



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No 4

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Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No 4

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Side A

GC It was fascinating last week, and though I wanted to go on, we are still in your childhood. There are some very fascinating questions that I want to elaborate on: one at two or three of your stories. Coming back to the village you stayed in, near the Dvina.

IB The village was not on the Dvina [yes it was].

GC But ...

IB It was nowhere about.

GC Eh?

IB The timber was felled, taken wherever it is ...

GC Aha.

IB The river did not flow to the village.

GC But what was the name of the village?

IB Andreapol.

GC Andreapol. But there is something – there was someplace, the name of which included in it the name Dvina [Red Dvina, in Riga].

IB Yes, Dvina, of course. Dvina is a river down which timber was floated towards Riga.

GC I see. But the place is Andreapol.

IB No, Andreapol.

GC Andreapol. It is – I think of the name Andrey.¹

IB Nothing to do with it. Nothing whatever. It has to do with the owners of the house, of the big house there.

GC Yes, whose name was Andrey.

IB Their name was not Andrey. Their name was Kushilev. But they were called Andrew. The man after whom the village was called. The

¹ Some confusion here: in No. 3 IB says ‘it was called Andreapol because the squires’ names, who owned the place, were always Andrey’.

village was created for the kind of purpose as this, my firm's timber trade. It wasn't a real [village] at all. It was a little town, which was invented or created for the purpose of ...

GC Of the timber.

IB Timber company union. For the company union. At the back was a village in which people lived: it was not called Andreapol.

GC What was it called?

IB It was Bli[z?]kaya[?] Selo [Close Village]. It was a big, a great village.

GC Yes, I see. Now you mentioned ...

IB Andreapol had a railway station plus, oh, 50 houses.

GC You mentioned the railway station: you mentioned the other places. You didn't mention a church. There was no church? Or chapel?

IB There must have been. There certainly was a church.

GC But you don't remember.

IB Yes I do. I remember only one thing, which I never saw – it was a funeral. In a typical Russian funeral, the corpse is not covered, so you actually see – I mean the body is covered, the face is not covered. So I saw, to my horror – it's the only – first dead man I ever saw. Somebody being carried to the church. From this I infer there was a church.

GC But you don't remember the church.

IB No.

GC You don't remember church bells.

IB No. There must have been some but I don't remember them, no. It was not part of the Jewish life of this community.

GC Fantastic.

IB There was no curse, it was not called 'schwarze tume' [black ??], which was the usual name for a church. You see, people didn't spit when they passed it. Somebody describes in their, some Jew, about being asked to spit every time he passed the church. I knew nothing of this. [16A] People in that village did not spit.

GC So you didn't have, since your childhood, the tension of encountering Christian religion.

IB No.

GC Church bells doesn't raise you any reflex?

IB I'll tell you. That's not entirely true. That's what Katkov used to accuse me of, behind my back, not to my face. That my conception of the officers of the church was priests with long locks and long beards engaged on organising a pogrom. I do remember seeing a priest – where else could I have seen him? Not in Riga, not in Petersburg – Petrograd. No, because the priests didn't – well, we'd never see them walking in the streets, I had never seen a religious procession in Petrograd, because my – in our district, it didn't occur. It generally didn't occur in capital cities. Except on tremendous occasions, which didn't occur, maybe during the war, although I didn't see. I do faintly remember thinking of having the image of some kind of priest with long locks coming down to his shoulders and a long beard. I had some association of this later in life ...

GC Yes, of course.

IB ... with anti-Semitic outbreaks. But at the time I certainly had none. I was not brought up to hate Christians and to spit at their churches. Nothing of that sort.

GC That's very interesting.

IB Yes. And my mother didn't really like them, you see, while I was a boy. Nevertheless there was no renting against them. There was no denunciation of them in my childhood, by anybody.

GC When did you sense that she didn't like them? There or afterwards?

IB Not at that period. Certainly not. No, I suppose I must have sensed – it's not that she didn't them, she felt alien to them. She didn't dislike them. For example, the maid who looked after us in Andreapol, and the made who looked after us – I don't remember the name – in Petrograd, she was devoted to us.

GC Yes.

IB That happens.

GC Very common.

IB Between the English and the Indians.

GC Yes, of course, any ...

IB But when my father's business friends came to dinner, one was called Ivanov, a common Russian name, the other was called, I can't remember, Nikolay something – Gorinov. When these people came to dinner, I felt my mother would lay herself out to please, but she didn't feel entirely comfortable. I saw that she was self-conscious in front of these people. She said nothing against them. There was never any denunciation. The Church, the Russians, no talk about pogroms. Nothing at all. It's all in history, it was not a part of my childhood. When I had heard that – in my childhood, Petrograd, we hadn't got there yet, I had these two girls, who were purely Russian, who were great friends, with whom I used to go for walks. That was certainly not something that was ill-regarded by my parents. There was no question of not seeing such people, or trying to make Jewish friends. None of that.

GC Those friends in Petrograd, did they go to church? Were they churchgoers?

IB I don't think so.

GC [??]

IB Never.

GC They have never asked you about synagoga?

IB Never! Totally natural relationship.

GC What was their names?

IB I'll tell you about one of them. We are now talking about late 1916, early 1917. One was the daughter, no less, of the Deputy Minister of Finnish Affairs. There was an Office of Finnish Affairs. The Russians were not very nice to the Finns.

GC Of course.

IB And he was called Ivanov² – in fact, he lived in the same house as we lived. He had a flat above us, and his daughter, who was a little girl, whom I met in later life. I knew her in 1916/17; I had a governess, and she had a governess. We were occasionally taken for walks, sometimes by hers, other times by mine. Always accompanied She, in, had a friend, a very pretty girl, who was in a ballet school. Imperial ...

GC Ballet School of Petrograd.

IB Of Petrograd, or Petersburg. And sometimes she used to bring her too, and we were all three, me and the two girls, were all great friends, I used to see her every third day. I met her infinitely later, in New York. Her name was Roman, afterwards she was Miss Ivanov, but she married a guy Roman, from whom she was divorced. She taught Russian in, not Brown Univ..., Brown ...

²The name IB uses for the family depicted in 'The Purpose Justifies the Ways', in L.

GC In Providence?

IB Providence, Rhode Island.

GC But not in Brown?

IB I'm not sure it wasn't in Brown, probably had some connection with Brown. She was an extremely well preserved, rather handsome lady, of a very very rigid white Russian type – extremely charming, pure-hearted, very distinguished. I did not remember what she looked like, nor she what I looked like. We came together because a professor of Russian, I presume, I don't think he was at Brown, maybe Harvard or something like that. She said she came from Petersburg, and for some odd reason he asked if she never – if she knew me because I came – I lived there too, and astonishingly enough, she remembered the name. It was a pure – since we all grew up together. And so I met her in New York in a restaurant, and we compared notes about our lives. This was between – this must have happened in about 1973, 1974.

GC That late?

IB Extremely, yes. It was after at least 50 years. It was 1977, it was after 60 years, so one couldn't expect to recognise each other. But I was delighted to meet her, and it reminded me of various – of our childhood. She said that I was a very bookish boy ...

GC Aha.

