ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 8

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Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 8

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Transcribed by: Donna Shalev

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'They'll kill you in the end.'
Ernest Bevin

Side A

GC In the meeting before last, we started speaking about Weizmann and your relations with Weizmann, but we only started, so – it was the meeting before last, not the last one. To begin with, I want to go back to the nature of your relations with Weizmann, where did it start and how it developed. And I'll tell you why; you mentioned that – I think that you told me that when you decided that you are going to Washington, or to New York, you came to consult him first.

IB Correct.

GC How come? That meant that you were already either personally or politically …?

IB We were friends. Yes, I'll tell you. I met Weizmann very late, comparatively speaking. People used to urge me to meet him. For example, there was a girl called Ingrid Warburg, who was a member of that family, daughter of a man called Fritz Warburg, who was quite pretty. Weizmann had a certain interest in pretty women.

GC Yes.

IB As you know. And she became a friend. She was a Warburg, she was a Zionist, and so on. So, she kept saying: Would I come to tea with her to meet him? – and so on. And I don't know why I didn't want to, quite, be there under those auspices. Maybe I would have done, but I paid no attention. The first time – I'd seen him once or twice addressing Jewish meetings, but drawing-room meetings, not public meetings, so I knew what he looked like. But that's all I knew. The first time I actually spoke to him was in 1939, I would say. Maybe 1938, or 1939. I'll tell you exactly what happened. I was a member of the committee, or whatever it was, of the Friends of the Hebrew University; Bentwich made me that.

GC Even before the war?

IB Before the war, yes.

GC You were so young.

IB I wasn't so young, I was thirty, I was twenty-nine or whatever I was – no, much more. I was I think in the middle thirties. Bentwich discovered that I was at All Souls, therefore I was a Jewish acad… – there weren't many Jewish academics in that kind of position, so that he somehow became aware of me and enrolled me, made me President of the Hebrew University, and there was a meeting in Mrs and Mr – wait a minute, whose house was it in? In Park Lane, in – it must have been in Israel Sieff's house. No, in Simon Marks's house.

GC Simon Marks.

IB Which was addressed by Samuel, by Rokoff, by various people of that sort, and my duty – I was instructed to second the words of thanks to Mrs – Lady Marks for – not Lady Marks, no, Lady Sieff.

GC Yes, well.

IB No, it was Sieff's house, not Marks's. The Lady Sieff, not Marks.

GC May be Marks's house and he [Sieff] was there.

IB Marks's sister. No, they had different houses. This was Marks's sister. I was ordered to second the vote of thanks for allowing her drawing-room to be used for this purpose. It wasn't a very prominent part of the proceedings. I tried to get out of it, and failed, so I had to get up and do it, and all I wanted to say was 'When we think of Mrs Sieff, we simply think she is very very rich. That's all we think about.' But that I restrained myself from saying, and I uttered the conventional phrases, and then Bentwich introduced me to Weizmann, who immediately began asking me who I was and what I was doing. And at the end of this, he said: Would I come to tea? – because I was a don at Oxford. All this was very unusual. And he was then living at the Dorchester, or at – not in Addison Crescent or wherever it was. This must be in 1939. So I went to tea with him and his wife. I talked to her in Russian; she rather took to me because I talked in Russian. Then we made friends, more or less. And then I used to go and see him about once in two months, in three months, until the outbreak of the war, and after. And then I went to America in 1940, July of 1940. I was going to Moscow. I did not consult him about going to America; I consulted him about going to Moscow. Simply because I saw him. From time to time I told him I thought it was quite mad, I doubt going to Moscow, as I thought – you don't know this story of mine, the journey to Moscow, do you? No, that's a long story, which I'd better tell you separately. And I said: this ridiculous idea of going to Moscow as a press attaché, the idea of getting bits of British propaganda into *Pravda* during the Russo–German pact, didn't seem to me a very promising enterprise, [then] or at any time. He said, 'No; nevertheless, it's very good to have Jews everywhere.' So I went, anyhow. Then I didn't see him until I came back, which was in the beginning, I think very early in – very early October, 1940. And then

I used to go and see him fairly regularly, and during the Blitz. Tremendous noises going on, in –

GC The Dorchester.

