back to England, I will be tortured and killed, everything must be done to save me. Nobody said that. I detected lt. Fortunately something would be offered. I didn't know anything about it. Childs, who was the man who was the Press Counselor of the [*unclear*], they shipped him to be the director of the [*unclear*]. I felt that anyway I couldn't do it. So I wrote to Harold Nicolson in the Ministry, asking what I ought to do if I was offered these jobs. He said – and I said, 'No I want to go back to England, because at such a moment as this, I think it would be shameful to be hidden under a kind of escape in Washington.' He replied, 'In wartime one must do exactly what the government told one – expects one to do. One must not burden His Majesty's ships with unnecessary cargo! You must certainly accept these posts!' Then I knew I must refuse. Harold Nicolson's judgement was the worst of anybody I had ever met in my life. The worst!

GC And you have already known …

IB I knew him before? Of course I did. Not well, but I knew him. So then I said, I must go. He said, will you just do – this is still in

my interest – just do one job, it will only take you a month. Could you look at all the Associated Press despatches during the last few months? We have the impression they're anti-British. And they keep on writing. We can't read things which will do us no good in the end. We can't read them ourselves. But it's a long file. There must be about hundreds of these. Could you look through them and make a report? I had to read the entire thing. It must have been con fused. So I went to New York, to the British Library of Information, fairly early, before the British Information Services, for which I worked. This was a kind of peacetime office where people went to find out all about the Tower of London, how could they get a good hotel, that kind of thing. Sort of peacetime goodwill, and a vaguely cultural office. The last thing wanted was to make wartime propaganda. So I went there, and did my job, wrote it up. There was Aubrey Morgan, they weren't in the army. I'll tell you how I made friends with them. Very interesting people. We got along very well. Aubrey Morgan was a Welshman who married the daughter of Morrow, who had been a Morgan partner, and then ambassador – no, senator – for New Jersey, and an ambassador to Mexico. His daughter married Lindbergh.

GC Charles Lindbergh.

IB Yes. Is still alive. Morgan married a second daughter, who died, and then he married the third one. His joke was 'To Morrow, to Morrow, to Morrow.' And he was a patriotic Welshman, and a friend of Roosevelt, though Roosevelt said that something would have to be done about his [*unclear*] son-in-law of Morrow, William Morrow. Do something for England. So he was attached to the British Library of Information by Vansittart. It was not a specific job. He got one about a month or two later. [*unclear*] by these people. And then I did my job and I went back to England. With Lothian. He was also going back. In the cabin. You know, telecommunications in the Yankee Clipper.

GC Yankee Clipper

IB Which was Seacliff.

GC Seacliff, of course.

IB And we flew to Halifax, and to Portugal. We flew to Oporto, from Oporto to Lisbon, from Lisbon Lord Lothian went straight on, and I was held back, no room on the plane. Three, four days I never knew where I was, what I was doing. I had fever, people helped me get a plane to Bristol, and there was an air-raid going on. I was very pleased: that's what I'd come back for. And Jews, above all, mustn't take opportunities of escaping, so were the conditions in England. After all, the English, they were trying to warn me. They said: 'Run away [*unclear*] Moscow.' But nobody offered me any other post. So I came back to Oxford. Nobody asked me any questions about where I'd been. Long vacation, as it were. I was at New College in September; I started teaching immediately, as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile Burgess had been attached to the BBC. I didn't see him.

Suddenly a letter arrives from the British, the Ministry of Information, to me, saying, 'Are you staying or leaving?' I was very surprised, so I wrote back, said, 'As far as I know I've no post with the British Government, so I can't understand whom [sc. where?] I'm supposed to leave from. They said, 'We got a telegram that had been sent by Lord Lothian – any telegram from Washington was signed 'Lothian' – saying, 'Were you indispensable at New College?' You replied you were not. Consequently you were appointed specialist to the British Information Office for certain communities, namely, the Jewish community, Catholics, Mormons, all the non-classes, un-smart, non-wasp minorities to whom propaganda had been done to induce America to enter the war. And they were doing England good. British propaganda. So I went to London, where I was interviewed by a man called Williams, who was a sort of – a journalist you could call him, who informed me that they had consulted Weizmann about whether I would be useful to the Jewish community, who was very important, influential. He said yes, I'd be perfect, so would I mind going? I said when do they want it? Will they tell me? Can I be briefed? He said no, but Mr Weidenfeld and