IB ... which I wouldn't have known. And that I always lectured, I'd always tell her things which I'd read in books. Communicated things which I'd read in books. She said she was pretty bookish herself; she would talk; but I was more so than she was. So we got on very well on the basis of common interests, and the books we read, and telling each other what we read. The other girl, the ballet dancer, was not terribly bookish, but she had great charm, and we enjoyed – we all enjoyed our camaraderie and we wanted to chat and just – and I: what was I? Seven? Eight? I didn't feel that she wasn't Jewish especially.

GC Very interesting.

IB She was just a neighbour. So I never had any – I wasn't brought up with the regular anti-Russian Jewish sentiments, none of that. My mother felt it, and when we came to England, even, it was quite clear that Jews were Jews, and the other people – although there were certain Gentiles that she was extremely nice to and nice about, she was, felt a certain alien... – a sense of being alienated. She never got over it. My father was the opposite. My father liked Gentiles. On the whole, he preferred them to Jews.

GC Yes. Now, both – this Minister of Finnish Affairs ...

IB I'll tell you a funny thing about this. When the Revolution occurred, he fled: probably condemned to death or something like that. Tsarist minister. And he went to Finland. And they paid him a pension for the rest of his life.

GC The Finns?

IB The Finns. This is so typical; although he was the oppressor – he belonged to a government which was – nevertheless, he had dealings and the Ministry of Finnish Affairs became transferred with all the [?] to Finland after the Revolution. And since he was an official relevant – to do with Finnish affairs, they went on paying him a pension.

GC Now what – was it the father of the lady from Providence? Or what?

IB Yes.

GC He was. So she fled with him.

IB She must have done.

GC So were they aristocracy? Upper middle class? Middle class? Typical?

IB Upper middle I would say. Bureaucrats. But I wouldn't be surprised if she was a cousin of titled persons, she belonged to a highly educated ruling class. But above her lived Princess Imeretinsky, who was descended from a Georgian king. Imeretia is a country in the Caucasus. There was such a country.

GC Yes, of course, but I didn't know about the family.

IB No, there is – so she was called; she was the Keisha, some special title, princely title. The most enli... – human, enlightened, it's very difficult to translate it, it was a certain princess head, but the royal princes had this special title; even though they were not of the Russian royalty, they got a kind of special suffix to the name, such as 'Most Excellent Prince', 'Most Excellent Princess'. Princess Imeritinsky, she lived two floors above us. She was not very well treated after the Bolsheviks came, but she used to come and visit us, and we would visit her. Perfectly natural; she was an old lady, perfectly polite, I don't suppose she was ever fond of Jews, but we didn't feel that. Then in the same flat, in the same house, lived the son-in-law, called Steinberg, the son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov, the composer. He was married to Korsakov's daughter and he was a professor at the St Petersburg at the Petrograd ...

GC The Conservatoire.

IB Conservatoire.

GC Steinberg was professor ...

IB Yes, I don't know what he taught, I'm not sure if it was cello or something like that. Anyway, he was certainly an eminent professor of some difficult ... It must have been ...

GC She, by the way, she's much older than she looks.

IB About fiftyish. Did you realise she was [unclear] for the rest of her years? Have you read her book?

GC Of course. She tries her best, I must say. It's an agonising.

IB Obviously.

GC But she's all right. Her heart and her mind ...

IB I'm sure.

GC ... are on the right side.

IB I'm sure.

GC And she deserves credit for the courage ...

IB A daring [?] work – she had no idea that what's his name, Yehu...

GC Bauer.

IB Yehuda Bauer was doing it, reviewing her book. She was rather offended; she talked to him, he talked to her. He didn't tell her ...

GC That's Yehuda Bauer. Here I come to the point that the politician's side ...

IB Exactly. I know. I told her she should go back to Israel and have it out with him. By all means. [*laughter*]

[*break in tape*]

IB Is it on?

GC Yes, I turned it on.

IB Let me explain to you where these people lived. It's not the first house we lived in, in Peters..., in Petrograd. The Revolution of February 1917 I saw in another house, on what is called St Basil's Island, Vasily's Island, was a much less smart neighborhood. On the so-called twenty-second line. It was divided into lines like Manhattan, sort of rectangular lines with big avenues running in between them, and that's where my parents brought me up early one morning, not very early – about nine, and I went out on to the

balcony, and there I saw crowds with banners. I don't know if I've told you this before.

GC No.

IB The banners you could read very easily. They said 'Bread', they said 'Land and Liberty', they said 'Long live the Duma', 'Up with the Duma', they said 'Down with the Tsar'. That's about all. 'Down with the War' too, some. And they marched about with these banners waving – huge letters. And then I saw troops moving in – yes I saw the troops rushing in upon them. Some mounted and some on foot.

GC Some on foot?

IB They were mingling with the crowd. Big fraternisation. No shooting, nothing.

GC No shooting?

IB No! Fraternisation. They mingled with each other quite peacefully. And that was the Revolution of February in Petrograd. That's all there was to it. And then, the only people who remained loyal to the Tsar, I found – I was told – were the police. That's not in the books. Not recorded. They were called 'Pharaohs' by the people.

GC Pharaohs?

IB 'Oppressors of the people.' 'Pharaony.' And I saw – they sniped; some of them were in attics, sniping at the revolutionaries. Extraordinary. And I saw one of these people, not in his uniform, being dragged off by lynching people, obviously to be executed or something. A pale man, struggling, among a lot of – my governess tried to take me away, but I saw it. That gave me a permanent distaste for violence. That was very early ...

GC I was going to ask.

IB Very real memory. Permanent distaste. To see a man, whatever he was, pale and being dragged away by this fierce crowd of twenty, in some direction, a very horrible spectacle. It was on our street.

GC It was your street, your house ...

IB It was the street ...

GC Where you lived?

IB Yes, where we lived.

GC I can see the violence, but what about masses? I mean do you have fear of masses?

IB No. Nothing. None at all.

GC I mean, the violence that you ...

IB The man being dragged was pale and struggling. No, I don't have fear of masses. Of course in those two Revolutions the masses were quite peaceful – in the first Revolution; and there were no masses in the second one. None.

GC None.

IB There weren't any. It was a coup d'état. It was in the middle of the night, more or less. There were no great martyrs, no great fighting. Oh, one heard distant shooting perhaps. But it was a sort of *crise de pouvoir* [crisis of power]. It was a coup d'état. There was no confrontation. This business about the Winter Palace being stormed is a myth. There were forty sailors and fifty soldiers who forced their way in.

GC Yes, that's not masses.

IB There may be – the cruiser *Aurora* did fire a shot, but there was no – these famous paintings of the storming of the Winter Palace are purely imaginary in Eisenstein's film.

GC Yes, I know.

IB It's fantastic, and he knew it. He comes from Riga, he's older than I am. He's the typical son of a baptised Jew from Riga.

GC There were Bolsheviks. Was it from the very beginning a derogative?

IB In my family, yes

GC From the very beginning?

IB From the start.

GC It's very natural.