IB Not in the Dorchester, no. In Hyde Park, opposite. It was where the anti-aircraft guns were. And he never – everybody used to rush to the cellar, but he didn't. I was very frightened, but as he was not, I stayed with him. And then he told me endless stories. I said – if he wanted to charm one, he was able to, and I allowed myself to be charmed. He told me endless fascinating stories about people, about his life, about the Zionist movement, about individuals. I used to go and see him at fairly frequent intervals. Then – that was in October, November, December, January, 1940 , 1941. Now, let me see. In …

GC When you were asked to go for the second time to Washington.

IB In 1941, yes. That is correct, I think. In 194… – no, in 1940, I remember, I already went to – but that's when I already in Washington. In 1941 – no, I didn't go, come to think of it. In 1941 I simply was given a job, in New York, admitted [administered?] by the Ministry of Information, and I said goodbye to him. By that time his son was already killed – that was the second son – in the Battle of Britain. They were in a terrible state. And he went to Washington, or New York, about the same time as I did. He and his wife travelled through Portugal, because I saw him in New York in 1941, when I lived in New York. I was in New York from February of 1941 until, roughly speaking, about February of 1942, perhaps March 1942.

GC [*can't hear: perhaps:*] Winter 1942.

IB What? Winter 1942. Then I went to England, but when I came back, I went to Washington, except that I fell ill. No, that's in [late September] 1942. I travelled in an aeroplane in Spring 1942 with Lippmann and Crossman. And Crossman was tremendously rude to Walter Lippmann. Walter Lippmann was a gentle, quiet, rather crypto-Jewish sort of man who was snobbish, Anglophile. Crossman pitched into him and, as you can imagine, was hideously rude to him. Well, I knew them both. I had met Lippmann, just, and

Crossman I knew very well, intimately. I've just talked about him to Anthony Howard.

GC I met him.

IB Yes.

GC He, by the way, wants to ask me about his Zionist status.

IB He can.

GC I'll tell him that he can.

IB Well, I'm not quite sure [when] I'll be seeing him again, but you can write him a postcard.

GC No, I can.

IB Say that I've met you, and that if he wants to ask you about that – send him a postcard to the *Observer*. He's a *Deputy Editor*. Say that you probably know more about Yigal Allon and people like that …

GC [*unclear*]

IB … than anybody

GC All the people that could …

IB Exactly.

GC I'm not …

IB You can say that I met you and told you, having talked about Crossman, that if he wants to know about the Israeli stuff, you're the man.

GC I'm sure that somebody will recommend that, anyway. When he will want to find out about the relationship of …

IB No – oh, I think he's willing to make notes whenever possible, that's all. You'll be in Israel by then. Why don't you do it?

GC It's all right.

IB Do you want me to ring him up? Do you want me to do anything?

GC No, I'll manage.

IB I shouldn't have told you. Well, all right. Then I used to see him when I was in New York. I must have seen him frequently. He lived at the St Regis Hotel, and I lived somewhere near. I saw him at least twice a month, if not more often. I can't remember how long he was in New York, when he went back to England then, or what happened. He was in a very crushed state about his son's death.

GC I tell you. He was in a – I think that most of the time he was in the States.

IB Yes.

GC He came, came back, and then went again.

IB That's quite correct. I just wonder – well, there was a very … I'll tell you what I know.

GC I [need?] the dates.

IB I know the following. I know the dates. Well, in 1941 I lived in New York, and I was in the British Information Services, and I was a propagandist, and the reasons for my job, one of the things I had to do was to make propaganda for Jews. And the Ministry of Information, before they sent me to do this, consulted him about – in London – about whether I would be suitable. He said to them 'Totally suitable.' So he was one of the people who was consulted about my suitability as a British Ambassador to the American Jews. I had other constituencies also. I had to talk to the Catholics, Mormons, all the non-U, all the unsmart groups.

GC You mean the unionist groups.

IB What?

GC Unions?

IB Yes. Certainly they do. I don't know if I ever told you this story, it' s quite amusing, about how I learned about the American labour movement.

GC You told me very long ago, and I don't remember. I tell you when, it was just an opportunity. You met at my house, or at Yehoshua Arieli's house, a colleague of Yehoshua, who was an American, a professor of sociology, who was then very active in the Trade Unions. And …

IB I remember the man.