Mr Morgan were very – were quite clear that they wanted me there. It was they who appointed me. They demanded my presence. So, again, I was not too happy about leaving England in 1941. I don't think the invasion was – well, it might still have happened. Anyway, you know how the government got many men[?], there was nothing to do in Oxford. So then I went, by boat. John Foster said, 'If you want to travel, ask me.' He was of course great friends with the American export line. So I got to Lisbon by air, and then I got on to a ship, tremendous Hornblower. I shared a cabin with two Americans, and Aline was on that boat. I noticed her, but she didn't notice me. She had no idea that I was there. Everybody talked to everybody on that boat. But I was too shy. She looked extremely attractive.

GC Ah, you remember her?

IB Absolutely I remember her. On the boat?

GC Yes.

IB She was remarkable. Very beautiful. Very very attractive. Never looked her in the eye.

GC Does she remember you?

IB No.

GC You never talked to her, you only …

IB Now! She travelled with some landed French Duchess, some French Duchess or other.

GC That's when she left France?

IB Yes. That's when she left via Spain and Portugal.

GC I mean, when she ran away …

Aline and Michael disembarking in New York, January 1941

IB When she ran away from Vichy. And then her parents followed. With Michel, her son. She got a Visa from Freddie Warburg or something, she knew enough people who would give her affidavits, and I think the American ambassador to Vichy, there was somebody there. She was treated better than ordinary Jews. Then I didn't know who she was. And then I spent ten days on the boat, quite enjoyable. Then I came to New York in the beginning, in February 1941. And went to British Information Services at Rockefeller Centre [*unclear*]. Stayed in a place called Forum Hotel in New York, W 55th Street. Nothing much really. But without Burgess, I would not have been an American expert, just on the basis of something like six weeks.

GC That's fantastic.

IB I never thought I'd go to America in my life! And there I spent a year, in New York. Well, I can tell you this much, I wondered what Aline was doing. I met her again: I was asked to lunch by Robert

Rothschild [*IB uses French pronunciation*], who always liked experts, local Rothschilds. I was supposed to be, by this time, an expert on America. This would have been about June 1941. I was in New York. Very hot. There was a man called Robert Soljean[?], who was a French journalist, who was pro-Allied, who was a correspondent of some sort, whom I met – I met journalists – and he became a friend of mine, and he knew the Rothschilds very well, and he said would I come to lunch on Long Island, with the Baron Robert and his wife Nellie, who's most beautiful, not at all Jewish-looking. She was certainly not the daughter of her father; of her mother, I'm sure. She was very prudish; there was always a photograph of Maréchal Petain above her bed in New York. Anyhow, we went to lunch. Cécile de Rothschild was also there, and a lady called Mme Strauss: that was Aline, who took one look at me, at about one o'clock, and immediately disappeared. They were gone.

GC Really.

IB I was introduced.

GC Yes?

IB I knew she was Mme Strauss. That was all.

GC And you have remembered her from the boat?

IB Certainly. [*telephone rings*] I was never left so suddenly by anybody. She left when the Baron de Rothschild [?], absolutely took one look and gone and went. The next time, Lord Rothschild appeared in New York on some mission to J. Edgar Hoover.

GC Lord is James?

IB No, Victor. James was never a Lord. No.

GC Ah, yes, of course.

IB And he sent for me to come and see him at the Pierre Hotel, so I went to see him in the Pierre Hotel, and I spoke to him peacefully, and there was a tap on the door, and in comes Mme Strauss. I had never seen two people want to be left alone so much. I was completely superfluous, and so left within ten minutes. There were my three meetings …

GC Three?

IB … with my future wife! After that, I didn't see her, or hear about her …

GC Until the 1950s.

IB Until, no, until, in 1945, Victor wrote me a letter, no a cable – sorry! – came from New York that said, 'I have a friend, a famous – quite an able physicist called von Halban. He's coming to Oxford. Cherwell.[14] They're coming to Cherwell. They don't know anybody, he and his wife. Would you be nice to them. [*unclear*]

GC Is, was he 'von'?

IB 'Von.' He dropped it.

GC But he was a Frenchman.

IB He was Austrian.

GC He was Austrian, I see.