IB No, even before they came to power. What happened was this: First there was this revolution. The first thing which happened, I remember, was a public event – was the death of Rasputin. That was in the evening papers in late 1916. The headlines I remember. Then in 1917 this happens. I see it on the balcony: my parents wished me to see it. My parents were very pleased. The entire family – all bourgeois Jews were pleased. Delighted with the first Revolution. The anti-Jewish laws were not immediately abolished. That was rather resented. The hero of this was Kerensky, who delivered these terrific speeches I never heard. It wasn't taken. My father's brothers, my mother's sisters were all in a state of agitation. I had all these cousins, they all went to meetings and they all came back in an excited state. I was – never went to school, but was taught partly by Lansky, about whom I told you, and partly by one of my father's brothers, who taught me Russian grammar, Russian literature. He was, I think, in his first year in the University. A student. And that was all the teaching I ever got. Of course I read books: I read *Don Quixote*, I read Gulliver, I read what Russian children read.

GC Jules Verne.

IB Jules Verne in quantities, about fourteen times more than is ever good for anyone again. And I read Russian writers of course. Children read them then. But I'm not sure I didn't begin *War and Peace*, which meant nothing to me, really. Perhaps it did mean something. Anyway we had Tolstoy, we had Turgenev, no Dostoevsky, that anti-Semite – not allowed.

GC We will discuss this. Yes.

IB Not allowed. Anti-Semitic writer. Chekhov, yes. Zhukovsky, Pushkin, all these Russian poets, handsome editions, Bar-Mitzvah type. What happened then was that I went on being taught by these people, and in the summer of 1917 we went to a spa called Staraya Russa, 'Old Russa' (still exists), when I was a child.

GC Near the Baltic Sea or far away?

IB No. I don't know where it is. I don't think I ever knew. It had been about, I think, a two- or three-hour journey [south of Lake Ilmen in Novgorod Oblast, Russia].

GC It was between February and until the end of October?

IB June.

IB There were various cousins of mine – I don't remember their names: what were their names? – whom I'd never met before, but we got on perfectly well. We played games. We went to listen to the orchestra, which was a sort of typical spa orchestra, which was conducted by a man call Señor Tzaniboly [??]. They were trying to get out of Russia. No good. They weren't let out. The number of scores they had for music was limited. The same music was played under different titles. Sometimes it was called a Venetian March, sometimes it was called a Hungarian March. British, Scottish, the same one. Same music. Yes, I remember being amused. There were all kinds of things, tombolas, there were children's parties, there were fancy dress parties – it was a very jolly vacation, I enjoyed it all very much. I remember my relations' name, curious name, Jewish name, Lagoviev. I've never seen it before or after. I don't know how

anybody came to be called that. I don't know, it's probably because they came from Lagovy.

GC You mean the surname Lagoviev?

IB Surname. Anyway, they were quite a cultivated family. Their children would read – that was that summer. Then we came back to Petrograd. My father wasn't there all the time, he went to and fro, so it can't have been very far. But it was a very happy time – completely careless childhood. When we came back we saw lots of – well, I suppose, endless posters for the Constituent Assembly. There must have been 23 parties, including a Zionist party. What Zionists had to do with the Russian Constituent Assembly is not clear, if they were allowed to be part of it. And I remember one day as I was walking I saw two young men tearing down these posters and putting up posters with ...

GC Yes hammer and sickle.

IB Hammer and sickle. Which I quite enjoyed, seeing this. But I could tell my father was not pleased. I learned[?], I didn't know why, it wasn't the right thing to do. Then came the second Revolution. My family didn't, nobody of my sort, of the bourgeoisie – did not think there was a revolution. wasn't quite It was – something happened, it wasn't quite clear what. The first thing which one knew was the general strike, which was against the Revolution. Military unions.

GC You remember it personally.

IB The lift didn't work. Certainly I remember it. No bathwater. No water for our flats. Oh, I remember of course. And the porter of our block of flats, who was obviously extremely monarchist, was extremely displeased by. He said, 'Very wrong.' Then people in the streets: my family was troubled. They didn't know what was happening. They were told that Lenin and Trotsky, who were never referred to by any other – they were something like – they never said Lenin without saying Trotsky.

GC Lenin and Trotsky.

IB Hyphenated. Lenin-and-Trotsky were the people who had done this but nobody knew whether it would last or not. Something unpleasant had happened. Then I saw posters which had on it certain verses by Mayakovsky which people afterwards sang, that's why they were originally written. Various posters of the Russo–Japanese War which I still remember were removed. They took off posters of the Russo–Japanese War and instead of that there were these posters the translation of which is 'Eat pineapples', 'Shoe ...', I don't know, 'Grouse, your last day has come – oh, bourgeois.'

GC And that was Mayakovsky?

IB Mayakovsky. Certainly. Rhyming. And that was put up in a number of places. I still remember the Russo–Japanese posters from the Russo–Japanese War which were very frequent in my neighbourhood. Pasted on the walls, not removed since 1905.

GC Fantastic.

IB Very odd. And I remember talking about the war to the porter and to the maid. She said, 'You know the Queen of Belgium started this war; she's a very cruel woman.' Just total nonsense of that sort. 'Queen of the Belgians.' This was 1916.

GC 1917.

IB 1917. 'She started the war; she's a very bad woman. Very cruel. She's at fault for it all.' There was no anti-German talk, particularly. Except that German was forbidden, people were forbidden to speak it in Russia. But I don't know what my family – they were bilingual, my parents, though they didn't normally speak German, so that was not a problem. What more can I tell you? There was a synagogue to which we went. Well, all I can remember is I don't think I can remember before 1917. Anyway, we were taken, there were two places. There was a little shtibl [room for communal prayer]: all the near synagogues in Peter..., Petrograd were concentrated in the same place. The order of the government was, if you have to have synagogues, let them all be together, not scattered. We don't want to have the Jews wandering about the entire – after all, it was outside

the Pale of Settlement. They were not allowed to live there unless they had professions, or their business was of a certain type: that was the law. So there was the so-called 'Choral Synagogue', which was the main one. It was founded by Aline's grandfather, and there were little Hasidic shtibls around in this sort of compound ...

G That's interesting.

IB ... in the. And I was taken to that by my grandfather, who was then living in Petrograd. That was of course all in Yiddish. I was taken there once or twice.

GC It was one of the shtiblach.

IB One of the shtiblach.

GC The Lubavitcher?

IB Yes. That existed. And I'm not sure whether it was there or in Riga, I'm a little bit confused. There was a famous Rev, who was a kind of Rebbe, too, called the Rogatchover [Joseph Rosen], quite famous.

GC Very famous.

IB He is very famous. Well, he appeared in the synagogue. He may have been there, or it may have been when we came back to Riga for three or four months. But I wonder, I think it was Petersburg, Petrograd. And he was a man of extraordinary appearance. I mean he really looked inspired. There was no doubt, he was somebody. He looked – some kind of unusually – the kind of charisma of ...

GC Charisma!

IB It was obvious.

GC And he was surrounded by Hasidim?

IB He was surrounded by followers, not very many.

GC He was well-dressed?

IB There were six. He wore the ordinary Hasidic black overcoat. He wore a black gartel [prayer belt], and he had a large beard, and very beautiful white hair, and when other people prayed standing, he walked up and down, in an inspired manner. It was obviously a matter of – that was allowed. Other people were not allowed to do that. You see, they say, a saint. And when we had nine for a minyan, and we had to have a tenth, he pronounced that I was suitable for making the tenth, although it was before my Bar-Mitzvah. It was a particular privilege. He examined me, talked to me, for five minutes, and said ‘Yes’ [*claps his hands*].

GC Ah, he examined you.