GC And you had a common subject.

IB I remember the man. I started telling you this story. Let me tell you the story now.

GC All right.

IB Let me tell you – you're out of order: now you want to go on with Weizmann. All right, I'll finish, I'll finish with Weizmann – wait a minute. So I was in New York in 1941. This story happened in 1941, the story I am about to tell you. Naturally. Then came Pearl Harbor, and then I was transferred to the Embassy in 1942. That is also the story of how – why I was transferred. It's a separate chapter, nothing to do with Weizmann. Then I came back from England in the summer – late, early summer of 1942, I think [September]. That kind of season, anyway. End of summer. With Crossman and Lippmann, and I caught pneumonia on the way, because the aeroplane kept going off and coming back, and I had to sleep in that very cold room in Ireland, which is where it all happened in that – there was a man who coughed all night, an architect. Anyhow I came with pneumonia to New York. Then I went to hospital for a month, and at the end of the hospital I recuperated in Weizmann's house in

the Catskill Mountains. He had a kind of – there was a thing called Grossinger's [Grossinger's Catskill Resort Hotel]. It was a famous Kosher establishment with cottages and restaurants and God knows what. A rich establishment.

GC The Borscht Belt.

IB It was called the Borscht Belt. The Borscht Belt in the Catskills. And that's where he had a house. And Mrs Weizmann describes all this in her autobiography, my visit. And that's where I stayed for about a fortnight, and then I came back to New York, and then went straight off to Washington after about a week in New York, to the Embassy. That's when my Embassy life started. After that I saw Weizmann less often, because he was in New York and I was in Washington. When I came to New York , I used to occasionally go and have tea with him. When he came to Washington, he used occasionally to ring me up, and I would then go to some rich Jew in whose house he was living, or some hotel, and see him. This went on until he went back to England, which was, I don't know when, in 1943 maybe. I think it probably was in 1943.

GC It wasn't.

IB Maybe not. Maybe 1944.

GC No, I think it was not.

IB In 1944, certainly. But maybe before or after.

GC He went back …

IB Anyway, Josef Cohn was my go-between whom I who used to come and see me in general, to chat. Josef, I recently heard, is dead.

GC A year ago.

IB Very recently – no, less than that.

GC Even less?

IB Yes. And Weisgal I knew, of course. Weisgal and Josef Cohn were the intermediaries. They were the people he saw most.

GC Josef Cohn was also in the States?

IB Oh, entirely. With him continuously. He was attached to the secretary. He was his personal secretary. And of course …

GC [Ernst David] Bergmann.

IB Bergman, yes. But Bergman was his scientific assistant. They went together to wherever it was, the Middle West, where experiments were made, to a place called Terre Haute [in Vigo County, Indiana], where there was a laboratory, where the oil was cracked, and all the rest of it. And I used to go to dinner with Weizmann. Sometimes Israel Sieff would appear. Sometimes Victor Cazelet would come, those kind of pro-Zionists. Who else did I meet there? I went, I remember, to Seders which Weizmann – did he hold them himself, or did he go to other people's houses? I think probably I was taken by him to someone like [Siegfried] Kramarsky, who was a rich banker …

GC I remember.

IB … from Hamburg in New York.

GC Yes, I remember letters.

IB They probably organised the Seder. I went to one Seder, at least two Sedarim with Weizmann in New York. Then Dorothy Thompson would come, and Weisgal would come, and a man called Jo something, who was a sculptor, would come. Jo Davidson. Those kind of people. I never knew whom, when Weizmann – and of course Weizmann, and of course Mrs Weizmann, and Josef Cohn, who was not married, and that sort of person. And on one occasion at David Lazar's there was a dreadful man called André Meyer, a multi-millionaire. He gave money to Weizmann from time to time because Weizmann was useful to him in ways which I'd rather not

commit to this instrument. I could tell you that privately.[1] Right, now, Weizmann. Well, there's not much more to tell. We were terrific friends. We became great friends, and then after that I saw him in London, in 1945, when he was in a pretty bad state. He was then negotiating mainly with the head of the Colonial Office, who was a man …

GC [*unclear*]

IB What?