IB He was Halban – the grandfather was a Jew, [16:28] called Blumenstock – he was a lawyer or something [?] – when he became more and more [?] rich, and quite [?]able, he decided to become baptised, otherwise it couldn't be done, so then they said, 'It would be quite a good thing if you could change your name.' So he chose

[14] Does he mean the Haldanes' house in Linton Road?

the name Halban, which is the name of one of the knights in the great Polish epic, *Pan Tadeusz*[15] – typically for a Polish patriot, which he was, [he] quoted *Pan Tadeusz*, he took the name of a great Polish patriot.

GC How interesting.

IB There were no other Halbans. It's a medieval Polish name. His son, who was already the son of a baptised Jew, was only a half Jew; I think [he] was Professor of Physical Chemistry in Frankfurt, and Zurich, and this is his son, who went to Bohr's laboratory in Denmark, and then went to Paris, and worked with [Joliot-]Curie and became an enthusiast. I think he was a French citizen. He was a quarter Jewish, more than a quarter. Anyway not very. He married three Jewish wives, in turn. Extremely fond of money, he was. But anyway, progressively richer. And so I said, of course, I would be glad, yes. So I went to visit him with Victor in his flat, in September, which I knew – the flat, of course – it had been inhabited by Alice de Rothschild before. Suddenly to my surprise I saw my Mme Strauss, who by this time …

GC Mme Halban.

IB Mme Halban. She was pregnant with Peter. And she was very nice and so on, and she was very different from the woman I met before. The woman I met before was not stiff, but rather proud, rather grand, but this time she was sweet, humble, extremely gentle, obviously been knocked about and I could see something was queer. She'd been bullied very considerably by her husband. Very pliant. It looked like – to me it looked like a bit too downtrodden.

GC She was his first wife?

[15] In fact Halban (aka Doctor Leander von Albanus) is a monk, the companion of Wallenrod in *Konrad Wallenrod*, by Adam Mickiewicz, also author of *Pan Tadeusz*.

IB Second wife.

GC Second wife. Who married three? His father married three?

IB No, *he* did. His first wife was called [Fanny Ella ('Els') Andriesse], who was the daughter of a Dutch Jewish banker, called [Abraham Albert] Andriesse.

GC And then Aline, and after Aline he married …

IB Certainly. He married a lady called – who was by birth Lazare [Micheline Lazare-Vernier].

GC Ah, Ben Lazare.

IB And then after he died she married some Italian doctor.

GC So that was the fourth time you met Aline.

IB Third. One, two, three. After that we had tea, and I went back to Oxford, and they came to Oxford, I invited them, and that's how I made friends with them. That's a long story.

GC Yes.

IB I had to go back to the States. I stayed in New York for a year. You might ask if I had played a part. Of course they had a military invasion, said things which they wanted, and so on. 'Jews are not to be invaded.' Persuaded to be pro-American during the neutral period. But somewhere, for example, this Admiral [Lewis] Strauss, who worked for [*unclear*]. I went to see him, in order to persuade him to do some pro-British thing, to come on a committee, Friends of Britain, or some charitable pro-British organisation. [He] refused. The Jews must not be seen dragging America into the war. The Jews were in a very sensitive position. That was the position of the American Jewish Committee.

GC I know.

IB So I said, 'Look, Mr Strauss – Admiral Strauss – if Hitler wins the war, you will be put in an awkward position, as a Jew. I promise you that. Can't be wrong. If Hitler loses the war, you will not be accused of being prematurely anti-Nazi therefore the risk is not very great.'

GC To which he replied …

IB To which he replied, 'I was a great friend of the secretary of Mr Hoover. Mr Hoover is the American [*unclear*].'

GC But did you persuade other Jews with this argument?

IB No, I don't [think] I had any persuasion. Tell you a very disgraceful story. I knew Eddie Warburg, because I knew Ingrid Warburg, who was a friend of Weizmann, she was one of the daughters of Fritz Warburg, one of the brothers. She introduced me to Edward.

GC Who was her brother?

IB Her cousin. Eddie Warburg was the son of Felix. He still alive. He's the Joint [Distribution Committee] … He does all the Jewish things. Reluctantly, but he does. He does his duty, as a Jew. Anyway, we got on very well. He was a very nice man, agreeable, naturally. And suddenly he came to me and we had a serious talk – about September 1941, it must have been.