IB Well yes, he talked to me a little. Asked questions. I don’t know what they were. But he pronounced me fit, which was only how he could allow. No misnaged would have ever allowed that. But as he was a saint, with direct relations with God, who could say no, so now we had a full service of which I made the tenth man. That instance I actually remember. The Rogatchover Rav. He came from Dvinsk or somewhere, he came from the Baltic. There must have been a place called Rogatchov [Rogachev, in Belarus], from which he originally came, wherever that is.

GC Yes.

IB Poland or Russia, I don’t know.

GC Well, I think it’s in Russia, but I ...

IB Some small town.

GC Yes, I’ll find out about it.

IB Well, anyway ...

GC What happened in later ...?

IB I have no idea, but anyway it just occurred as a passing figure. But I saw, it was the only Rebbe I had seen, because the [6th] Lubavitcher Rebbe I never saw, because he sat in Lubavitch, and that was Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson. That was the Rebbe of the period, who afterwards was smuggled out by – from Riga, I think, to which he went. The one who still is alive, I think so [no: 1880–1950]. Where he went, I don't know. I think he went to America [yes]. He may have done. The predecessor of the present one.

GC I'm not sure.

IB The man who saved him was himself caught by the Bolsheviks and executed. There was a kind of – I know I'm running ahead – the chief Hasid in Riga, a man called [Mordehai] Dubin. He was a macher [fixer]. First of all, he was a man who managed everything. He was a passionate Hasid. He was on very good terms with the Latvian dictator in the – there was a dictatorship in Latvia towards the middle of the 1930s. And he was the sort of 'Court Jew': he could fix anything. I mean he could give bribes, he could accept them. He looked after the community, and he was the Yiddish-speaking man of power. I remember him. He was arrested after we left, long [after], this is a story I knew about. He was arrested by the Russians, not the Germans. When the Russians overthrew the – invaded Latvia, which was in 1940, he was a prominent friend of the dictator presumably. In with the government. He was arrested. He managed to smuggle out a note saying 'Save me, save me.' They failed to save him and he was gunned down. He was sentenced to be executed. Sent to a camp and killed. But he saved the Rebbe: that's the point. Without him the Rebbe would not be saved. He lost his own life, but he took risks. Just an episode.

GC No, but still.

IB Now, we go back to Russia. Then, after that came the Revolution. Gradually it dawned even on my family that this had come to stay. And there were – Lenin was thought to be fanatic, perfectly honest, dangerous, because he was a fanatic. Honest, straightforward, but unfortunately totally fanatic. Trotsky was thought to be a scoundrel. Absolutely. Nobody doubted that. A real

scoundrel. Complete difference in moral character. Yes. In my circles.

GC How interesting.

IB It was interesting. A Jew and so on. A typical Jewish scoundrel, no good at all, nasty, terrible. He was rather – but how this transpired, how it came [about], I don't know.

GC Very interesting.

IB Yes. There was a different [*unclear*]. The firm ceased to be Lenin and Trotsky. We went on living in the same house. My father supplied sleepers railways, and went on doing so, for whichever government was, provisional government, Soviet government, etc. I don't think I was very well aware of what Communism was. Nor did I know that the war had stopped. I don't think – Brest-Litovsk had not come into [*unclear*]. This was what? – some time in 1918. Then, one night in November 1918, I went on with the same people, Lansky, my uncle, nothing changed in my life. I went to synagogue on Shabbat and every Shabbat. The synagogue was, as I remember it, a very large building, I saw it again [*gap*] splendid shamash [warden of a synagogue] with a long splendid beautifully kept beard, called Stein, who wore dark spectacles and magnificent garments, and magnificent French-style hats such as they wear in England sometimes, semi-top hats, and the people who came wearing top hats in 1917, people like Poliakoff, people like 'prizim', which we were not. But I saw – a man whom I remember is Professor [Abraham (Albert)] Harkavy [1835–1919], he was there.

GC And you remember him?

IB He was eighty. It was that sort of thing. He was much admired, it was pointed out. Tiny little man, very old, but people took pride in him. He was a famous orientalist. People were very pleased he was treated with a certain amount of awe and respect. I remember seeing him, yes. He sat in the front row, little contracted old – I don't know – he must have been in the early eighties. Harkavy must have flourished in the 1870s, 1880s; that was his period, I guess. Maybe he wasn't so old.

GC Maybe he was a little younger.

IB But that's what he looked like. Little old man. Then there were various – I don't know – grandees used to come who sat in the front row wearing top hats. There were no Ginsburgs at that time, melted away in 1917, one way or another, and the synagogue went on functioning, it functioned all the way under the Bolsheviks, untouched, in the early years. And what more can I tell you? I was taught by – I already told you, I was taught the Talmud by Rev Baer – that also went on. Now, in summer of 1919, spring of 1918, for the first time I met Leonard Schapiro.

GC Spring 1918?

IB Yes. Maybe it was late 1917, but I suspect it was 1918. He was two years older. His family also lived in Riga and they were grander than mine. I told you about that. And as I told you before, he took an interest in art and introduced me to various contemporary Russian painters of the avant-garde type. And we used to buy picture postcards. He was bilingual too: Russian, English and German – trilingual. Then we all had a holiday together in summer in a place called Pavlovsk, which was one of the royal suburbs of Petersburg. It still exists under that name. It had a sort of beautiful – I remember – park. It was wonderful, very pretty, neoclassical architecture, built around 1800, 1810. It was called Pavlovsk because it was named for Paul – elegant, fairly elegant statuary; elegant temple-like pavilions. The railway station had a concert hall for the royal family if they arrived – something in which to be regaled by concerts. By this time anybody could go. And there I met Leonard Schapiro and his family, and there were two girls, I remember, called – well, they were Viezlnsky [?] Jews. One was prettier than the other one. Leonard Schapiro was rather older than me and flirted with them. I was below the age of flirtation, but we went about as a kind of foursome. Then I read Dumas and then I read Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*, and all kinds of rather older books; and we were a group of four and we spoke to one another every day, and we had a very good time. There was nothing particularly to do. Whatever games there were we played; we took walks.

GC In the resort?

IB In the resort. Now one of the things I do remember about the resort is this: there were members of the Cheka who used to come; they wore leather jackets. Black leather jackets and holsters with pistols inside. And the local girls gazed at them with all excitement. They were macho types. It was known, or thought, or believed that they shot people every evening. This of course made them attractive. They marched about looking terribly gallant, and tremendously cruel and brave, together, and eyed these girls, and the girls eyed them. I remember, for some reason, these people, six or seven of them at a time, used to march about and those that admired, and probably flirted with, them and so on – with the killers that they were thought to be, the executioners. There was a great excitement. Sexual excitement. It was the local women. That's rather unusual. I don't think that's in the books, either. That I do remember, in Pavlovsk. I said, 'Who are these people?' It was explained to me: 'Very dangerous, remarkable people who love shooting bourgeois.'

GC In your family, you didn't have any Communists?

IB No. The nearest to it, there was, in fact in the same house, there lived a man called [Samuel] Kadinsky, a diamond merchant, whose wife emigrated to Brussels. He was a diamond trader in the end. He was a perfectly nice fat Jewish bourgeois. Why do I remember him and his wife? Because she had a nephew whose name was Greenberg, who published a lot of Russian books in New York. There was a Russian publishing house in the late 1940s, early 1950s, so I talked to him about his relatives. Anyway, she – they had, I can't remember if it was a son or a stepson, who was neurotic, difficult, didn't do any work, was a problem. He joined the Cheka. That's about the nearest.