GC George Gatan[?].[2]

IB George Gatan[?], who was not unsympathetic, with whom he got on quite well, you see. But he used to tell me about people – he hated Curzon, of course. More than … In the early days when he went to see Curzon in the Foreign Office he said, 'Lord Curzon, the temperature of this office has gone down by a very great many degrees since I was here last.'

GC I see.

IB [*laughter*] Then he saw – he disliked [Selwyn] Lloyd, because he wouldn't create a Jewish army, of course.

GC That's earlier, that's in the war.

IB That's in the war.

GC Now, during the war, he would go and see John Martin.

IB Yes.

GC And there was a certain [Desmond] Morton, in Churchill's …

[1] Here the cassette recorder is moved away and then moved back. The transcriber writes: 'Gaby, should I try to decipher the following anecdote, which IB tells away from the microphone?' Time may tell whether this is possible.

[2] The Colonial Secretary at the time was George Henry Hall.

IB Morton was the head of Intelligence [Churchill's Personal Assistant], yes.

GC He was a late …

IB He was the head of Intelligence. Correct.

GC It was very crucial, and so on, because – I'll tell you why. I don't know whether you know. I'll tell you something.

IB By all means.

GC Our agreement, I mean the Jewish Agency [?] agreement with the SOE in 1941 defined our commitments and Agent G [?] commitments, enabling us to use the air connection, how do you call it, the telegraphic connection, the secret telegraphic connection of the SOE. We could use it for our political purposes, which means that Weizmann could connect – contact Washington or Jerusalem. The only stipulation was that it should be *en clair*, not coded, and that was of immense importance. Because that enabled us to be in contact – Weizmann to be in contact with Zionists all over the world …

IB Quite so.

GC … during the war. And it was through, in London …

IB Morton did it.

GC It was through Morton.

IB Quite so.

GC And in 1943 there was a crisis, and it stopped. That's another story. Then – and Morton, several times when he told his friends that he saw Churchill he had to refer [to?] Martin [?].

IB He more or less kept – sat downstairs, and checked the visitors. Very close, I mean, he was, the men employed by him, as [?] or intelligence, and generally so: he was a man who passed – people

who wanted to see Churchill he always had to approve, unless he knew them, or very important people. But people from outside, he had to check up on them.

GC And how did he become close to Churchill? In the 1930s he used to provide him with information.

IB Ah, about the Germans.

GC Not about the Japanese politics?

IB Exactly.

GC He – and there was a certain young Ralph Wigram.

IB Oh, I know who that is. I knew his widow [Ava Waverley], intimately.

GC She was the wife of Anderson [Lord Waverley].

IB That's so.

GC And that, the young …

IB Wigram was very anti-German.

GC That's the point. That's why he was ready to …

IB Of course. Ralph [he pronounces it 'Rayf'] Wigram – he was called Wigs by his friends. He died comparatively early [1936].

GC Very.

IB During the war.

GC At the beginning.

IB Or before the war. Beginning of the war. Yes.

GC He and another young very bright boy.

IB Foreign Office boy. What?

GC Another with him, I mean he was [killed?] or died?

IB Died.

GC Died. And that's how he became close to Churchill, I mean Morton. Yes, but coming back to you.

IB I can tell you a sort of joke about Morton. Nothing to do with anything, but talking about him. Martin told me that he was in the room when Vansittart came down the stairs to see Churchill. Of course they were on very good terms, too. And Churchill turned to Morton and said 'John,' or whatever his name was, 'our friend …'

GC Desmond.

IB Desmond. Correct. Our friend Van has many wonderful qualities. We all know that. We all love and admire him. But there is one property he has which no other human being known to me has. It's unique in the world. So far as I know he's the only man who possesses it. He likes Dalton.

GC [*laughter*] That's a very good story.

IB [*laughter*] That's a very Churchill story .

GC Churchill didn't like Dalton.

IB Of course not. Nobody liked Dalton much. He had some protégés, like Gaitskell and Crosland and Gerard [?] and what's-his-name, and Jenkins.

GC One can say something: that he encouraged young people.

IB No doubt. He was somewhat anti-Semitic.

GC Was he?

IB Yes. He was. And he was homosexual. All these things are true. No. These things are true. Loud voice.

GC Yes, I've heard so.