GC 1940 or 1941?

IB 1941. The story is this. Henry Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury, went for a holiday in the summer – holiday in June, in the Caribbean. Among the other places which he visited was the Dominican Republic, where there was a colony of Jewish refugees organised by Jimmy Rosenberg as an alternative to Zionism, an

alternative to the Jewish Republic, and they wanted Morgenthau to see this. So he saw it and the effect was not quite as expected. He saw these poor people, who were actually broken characters from Europe, and he was deeply upset. He had never seen refugees before, and he was terribly terribly upset. Morgenthau came back to Washington, and he sent for the eminent Jews, which meant Felix Frankfurter, Ben Cohen, Warburg, which meant Eddie.

GC Eddie Warburg?

IB yes. Bernard Baruch.

GC Sam Rosenman?

B: I don't know. The speechwriter?

GC Yes.

IB Eugene Meyer. He was terribly important. He led the Federal Reserve. What are the important Jews I can think of? I think that was about all.

GC Was Brandeis still alive?

IB No. Brandeis died in 1941. Perhaps he died in 1940?

GC And Jacob Blaustein of the American Jewish community?

IB No.

GC Not men like that. No Zionists.

IB Not the rich Jews. Vulgar-rich Jews, no. These were eminent cultural, cultivated men.

GC Of course. Now …

IB Some people Morgenthau new. Morgenthau never knew Blaustein. He could have invited Klaus Kahn.

GC Klaus Kahn, yes. Of course. I thought of Klaus Kahn. Neither the Schiffs, the rich Jews, Strauss – never mind.

IB Albright told me this.

GC Yes.

IB These are the cream. And he said to them: 'Gentlemen, it is a grave situation. The Jews are perishing in Europe. The Germans' – they didn't know anything about anything – 'they are having a terrible time. England has shut its gates. This is a terrible thing.' I can't remember. When was the *Struma* and the *Patria*?

GC *Struma*, *Patria*, well, Churchill was already Prime Minister. It was May 1941, I believe.

IB The *Patria* and the *Struma*. And he knew about it. 'They were not let into Palestine. They were drowned, they perished, and the Germans were killing them, everyone else was killing them. Something must be done! We're helping all we can. We'll damn the British, [*unclear*] as you know. We've got to tell the English they've got to open the gates of Palestine.' Those people practically, I don't know what they'd done. Eddie Warburg came back to New York, saw me, and said, 'Hank Morgenthau [as he called him] has gone off his head. Just can't be done. We can't tell England what to do at this moment [*or* with this boat]. They're fighting mankind. At the end of the year, all these problems w1ll be justly settled. I daren't press England to do anything. Monstrous. Think of what it would do to the Jews in America, if it was known they are trying to force England. It would just … Now. Why am I tell1ng you this? We were to write to Halifax, for a British official, and tell him that if Hank Morgenthau goes and talks to Halifax about him, he doesn't have the support of the American Jewish community, just as himself, he speaks in his own name.' I must have told Weizmann the story.

So I wrote a very cautious letter[16] to Halifax, whom I knew personally, from All Souls. 'Dear Lord Halifax, I spoke with a member of the Jewish community, who informed me that the Secretary of the Treasury was profoundly upset by his visit to the Dominican Republic, and is deeply concerned with the fate of the Jews in Europe. He thinks that they are needlessly massacred when there were countries to which they can go and be transported, even now. Among these countries, Palestine. I do not know how many of the Jews, prominent Jews, feel similar feelings, though I'm quite convinced that the Secretary of the Treasury is deeply concerned about it, and they have asked me to speak to you about it.' Full stop.

GC Did he?

IB He never did. Nothing further. Nothing ever happened further. See. So my letter would not have deterred …

GC And you never discussed it with Eddie Warburg later?

IB With Eddie Warburg, never. It was so awful. He did everything. The Joint Distribution Committee [– he] is still on it, and all the Jewish charities, just did. He was one of the people who certainly believed that any pressure on England …

GC At that time.

IB … would work against the Jews. Even before. Why didn't I protest? As you know, I have always thought that protesting about the bombing of the trains …

GC Yes.

IB … and the camps was no use.

GC Yes.

[16] Untraced (as yet).

IB No point in it.

GC I'm sure. I agree with you.

IB In fact already in the war it was suggested [it] won't do any harm. Ben-Gurion was right, but nobody believes it now. It is always cast in their teeth.