GC And you knew ...

IB I knew him before this happened. And then they said 'You know this boy – he left.' 'What's he doing?' 'He's joined the Cheka.' It was alleged that one or two of the sons of the people, of the pious Jews of Andreapol, also were Communists. I never knew who or what.

GC But there were rumours.

IB There were rumours.

GC Very typical.

IB One or two of them joined the Communist parties. They were just rumours. I never checked, I never actually came across a Communist. But of course there was Yitzhak Sadeh. I told you about him.

GC Yes, but not in this context.

IB In 1917 he was in Petersburg, came from Riga. His story is quite simple. He was the son of rich parents.

[tape off and on]

IB Oh yes I was telling you about Yitzhak Sadeh.

GC Yes, about the – all right, I wanted to ask you something about, but I'll ask you later. There were pogroms.

IB Yes?

GC When did you first ...?

IB Can't tell. Impossible to say. I don't think – I can't tell you when it was ...

GC It's all right. I'll tell you why I ask.

IB Oh, the Beilis case I heard about. The Beilis case, yes.

GC You remember that?

IB No, I don't remember, because I was four.

GC No, but you heard, of course.

IB I knew the details. Every Russian Jew knew about that. The Beilis case, pogrom, I knew the word, it must have been used, but I can't tell when I first heard it. Where did you first hear it?

GC I'll tell you now the story. It's really very interesting. For me the name 'pogrom' is – I learnt it late at the library in the school, and it doesn't raise any associations.

IB No associations.

GC But Batya, my wife – she came with her parents to Jaffa port in April 1936; they were on a cruise in the Mediterranean coming through Jaffa the day the riots started.

IB In Israel.

GC Yes, the 1936 Arab rebellion. And she remembers a tumult in the boat, and people are excited what to do because Jaffa is an Arab town, and people were saying there is a pogrom, and she, who was eight years old, asked her parents, 'What is a pogrom?'

IB Aha.

GC And it became a real experience, a collective experience for all the grown-ups. Here is the true Palestinian, or Sabra, or the New Jew. She doesn't know what pogrom is. I mean, they couldn't understand it; that's why I asked.

IB All right. The word was familiar to me but I can't say – I don't think in those terms either. But I can tell you, the Beilis case my mother talked about. Every Russian Jew did. Of the people concerned. The story of Beilis is simple; they told it. But I remember that there were certain names that came up in that connection. For example [Justinas] Pronaitis [or Pranaitis] was a Lithuanian priest who testified against, about the Talmud being full of terrible things: he had to be refuted. And he was a man employed by the government; it was government's part, as you know. So Pronaitis was a name nobody now remembers. Who now remembers the name Pronaitis? Typical Lithuanian name. He was a professional, the government expert on Talmud, who said dreadful things about

it. Then [Aleksey Semenovich] Shmakov was also a famous anti-Semite; again he was a witness against Beilis in some way. Who Shmakov was I can't tell you. It's a name that stuck in my mind. He's involved some.

GC Just your mother's stories, or you read about it?

IB No, no stories.

Side B

IB Who was the man who wrote Weizmann's biography? *Trial and Error* was written by whom? Not by Weizmann? [yes it was: subtitle *The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann*]

GC No. The third chapter by man called Kimchi.

IB No, not Kimchi.

GC No, Cannich[?], wasn't it? Yes, you're right.

IB American Jewish author.

GC Yes, of course.

IB Came from Romania. What was his name? Samuel.

GC Ah, Maurice Samuel! He's the one who wrote the book on Beilis and he was furious with Malamud for writing a novel on the subject: he got it all wrong, etc. I wrote the review of it in the *Jewish Chronicle*.³

GC [*laughter*] Fantastic.

IB Anyway, the point is this: that Pronaitis, Shmakov and the friends of the Jews like Charkov[?], who was a very famous lawyer who

³ **'The Great Blood Libel Case'**, review of Maurice Samuel, *Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case* (New York, 1966: Knopf), *Jewish Chronicle Literary Supplement*, 23 December 1966, iii–iv; repr. as 'The Beiliss Case: Prelude to Revolution' in *Midstream* 13 no. 2 (February 1967), 66–72.

afterwards, at the heels of his brother, became the provisional governor of [*unclear*] in Paris, see in 1917. Then there were other people. [I. G.] Shcheglovitov, Minister of Justice, who was determined to prove Beilis was guilty. He was a notorious anti-Semite, whom the Communists killed very [16B] very early. The Bolsheviks got rid of him very early. Vera Cheberyak, who was the woman who denounced him originally, who kept the brothel with her brother. She was somebody whom the Bolsheviks shot at a fairly early stage. I don't think there was even trial. All this gave pleasure to my family – that they didn't mind.

GC So in this context the names came back of the Beilis trial.

IB Yes.

GC In the Bolshevik period.

IB In the Bolshevik period, exactly.

GC I see.

IB I remember they talked about everything before too.

GC Yes.

IB I can't remember when, but it was something which was engraved upon the imagination of every Russian Jew. It was like Dreyfus.

GC Like Dreyfus.

IB For their purposes, like Dreyfus.

GC And the hero was Rosenberg.

IB The hero was – no, who was ...?

GC The lawyer was Rosenberg.

IB The lawyer was [Oscar] Gruzenberg – made splendid speeches. But they were not – of course they admired that, that's not what did it. It was the Jewish lawyer that – he thought he was a hero, himself. He was a very vain figure.

GC I know.

IB Of course, Gruzenberg occurred. But the man who really won the case for him was [V. A.] Maklakov, who made one statement which proved – somewhere I'll find the wonderful statement – he said, 'You know, if it had been true that a Jew had actually killed a Christian infant, for whatever purpose – if the people knew that, wouldn't be a Jew alive in Kiev today. It can't have happened.'

GC Fantastic.

IB 'It can't have happened.' It's enough to say that. Ridiculous. Impossible. Out of the question. [*laughter*] If anyone really believed it, no, there wouldn't be a Jew alive. What do you mean? It was obviously fabricated. It was the best statement made for the entire case, of elaborate proof. All this – the Jew with the black beard. We saw the Jew with the black beard. Poor Beilis, he went to America, he went to Israel, he went to Palestine. Didn't do at all well. Went to America, died in total obscurity. Nothing happened about him. Anyway, that was something. You asked about 'pogrom', that's why I'm telling you.

GC Yes.

IB So that I knew, and that there were anti-Semites in Russia is clear.

GC And yet you didn't fear when you went by a church or when you saw a ...

IB Not at all.

GC That's very interesting.

IB Not at all. I had no fear. Not at all. I had no sense of something sinister. Priests, yes, I had an image of a priest as a rather sinister

creature, but churches, no. In Petersburg there were these splendid – there was St Isaac’s, a great cathedral, and Kazan Cathedral, and so on. These were magnificent buildings which I passed every day, which I admired and liked, and sometimes went into. No. I don’t think Petersburg had a lot of overt anti-Semitism. That’s the point.

GC The liberal condition.

IB Existed to some degree.

GC But let’s come for a second back to the small town where you were before Petersburg, between ...

IB Andreapol.

GC Yes, at the village. It was a village with more or less a Jewish squire.