IB Loud, coarse. He shouted.

GC [*unclear*]

IB That's right. That's it. Exactly. Not a bad man, just happened to be anti-Semitic. They all were, I mean, not only Be… – Bevin wasn't so terribly anti-Semitic to start with.

GC No worse than many others.

IB Became so. Morrison certainly was. In the Labour Party, Attlee in a quiet way. Didn't like Jews.

GC And he was from the beginning anti-Zionist.

IB That I know. But he didn't like Jews. And what's-his-name, Roy Jenkins, who wrote his life, told me so [?].

GC I wouldn't be surprised.

IB No, it is so. In a kind of Church of England way. I'm trying to think which – the only people who were nice to Jews in the Labour cabinet were, let me see, oh, [Arthur] Creech Jones later was all right. Who did, for example, the Zionists see? They were quite close to some protection [?] of the Labour Party. Who were the Zionists?

GC In the Cabinet?

IB No. In the Labour Party.

GC Ah, in the Labour Party. Berl Locker [?]

IB No, who did Berl Locker [?] see? Who were Berl Locker's contacts?

GC I see. He would see many people.

IB Creech Jones only. During the war?

GC Not only, but …

IB During the war.

GC During the war. And during the war Creech Jones was the Parliamentary Private Secretary of Bevin.

IB Ah yes, I see.

GC [So] that he knew what Bevin …

IB Quite. I was saying [?]. Nobody else. After all, there were Labour contacts.

GC There were Labour contacts.

IB There must have been.

GC Now, Israel Sieff would be in contact with Bevin?

IB Wasn't Bevin its leader during the war?

GC No, no, not in the war.

IB I'm talking about the war.

GC Ah. During the war, they would see only Creech Jones. They never –through Creech Jones they might see, might have seen, Bevin.

IB No, I understand. But no other Labour leader.

GC Never Attlee.

IB Never Attlee.

GC As long as Dov Hoz lived, he would see Morrison.

IB Yes. All right.

GC He had contacts.

IB Hoz had contacts with …

GC And who else was a Minister? Cripps was.

IB During the war. Let me see. No, nobody. Ah, Dalton was.

GC [Arthur] Greenwood.

IB Greenwood, yes. And Greenwood's son. Yes.

GC And [Philip] Noel-Baker.

IB Noel-Baker too, yes.

GC But they were weaker.

IB Of course.

GC [*laughter*]

IB And there was of course Dalton, but they didn't see him.

GC They didn't see him. No. They didn't. He had some contacts. He knew [Moshe] Sharett. He knew Sharett from the LSE days.

IB Anyway, let's go back to Weizmann.

GC Exactly.

IB Then, in 1945 – I remember 1945 was a very – he thought he could do something with Gayter [William Hayter?], and Gayter [?] encouraged him. But by the time we came to 1946, which was when I came back from Moscow, everything had hardened, because of Bevin. The government had fallen, and Adolf Bevin, he used to call

him then, and Bevingrad and all that, in Haifa, you remember [?], and all that. And then he more or less took up the position 'tamut nafshi im plishtim' ['Let me die with the Philistines' – Judges 16:30]. Quite straightforwardly. The Jews would have to revolt.

GC Really?

IB Because – what?

GC Really?

IB Yes. There's no doubt, by that time he was desperate. He said, well, he didn't want to, but if it had to be, it couldn't be let go like that. And I used to say to him, 'The English want this, the English want that. I think that's what the policy is.' I wasn't in the Government, but as I had gone about, what, April, March, April 1946 [April], I came back from Washington, and he would say, 'It won't help them. It's too late. We shall get it. In the end, yes, the Jewish State will have a mandate over England. We shall treat them better than they are treating us. One might almost say, our enemies say that the United States is under our mandate [?].' Anyway – and then that's when I met Weizmann's son, whom he didn't like, and had dinner with him. When I came back and told Weizmann that I met Weidenfeld, who was the son of – [his?] son's friend, of Benji's[?] son. That's how I came – that's how Weidenfeld knew Weizmann. That's how he came to go with him to Israel, and so on. I remember very well an episode which I can tell you. Weizmann lived in London, he went to New York in 1947, certainly. Or during the [?]. I mean the Partition, and all that. Was he in London in November [?] of 1946? He may have gone to Palestine in between.