GC I couldn't agree with you more. Even some Jewish partisans from Poland said the same, that …

IB It wouldn't have done any good.

GC Yes.

IB But people like Bergson, you know …

GC Yes, of course.

IB I don't know why people thought it could do good. How could it? Did they think the Germans could actually be stopped? But that's how I spent my time in New York. In that period and all that. I used to go to dinner with people on the *Jewish [Daily] Forward*, with Horowitz, you know.

GC Yes.

IB Labour people, in a dinner jacket, in Brooklyn, at six in the afternoon! Quite interesting. These were people who knew Eugene Debs in the early beginnings of the American Labor Socialists.

GC Labour Socialists.

IB 1910, and before that. I heard a lot of stories.

GC We'll come to them, in the American period, later.

***

I want now to come back – it all started when I asked you whether you felt liberated when you left Oxford, and you said you really felt liberated when you left home.

IB I was bored and I knew many people, and we went out to dinner and so on. But on the whole I was not very bored with it, on the whole it was a rather lonely period of my life.

GC Now let's come back to your childhood. You said that you were not an extraordinary student.

IB At school?

GC In Oxford. That you were idle, you didn't work hard, and that you were not an exceptional student.

IB I was quite undisciplined. I did Philosophy at Corpus Christi.

GC That's what I was going to ask now. But you were a sort of Wunderkind.

IB No.

GC Not in school either?

IB In school not at all!

GC No?

IB I was never head of any form.[17] I was never head of a class in my life.

[17] Not entirely true.

GC Yes, you told me. But a Wunderkind can be a Wunderkind of another type. To be a head of a class, you have to be a sportsman or …

IB No! Entirely work. Nothing else. It was nothing but examinations. Nothing to do with anything else.

GC You did well, though.

IB Classes had nothing to do with life, nothing but merit for what you do.

GC And did your mother or your parents put pressure to bear on you?

IB No. I was too low. When I was about twelfth they thought I was a bit too low. They didn't put any pressure till I was fifth. Towards the end, in my school, I was second, in the class in which I belonged. It was the highest I have got.

GC Second. Who was the first?

IB Some man who became a form of clergyman.

GC A clergyman. How many Jews were in St Paul's then?

IB Quite a large number. It was a ghetto. St Paul's had about 600 boys, of which about 80 …

GC I see.

IB Gollancz, these sort of people. Herbert Wolfe[?]. It was *the* school to which Jews sent to their children, day school. Bentwich, that kind.

GC And you look back on your St Paul's days with …?

IB Pleasure. My first year was not very good. I was a foreign boy, my English was not all that good. There was a schoolmaster of whom I said at the end of term – was not nice to me. I went to St Paul's in 1922, after my Bar Mitzvah, which was in 1922. The first term was all right. Spring 1922, Summer 1922. I was very happy. After that I didn't go [sc. look] back. I was entirely happy.

GC But you have no memories of a Wunderkind whatsoever?

IB No. I was quite bright. I met the bright boys, I took an interest in literature, I took an interest in music, but certainly nothing special. Nobody there remembers me. None of the masters thought I was particularly good.

GC Did your parents think that you were particularly good?

IB No, they did not. Of course they thought I was marvellous, but they had no reason to.

GC So why did you go to Oxford? Was it the order of the day?

IB It was the order of the day, if you had enough money to get in. The first college which I applied to was Balliol. I was rejected, both for a scholarship, and for an ordinary place. I did the exam for the scholarship. No good at all. That was rather a setback. But the school must have thought I was good enough to try a year earlier than I needed to. I was then seventeen. The normal age was older than that. And then I had come in again for a scholarship – St Paul's School forced its people to go for scholarships. A scholarship at a bad college was better than to be a commoner, even if you could afford it …

GC Really?

IB … in a good college.

GC Why?

IB They forced you. Because they liked scoring …

GC How interesting.

IB … for a scholarship. Scoring if it was possible, because you got the scholarship by doing this. It was a cramming school. They taught one too hard. The work was too heavy. And that part of the period I didn't like. Having to learn an enormous amount of Latin by heart: that was a nightmare for me. I was never any good at Classics.

GC Classics is a very intriguing point, and I'll come to it. I thought of coming to it today, but I'm not sure. Now, you went to Corpus.