IB No, not at all.

GC Not the nobleman that was there in the manor house, but your parents were ...

IB He wasn’t a nobleman, he was just a landowner.

GC But your parents were the richest ...

IB Yes.

GC ... who employed everybody?

IB Yes. The firm.

GC And the teacher had to treat you ...

IB Special treatment.

GC Special treatment. And so on and so forth. Didn’t this cause a little resentment among the gentiles? Did you feel ...?

IB There were no gentiles in our life. No, there were shopkeepers. You went in to buy candles in an ordinary shop and they served you the candles. They did the same for the peasants. You see what I mean, they didn't feel this Jewish hierarchy at all. They were people who sold things that people happened to need.

GC I see.

IB There was a policeman somewhere. I never met him. There were these officers that I told you [about] who used to visit my mother in the evenings. They certainly didn't. What gentiles could there have been?

GC And you said that the young ...

IB They were peasants.

GC Young girls that would go to the forests.

IB That's right.

GC Jews and Christians together.

IB No. Only Jews. Because all the officials ...

GC Everybody.

IB Everybody was a Jew. The daughters of the shopkeepers were peasant girls. They didn't belong.

GC They wouldn't belong.

IB These were bourgeois. This is middle class. The Jews are a middle-class nation, no. There were no proletarians. There were no peasants.

GC There was no problem. So, until you came to England, you didn't ...

IB I remember one of those sights. I used to go into where my grandmother – my grandparents rented rooms from a man who was a shopkeeper.

GC Yes, of course.

IB And I remember some peasant woman coming in. She would call ‘Itzka’. ‘Itzka’ was short for ‘Yitzchak’, of course, ‘Itzka the Black’ because he looked so black; known as Itzka the Black. He said, ‘You’re still here? I thought you were dead. I was told you were dead.’ He didn’t congratulate being alive – ‘Ah, I thought you died’ – in any normal words. It impressed me, I was amused by that. ‘I thought you died ... can I have two pounds of something?’

GC Before we come to Yitzhak Sadeh another etymological question. When you defined your father’s feelings for the British, or Leonard Shapiro’s parents, you always said *Anglomania*, you didn’t say *Anglophile*.

IB About my father?

GC And Leonard Shapiro’s father.

IB No, he wasn’t at all. He wasn’t an *Anglophile*. He was not an *Anglophile*, he was simply ma...

GC So are you saying – no, I think you said it about this great uncle, who was a member of the Duma [Yakov Schapiro].

IB He came to live in England before the war.

GC Yes and you said ...

IB Before the First World War.

GC One of them you said ‘*Anglomaniac*’, and your father too. Why don’t you use a milder word, ‘*Anglophile*’?

IB Well, I could ...

GC But ...

IB I only use it ironically.

GC But I think ...

IB I use it ironically. My father's determination to come and live in England and to live as the English lived and his passion for the English in general was beyond ordinary friendly feelings for the English. 'Angloman' in Russian was a word [АНГЛОМАН].

GC I know.

IB And that simply meant that somebody was as it were, con... directly towards England, who was conditioned by some sort of English feelings, pro-English feelings of an unusually strong kind.

GC And you said it about ...

IB In the, the word being Angloman, Anglomaniacs were – was an ironical term for people who were on the whole conservative, conservative liberals who believed in justices of the peace, properly speaking anti-revolutionaries, right-wing liberals, they were always – one who admired England, who were not left-wing, not monarchists, but the sort of intermediate class of bourgeois liberals of a respectable, mildly conservative sort.

GC My father.

IB No doubt.

GC From the age of sixteen or seventeen.

IB No doubt. The English and the Dutch, they were two good nations because they were philo-Semitic. There was no anti-Semitism in England. No anti-Semitism in Holland. Every other country – Italy didn't exist for these people. But the European countries they knew were all in some degree anti-Semitic. France, Dreyfus. Germany discriminated against them. Austria was even –

Austro–Hungary was no good. Poland highly anti-Semitic. Romania ...

GC I can see.

IB Scandinavia was all right, but just outside the range, although there were a lot of Scandinavians in Riga.

GC The contact between Riga and Stockholm, and Riga and ...

IB It's quite close.

GC It's in the Hanseatic towns.

IB More with Scandinavia. Danes.

GC And I think even the Hanseatic architecture is ...

IB They are Teuton Germans, and these are Hanseatic. But there were contacts with Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Merchants lived there and traded across the Baltic. But anyway ...

GC We'll come to that later.

IB Let's come back to ...

GC Yitzhak Sadeh.

IB Yitzhak Sadeh. His parents were quite rich. He was a very remarkable man. I met him when, I think I told you. The first time I ever saw him was at his wedding, in 1912.

GC Schreierei [screaming].

IB Schreierei. [*laughter*] Schreimusik [screaming music].

GC Schreimusik!

IB Married to my aunt. He was an art dealer in Riga. He didn't want to go to crude business, thought art dealing was the least soiling, and

he had a particular taste for – again [?] and Anglomania of a certain kind – for English late eighteenth-century, early nineteenth-century paintings. Yes, he liked [George] Romney. He liked – who else? Elegant early nineteenth-century English portraits.

GC Joshua Reynolds?

IB Reynolds too, yes. And he used to supply us with albums of English paintings. The other thing which he was – he was a footballer, when there were not very many, and a ...

GC Wrestler.

IB Wrestler. The number of footballers in Russia in general wasn't very great. Jews, I mean, who – unheard of! And he was a painter's model. Of course he was physically well developed and he used to sit as a nude model for Latvian painters, which, again, was not a thing Jews did.

GC That was in Riga?

IB Riga.

GC After 1918?

IB No! Before!

GC Ah, in the early 1910s.

IB 1910, 1909, 1908. So the whole thing was very un-Jewish. He was felt to be – somewhat out. Still, he was Landoberg, he was called Yitzhak, and he was a cousin, and he was older, and he was quite all right, and he was an art dealer. Not art, but a dealer in art books. Various books. Mostly pictures, sometimes perhaps prints, photographs, various sorts. Then, next time I saw him was in 1917, when he became a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Militia, which he joined – no, sorry, I told you all about that. In 1914 he joined the Russian Army, immediately. He was bought back by his parents, which you could do. He immediately ran away and rejoined it. In 1917 he became a Socialist Revolutionary. Visited us in

Petrograd, carrying an enormous Mauzer pistol. My mother was so frightened, she took it from him and put it in a bath of cold water, like a bomb, in case it went off. But he was now a hero of the Revolution. Very exciting to meet him. And my parents were very pleased to see him, their relations were good.

GC It was between February and April.

IB May, June, yes. He was presumably under the command of Ruthenberg, who was the head of that group. I couldn't know it at the time. Then he joined the Red Guards, in 1918. And immediately became Bolshevik. And joined the Red Guards, that's what they were called, whom Trotsky created, and then travelled about with his wife. He had a little daughter, who in the course of these travels from one army camp to another died. He hadn't the faintest feeling.

GC His wife, you mean?

IB He and his wife and the child. The child died in 1919.

GC And he was indifferent.

IB I didn't see him in 1919. It was reported. Then he – the story is really quite simple – he left the Reds and joined the Whites.

GC People don't know this.

IB What to do ...

GC I know, he told me.