GC In 1946 he was …

IB In the summer of 1947 he was in Rehovot …

GC Yes.

IB … because I stayed with him.

GC In the summer of 1946, too. He came too in 1946 when the Anglo–American Commission was there.

IB Ah, yes.

GC That's right. Now, later I believe he had an eye operation in Scotland. Or was it in the end of 1945? After the war: 1945 or 1946.

IB Where was the operation?

GC He had an eye operation in London. And then to convalesce in Scotland for a while.

IB Well, [?] probably.

GC Probably.

IB She had a house there [Kilkerran House, Ayrshire].

GC Yes.

IB Balfour's niece [Blanche 'Baffy' Dugdale].

GC And he was in a very bad medical[?] state.

IB I understand.

GC It was I think in summer of 1946 [?].

IB Could well be.

GC [There?] were great [?] negotiations of Attlee.

IB That's when I saw him. I saw him in 1946 of course, and I can tell you something which happened. Now, what was it? A story I was going to tell you. Yes. I went to see him before dinner, and he was very contemptuous of my social life, and he said 'Who are you dining with? Which Lord or Lady?'

IB I was coming to this: his aristocracy, and yours.

GC There was a Lady called Lady Colefax, who was a famous hostess. He said, 'I call you Lord Colefax.'

GC [*laughter*]

IB It was so typical. There was no Lord Colefax. There was a man called Sir Arthur Colefax, and he was dead. Anyway, he used to mock me for seeing all these British aristocrats. And I used to receive it quite well. I didn't mind very much. And he kept pressing me to come to Israel with him and be his – and work for him and so on, which I evaded. And …

GC He asked you to join his staff, or …

IB Yes, to join his staff. [?] Some of – anyway, then, I remember, I went to dinner in the Dorchester with a Lady called Lady Cunard. She was a famous hostess. A fine [?] London hostess, American by nature. If I had known that she was nice to Ribbentrop before the war, I might not have made friends with her. Because of that I only became aware in the last five years. Anyway, she was a famous and rather brilliant hostess and gave dinner parties at the Dorchester by then. Well, I went to dinner, and I sat – on my right, don't forget this dinner party was a somewhat typical story of an amusing kind. On my right was, I don't know, I think Diana Cooper. On her right was a man called Lord Rothermere, who then owned these papers [?].

GC [*unclear*]

IB The [?], yes. Son of the old man. Then there was Lady Cunard. Opposite was the Peruvian, the Chilean Ambassador. Harold Acton was there, the aesthete [?]. Clarissa Churchill, as she then was.

GC Harold Acton was then accepted as [?] [*whole sentence unclear*].

IB Yes, in her circle, certainly. Clarissa Churchill was there, certainly. I remember particularly. Who else was there? And then there was Lady Rothermere on my left. The famous hostess afterwards called Mrs Fleming, she became. Ann Fleming, the famous political

hostess. But then she was married to Rothermere. And there was someone at the table, and there was a man whose name I have forgotten, with a name like Williams-Thompson, who wrote a book about Palestine. Williams-Thompson or Thompson-Williams [Richard Williams-Thompson, *The Palestine Problem* (London etc., 1946: Andrew Melrose)]. He was the Public Relations man for the Ministry of Supply by then. But he was in the Army, in Palestine, and wrote a very anti-Zionist book, which was widely read and reviewed. And somebody recommended him to Lady Cunard – an interesting man, wrote an interesting book, so this was his debut. He came to dinner and obviously sat next to Lady Rothermere and wanted to impress her, because he obviously wanted a job or something. Anyhow, he was quite new. I knew most, some of the people. But he knew nobody, and this was his sort of …

GC Debut.

IB Debut is what it was.