IB I got a scholarship to Corpus to do Mods, one in History, and – no, to do Mods in Classics and Modern History. Neither of which I did. No.

GC Why?

IB Because the man – I was sent for by the Ancient History tutor, who was a man of about 70, 73, even then. Old, sort of military type, who said my classics weren't very good. He though my essay was the best thing I did. That if I did the Classics I wouldn't get a good degree. So would I mind doing Ancient History immediately, under him? And he fancied me, which meant of course Philosophy as well. Couldn't do one without the other. He was not very interested in philosophy. So I passed the examination, which I had to do to get on to the final. This I did then, and had a year to spare. Then I was supposed to do Modern History. I didn't want to do that. -So I said I wanted to go on doing Philosophy. At first Literae Humaniores, then PPE. And so I did two Philosophy exams.

GC Now it's clear that from the very first days, you were a man of literature.

GC Literary ideas, not literature.

IB Ideas.

GC From the very early days, ideas, and not literature? I thought that – I see.

IB I read books, and I read classical books before I was told[?]. In that sense I was premature, yes. I was kind of – what is the word in English? Doing things before one should. What is the word I'm looking for?

GC Well, *lifnei zemano*. I understand what you mean.

IB I'm looking for the word. *Lifnei zemano*, yes. Precocious. That is what I mean. *Praecox*. I read *War and Peace* in Russian at the age of eleven. I read *Anna Karenina* when I was twelve.

GC That's what I had in mind.

IB I didn't enjoy it too much.

GC Ah, you didn't …

IB No. I read them.

GC I see. Well, Russian literature will come to us later, too. So what made you decide to opt for an academic career?

IB nothing. When I went to St Paul's I was second in the top form, top class. And the people there, even my form master, who was a classical tutor from Oxford, he thought I would do quite well in Literae Humaniores. Had in mind I should pursue Philosophy. It was quite a normal thing. Everybody went to Oxford at St Paul's, either Oxford or Cambridge, if they could. If they failed, like Leonard Schapiro, they had to go to London.

GC He failed?

IB Failed, yes. He had a scholarship; his parents had no money.

GC And he had no money. Did he bear a grudge?

IB Tremendous. And his relations with me were complicated as it was. The envy. He thought he was better than I was. He was. He adored the Classics. He was very snobbish. He believed in the right, the aristocracy.

GC He was snobbish?

IB Church of England. Yes. Terribly. So that would explain it. His parents – his father came from Riga, from a much better family than mine; his mother was the daughter of a Cantor in Glasgow, but she was a terrific snob, and so although they had no money, they had a butler and [*unclear*].

GC Really.

IB Grotesque. My parents rather mocked at – laughed at them.

GC Oh, I see.

IB My parents had more money. We were neither rich nor poor. My father made about £3,000 a year, in business deals. It was nothing much. We'd spend what he earned. There was no accumulation.

GC But did they have difficult years?

IB I reckon no, the only difficult year, apart from Russia, was in 1931, when the crash came to my father's thought[?]. He lost a lot of money, in the end. Then again, it happened in 19… – no it didn't. It happened before that. Yet he was not very worried, but I don't know why he wasn't worried. I think, I can't remember, timber trade [*unclear*]. I remember that he was very upset and yes, why didn't he … Went on. He just went on. Started again. We weren't ruined, but

he lost some money, he lost … He became terrified in 1939, no – in 1939, when the war started, because the source of that money was in Riga. Timber, that sort of thing. They could no longer get in because the Germans blockaded all that. Then he thought …

GC So what did he do during the war ?

IB He traded in pigs' bristles. Bristles which brushes are made of.

GC Yes, of course.

IB He didn't make much money. But he turned to that as an alternative. And home-grown timber in England, but that wasn't much. Before he died, he was thought to be worth £100,000. He was worth £32,000 pounds. Out of which my mother hardly lived.

GC Really?

IB She managed. But I, when I was in Oxford, I got an ordinary Oxford salary. There was no money. There was no money at all. The £32,000 pounds wasn't too bad. She got about £2,000 pounds in interest.

GC Not too much.

IB In 19… – when was it my father died? My father died in 1953. [*unclear*]

GC did she complain?

IB No.

GC Never?

IB No. She was very economical. Never spent money. She hoarded it, in case my father became bankrupt. I think she did accumulate about £8,000.