IB Joined the Whites, and found himself on the shores of the Black Sea, which was where the Whites were being – I think there was a certain amount of White occupation of those towns, Simferopol, Odesa, in 1919, 1918. One evening – that's his own story – he was sitting at the campfire and heard the officers' talk, straight anti-Semitic talk, so he decided it's not the place for him, so he and his wife got on the next boat which left from the Black Sea port and they didn't care where it went. It actually went to Constantinople. From Constantinople they went to Jaffa. The rest you know. In Jaffa

he became a stonebreaker. Solel Boneh. All right, I next saw him in London in 192...

GC The Exhibition.

IB ... for the Wembley Exhibition, where he came with a pavilion, with the Palestine pavilion, Jewish section, from Solel Boneh. All right, we'll leave him at that point. The rest ...

GC Did you ever ask him why he joined the White Army? It is a little ...

IB Well, because he thought the Reds were too – he joined the White Army because he was certainly upset by the Reds. He thought they were brutal, and he didn't like the discipline too much, and he thought they were terrible people. He thought Communists were terrible people until 194..., until ...

GC Until the war was ...

IB He never liked Communism at all. He was a pure adventurer. And he simply said to me what I repeated to you. 'The position was simple,' he said: 'Russians may throw bombs at us, the Americans never will, so we have to make friends with the Russians.' That's all it came to.

GC And that was the doctrine of [Moshe] Sneh.

IB It came to the same thing. I met Sneh in his house. Sneh said there's no doubt about it. Immigration in Palestine will come from South Africa and Argentina, but there's bound to be anti-Semitism there, they will come in thousands.

GC But on the other hand, he became a Communist out of Jewish motives. He was sure, I mean Sneh, that the Russians will occupy ...

IB That we must come to terms with them. It had no political – I agree with you.

GC And as he didn't have nuances, either ...

IB Oh no, exactly.

GC But in your family, Yitzhak Sadeh was an anathema.

IB No, oh no. Only after he left his first wife.

GC But when he left her, he was.

IB That was in the 1920s, late 1920s. She went back to Moscow, and I saw her in 1945.

GC She left because he left her.

IB Obviously. He treated her badly, I am sure. She was hideously ugly. She was a graduate of two universities, she was a bluestocking of the first order, she was a socialist, she had two PhDs, anything you would like. Frightfully ugly, worshipped him. His first cousin.

GC And they had only one child, who died.

IB That's right.

GC And you saw her in 1945?

IB In Moscow, yes.

GC What position did she have?

IB None – I don't know. She lived in a room with her brothers, in extreme squalor, and half blind. It was [?]. I think she had a little government job in some office. She lived out her life very very sadly. My mother's sister [Ida] was in a much better position. When she married the grandson of the Patriarch [Yitzhak Samunov] ...

GC You told me.

IB This is my father's sister [Evgenia Berlin]. She was a sad, ugly, rather depressed woman.

GC So she didn't even ask you about Israel, Zionism, nothing?

IB It was too dangerous. Took no interest. It was an episode in her life. He pretended he was a Zionist, but I don't know if he was.

GC Who?

IB Yitzhak.

GC Ah, yes. Now you once said something that I remember – that he might have ended up as a general in Uruguay or Mexico or ...

IB He made patriotic speeches to my family in 1925, about our land. He taught me the song that was then [one of the?] patriotic songs. I had already learned Zionist songs in 1917, in Petersburg, in Petrograd. I learned things like 'Shomrei ha-Arazim' ['Guardians of the Cedars'], in German 'Dort wohnen die Zeder' ['There the Cedars dwell']. I learned the 'Tikva' ['The Hope'],⁴ certainly. Probably other things as well. 'Sham shu'alim yesh ba-ginot sheli' ['There are foxes in my garden']. That was 1917.

GC And the little song 'Sham shu'alim yesh' is also in German?

IB No. That's an Israeli Palestinian song.

GC Well, it can't be Palestinian, it is ...

IB Not German.

GC Not German, nor Russian.

IB Russian it might have been.

GC Because you see the composers usually ...

IB No, it wasn't Russian. None of the Russian – it was Jewish. It had a kind of ...

⁴ Written in 1878; became the anthem of the state of Israel.

GC It could be Jewish.

IB Wallachian, Romanian, that kind of thing,

GC Yes, Moldavian, you are quite right, sorry, you are quite right.

IB Da da da da – da da da [*claps hands while singing*]. Much more like Hasidic songs. ‘Sham shu'alim yesh baginot sheli’. It was the song of the ‘Shomrim’ [watchers].

GC ‘Se'u Ziona nes ba-degel’ [‘Set up the standard toward Zion’, Jeremiah 4:6].

IB No, that I don't know.

GC That's the song called ...

IB Same sort of thing.

GC And then you said, what kind of songs did they teach you in Petrograd?

IB Oh! ‘Be-tzet yisra'el mi mitzraim’ [‘When Israel went out of Egypt’: Psalm 114:1].

GC Ah, very nice.

IB That was a psalm which I already learned at school, in Latin. Because there is a Mendelssohn version of it. ‘De [In] exitu Israel de Aegypto, domus Jacob de something or other [populo barbaro]. [?] Iordanus [Iordanis] traversus est prorsum [retrorsum].’ I remember.

GC I always remember when you once went to a Seder, I think in Ginosar.

IB With Yigal, yes.

GC And you came back and you told me ‘They don't realise, but all their songs come from Mendelssohn, or from ...’ [*laughter*]

IB Exactly. But that wasn't Daniel. No. Not Mendelssohn. The song he taught me about was by this time already a Palestinian Jewish song.

GC You know that one of the best composers we had – we had three or four excellent composers in the Mandate period that really raised the level of the popular song to an extent that until now maybe it's the best kind ...

IB Quite.

GC ... kind of art we had.

IB Quite.

GC One of those four or five was [Samuel] Sambursky's brother.

IB Kurt Sambursky.

GC Yes. Daniel Sambursky.

IB Composer.

GC He came from Berlin, and for two or three decades was conductor of choirs, teaching popular music all over the country, paid by the Histadrut [labour organisation], and some so beautiful popular music.

IB Still played.

GC Still played, still sung, very Zionist, very patriotic.

IB Not only patriotic but beautifully done.

GC Beautifully done. And there are about three, four other – in this respect I think they are chief in art more than in any other thing. To this day the popular songs, the *chansons* in Israel is always very highly

...

IB Dates back to Mandate. Another Yitzhak Sadeh song of course was the 'Hora', which I'd never heard before. That was also taught. He presented me with two books. He lived with us, at that time, and so did my aunt, in Kensington, where we lived. Every morning he went off to Wembley. In the evenings I don't know what he did – went to the cinema? Our relations were very good then. He then told me the story about how he went to jail during the Jabotinsky riots, and how rude he was to Lady Samuel. She came to inspect the prison, the High Commissioner's wife, and his sentence was doubled as a result. Very pleased with that. He had no feeling for Jabotinsky himself, nothing at all. He wasn't a friend, didn't know him, and so on. I don't know whom he knew in those days.

GC He was then a central leader in what was called 'Gedud ha-Avoda', the Labor Legion.

IB That's right. Labor Legion.

GC It was very very interesting, in a way unique social ...

IB Who were the leaders of that?

GC He was one of the leaders, but Dolek Horowitz was ...

IB I see.