GC Have you got any memories of a recession?

IB I never had to support her, my mother. My aunt, yes.

GC That I know. We'll come to it later.

IB My mother managed to live on her income. I think I borrowed her money, invested it for Warburg. Did quite well. She made more money as a result. No, I can't … She was perfectly comfortable.

GC Do you remember friends who were well-to-do and the families of whom were ruined in the recession? In school times, or …

IB No. Shapiro apparently never had money. When he was a boy the company totally collapsed. But it wasn't anything special. The company really was ruined. They didn't give – many people needed work. They lost money, but there wasn't serious bankruptcy as a result.

GC Now, you are in Oxford, you study …

IB I was in Corpus Christi College. I was living in Oxford. I met nobody. I met one person who was at St Paul's. Socially. St Paul's was like a very good grammar school. It was not very grand. Its social top would be the son of some scientific knight. Apart from this, the son of a bank clerk [*unclear*]. When I came to Oxford, I lived among public school people who were much grander than the society to which I was used; not Etonians, not the top; the middle-class probably. They played rugby, their interests were mainly – they played games and they rowed and they played football and cricket. They skied, they got on beautifully well, very well indeed. I liked to know a completely new set of people, totally different from what I

knew before. Gentlemanly, class of – upper middle class of English gentlemen: middle class, not upper class.

GC Had you got friends from those days?

IB Oh, Corpus? I aren't think. The only real friend I had was a poet, who was very unpopular; he grew long whiskers. He was not a homosexual. His friends were. He did obscene drawings, wrote poetry, and I shared a house with him, which wasn't incredibly good for either of us. I got on with the others. When I go to gaudies at Corpus, I meet them.

GC You told me.

IB And we're on very good terms. All kept each other in line.

GC But students, undergraduates, not from Corpus, but from your days – who were your friends from other colleges?

IB I can tell you. Some people from school, still. All I
can say is that in my second and third year, in my second …

Side C

IB … highly touchy article. History of Ideas. Published by Blackwell's.[18] Probably lost money on it. The editors. In the beginning I don't know who they were; the last editor that I remember was the poet Wystan Auden. Auden the poet. He was the editor in 1927. He passed it on to somebody else, and then from there a man called Arthur Calder-Marshall. He was a novelist, became a novelist. He was a year older than me at St Paul's. We were friends. And he was a sort of a literary person – literature, sort of highbrow and social, and he was at Hertford, and he passed it on to me. And I met young student writers, including the man with whom I afterwards shared a house, called Bernard Spencer, who didn't

[18] The *Oxford Outlook*.

have much of a career. He was a friend, yes. He fell out of a British Rail car – we drifted apart. He fell out of a train. I think it was suicide. If you ask me, my friends in those days …

GC Who was in the editorial board?

IB I don't remember.

GC Was it prestigious to be the current editor?

IB Quite.

GC You wanted to do it?

IB I accepted it. I was surprised to be offered it. But I enjoyed it. Yes, certainly I had friends: Calder-Marshall was one, a man called Humphry House was after the famous [?] was another, Freddie Ayer …

GC Freddie Ayer was in your days?

IB He was a year younger.

GC He was in Christ Church?

IB Yes.

GC Came from Eton?

IB Yes.

GC And he's a Jew?

IB Half. Father was not. A Jewish mother. I don't remember anyone else then. In my day …

GC Most of your Oxford friends are from a later period? I mean from All Souls, and early New College days? So it seems.

IB Yes. It seems to be. I'm trying to think of who else there was in those days. Tony Andrewes was Professor of Greek History, New College, in my year.

GC And John Foster became a friend of yours later?

IB A man called [Kenneth] Robinson; became headmaster of Bradford Grammar School, who was at Corpus with me. He was a genuine friend.

GC David Cecil? Later?

IB 1938. He was a don at Oxford between 1922 and 1928 [sc. 1930?]. Then went to London, and came back. He went to New College, in 1938 [sc. 1939].

GC We'll come back to him, because you mentioned him, he's a very special man.

IB certainly a great friend. It began with Philosophy. I was interested in Philosophy. Yes. I met other undergraduates who did Philosophy. That's how I got to Crossman …

IB Let's stop here.

GC Yes. The crucial questions are now, but you are tired.

IB I couldn't answer any more.

GC I am sure.