GC And the two main leaders were Dolek Horowitz and somebody called Mendel Elkind. But in 1929 there was a group of splinters who went back to Russia.

IB Really?

GC And this is the trauma – we have in Israeli Labor history several traumas: [Haim] Arlosorov. But *the* trauma is Elkind's departure.

IB Then he disappeared.

GC He disappeared. His wife was found. They established a small colony in the south. And then of course during the 1930s they were persecuted. We found out what happened to him only lately. He was

sent to a Gulag. His wife was still alive a few years ago and somebody spoke with her and heard all about this.

IB The facts, yes.

GC And this trauma created this kind of conditioned reflex against any Communist.

IB Let me tell you. I had a friend called Rachmilevich whom I talked to you about. He went to Palestine in 1947–9. By then, 1951, I think, he was ill, and he was in hospital, and next to him was some member of the Mapam. And they began to talk politics, and he made some pejorative reflection about Stalin, and the man said, 'Please don't say that.' It caused him pain.

GC Rachmilevich said it?

IB No, the man said it to Rachmilevich. Rachmilevich was a Menshevik all his life. He was a typical Russian Jewish Social Democrat. Afterwards Stalin, of course – he made some nasty hostile remark about Stalin, and the man said, 'Please stop talking: it gives me pain.' This was in 1947, 1948.

GC Yes, that could be somebody who was ...

IB Like the man in Prague, actually.

GC Pardon?

IB Like the man who went to Prague and was arrested.

GC Oh yes, [Mordechai] Oren. In 1947 somebody could be a sheer Communist. If you are a Communist, you are a Communist.

IB A Communist, yes.

GC But the point was, within the Labor Party, the danger of ...

IB There was an extreme left wing, yes.

GC Secondly, after the Second World War and the heroism of Stalingrad on the one hand, and the Jews who were saved by the Russians on the other hand ...

IB Oh, they were quite ...

GC And Gromyko in April 1947.

IB Of course, of course this.

GC This could have been.

IB Yes. I came in 1947 to Palestine, before Gromyko, to see Weizmann. Before the meeting and all that. And I remember travelling in a boat, in this little boat from Marseilles to Haifa. I can't remember whom I'd talked to. First of all I talked to Litvinsky. He was on that boat.

GC Oh, I'll tell you about the family.

IB He was just an ordinary ...

GC Very rich.

IB Balabos [Jewish house-owner]. Yes. But of no great interest. Then I talked to what's his name, that's where I made friends with him, [Yitzhak?] Tabenkin. He was also on that boat.

GC You met Tabenkin then?

IB Certainly, then and afterwards. I knew Tabenkin. And there was a man with Tabenkin, I can't remember his name, also some kind of Zionist official ...

GC It was probably spring 1946.

IB ... who came over from Europe, summer 1947.

GC Summer 1947. Tabenkin went to see the camps of the DPs in Germany.

IB Could be. We are now in something like August 1947, July 1947.

GC If you speak before Gromyko's speech, it was Apr...

IB It was October, November, what ...

GC No, the speech of Gromyko was in April.

IB It was then: I don't know about that. When was the speech – in New York?

GC Yes, there was a special session of the United Nations.

IB On this subject.

GC On this subject only.

IB Before the vote?

GC It was there that they established the United Nations Special Committee.

IB Yes, well, this was published, and so on – and then it came to Palestine. Gromyko had already made a speech then. I don't think I was there, anyhow. What I can tell [you] is that this other man, somehow I can't remember – who was also certainly an official, who said I was talking to Communists – I said, 'You know, there are some honest Communists in the world.' 'People don't deny it,' he says: 'there are some very decent people who are Communists', when I suddenly saw where this was going. That was the date. Tabenkin didn't quite see that ...

GC But he didn't prevent it.

IB I'm sure he didn't. We stopped in Lebanon, I remember. I was allowed to come down, because my passport said that I was a British official. Tabenkin was not. Nor my father. Nor my father. Beirut. They were not allowed to come down. Jews weren't.

GC You know why. It's the boycott of the Arab League.

IB Very likely: all those that weren't British officials – wouldn't let them land. And 'Ai Levanon, Levanon', said Tabenkin, 'Lama lo, lama lo? [Why not?] Ay ay ay!' How this went on.

GC Did you speak with Yitzhak Sadeh English?

IB No, Russian.

GC did he speak with you about literature?

IB No, he wasn't in the least interested.

GC He tried to show off.

IB He may have pretended to.

GC Is disciples in Israel see ...

IB As an intellectual. I don't think so. That is a put-on. My aunt, his wife, could have talked to him, he may have caught something from her, but he was not interested in books.

GC Yes, but it is interesting.

IB I saw him in 1947, when he had a price on his head. I was seeing the Weizmanns. I went to Tel Aviv, and I went to a cafe. I didn't know how I traced him. I must have met somebody.

GC Somebody must have taken you.

IB I'm sure.

GC I can tell you whom. I'm sure that it was the bodyguard of Yitzhak Sadeh. Yitzhak Sadeh had – no, sorry, when Weizmann was in Israel he always had somebody in charge of his security.

IB Yitzhak Sadeh was for a time. Weizmann liked him very much. Ben-Gurion hated him. Weizmann used to call him 'Reb Yitzchok'.

GC There was a special relationship.

IB And he liked Weizmann. He loved Weizmann.

GC I know.

IB Weizmann loved him. It's all true. When I went to see him at this cafe, at the back somewhere, secretly, he was very jolly, in an extremely good mood. This was in 1947. Why am I telling you this? Because that was the first time I saw him: until then my family had refused to let me go and see him. That I ignored. My father was there and refused to meet him. But I did not. And then I saw him again at his house in Jaffa.

GC That's when he was ill?

IBs Not yet.

GC Ah, not yet.

IB He was full of trophies from the war and he gave me very vivid descriptions of capturing foreign fortresses. I told him he was Garibaldi. He liked that very much. He signed his last letter to me 'Garibaldi'. And that's when Sneh came to his house. It wasn't till then. That's when he was to go and see the Soviet Ambassador.

GC That was 1949, I think.

IB It was 194... [*thinking*]

GC It can't be earlier.

IB He wasn't earlier, no. It might have even been later.

GC Later, all right, but not earlier.

IB 1950, 1951 is more like it.

GC Yes.

IB More like it. When did he die? 1952, 1953?

GC 1953.

IB Eleven months. That sort of period. About two years before. I saw the last wife. She was a sort of 'sniperette'. Very militarised lady.

GC She was a good photographer. She was a Yekke.

IB [*unclear*]

GC From Givat Brenner. She died.

IB Of cancer. I saw of course his – I saw ...

GC The son.

IB Is his name Yoram? Very nice.

GC It was my initiative.

IB It was.

GC When we were invited to Yitzhak Navon.

IB Correct.

GC He asked me whom to invite. I told him: Surely, invite Yoram Sadeh. It was a very good idea. For them it was a real experience.

IB Very nice for me too. I have not seen him since. I always meant to. I think I have an address somewhere.

GC He lives in the same house.

IB In a ...

GC In Jaffa.

IB Jaffa.

GC And he makes his living from translations. He translates for Am Oved [publishers].

IB Oh, I really must. I'm going for three, four days at the end of January, beginning of February, for these Rothschild, I'm – in [a] few years, I need somebody else, I need a lawyer.