GC [*laughter*]

IB All right. And I was talking to my neighbour. Suddenly I heard him say to my neighbour on the left, to Lady Rothermere, with whom he was flirting – he was very handsome – he said, 'No, the Zionists are terrible people. They're dreadful. What they did to the Arabs is absolutely ghastly. I mean they're practically Fascists. Got rid of – they're cruel, they're nasty. They've stolen that country.' Literal anti-Zionist talk. I listened [to] this and thought, 'Oh my god, do I have to interrupt?' And so I stopped the dinner party, which is always rather an awful thing to have to do, embarrassing. Then I [heard him] say, 'Weizmann, of course – you know Weizmann is all right. He has given them up. He no longer sympathises with them. I mean, he knows, he thinks they're terrible. He's a perfectly decent man. He can't be having any business with them any more. He's, he's really left it, you know.' At that point I could bear it no longer, so I leant across my neighbour and I said, 'I'm so sorry. I'm afraid I've inadvertently heard what – you are just saying you talked to Weizmann. I left him three-quarters of an hour ago.' [*laughter*] 'And I can assure you that what you are saying is completely false.'

GC [*laughter*]

IB I've never seen a man more surprised. Never. At a dinner at Lady Cunard's, the last person you were likely to meet was a Zionist. Jew, maybe, but Zionist, inconceivable. Even a Jew could be unusual. The only Jewish friend she had I think was Hore Belisha, for some reason, and me, that's all. And so then he started back and said, 'You know Dr Weizmann?' and I said 'Yes. I know him very well. I've just seen him. I can assure you he's one hundred per cent in favour of the state of Israel, and nothing else' – which was not at all true. Weizmann didn't really want a state. And he said, 'Well, I'm not going to take anything back. I think that put you off the Jews in Palestine.' I said, 'Are you Jewish?' 'Yes.' 'Well, I'm sure you wouldn't approve if you saw what I saw.' So then we had an argument. This stopped the conversation, and we began, you know, Arabs have rights, Jews have rights. I think some compromise was reached, some statement of that type. And Clarissa loyally said, 'I quite agree with you. I'm sure that's the right way to go about it.' This was before she got married to Eden. And Lady Cunard couldn't take less interest in the whole subject, but decided it had been a great bore, so she said [*IB imitates a falsetto voice*], 'Oh, I've been listening to you talking. We're all on Isaiah's side.' [*laughter*] 'Everybody here agrees with him.' She said it in a loud voice. The man then said, 'All the same, I don't, I can't agree.' But he was squashed and talked no more. At the end of dinner, he came up to me and said, 'You know it's more [?] than one to a country. You have your views, I have my views, we're allowed to express them. Where do you live?' So I said, 'Well, I live with my parents, at Hampstead.' 'Can I give you a lift? I live nearby.' He gave me a lift. Quite a nice fellow. Just happened to be a routine anti-Zionist. Of course there were many people like that. There was some reason. You can't deny it. If you were in the British Army in 1946, you could think the Arabs were not being entirely justly treated. Between you and me, this can be admitted.

GC Of course.

IB [*laughter*] Anyway, I thought I'd tell you this anecdote. Right.

GC How did you become friends with this Lady Cunard?

IB Oh, because Clarissa took me to dinner there during the war. When I came back in 1944, she said there's this – I knew who she was. I didn't know before the war.

GC And Clarissa you knew.

IB Clarissa I knew because I met her in 1947 [1939/40?] when she was, I should say, wait – when she was 18 [19/20] – quite young – and I went to stay a weekend with Lord Oxford.

GC 1947 or 1937?

IB 1937. I went to stay a weekend with Lord Oxford, with his [grand?]mother. Lord Oxford didn't, was not a great friend of ours, but at that time we didn't …

GC But he didn't do anything [?].

IB Yes, he was. Before the war. He wasn't in the [?] Office. He was an undergraduate at Oxford. He was about four years younger than I. He just became a friend. He was very Catholic, a very fervent Catholic. We didn't talk about Zionism in those days. I was a friend of his, and he was living with his grandmother [Frances Horner], who was called Lady Horner. She was a very famous social lady from the Balfour and Curzon – the Souls, they were called [?]. She was …

GC I know the name.

IB She was a central figure of the Souls.

GC Horner?

IB Lady Horner, yes. They lived in Somerset. Now it's called Mells [Manor?]. And there was Lady Horner, and her daughter [Katharine] was Asquith's, Raymond Asquith's wife, widow. And my friend was his son. He was called Julian. And I was invited to a weekend and I went. There were one or two people I knew, and Clarissa was there. Clarissa was a Catholic by birth, as her mother was. And Lord Oxford had to be found a Catholic bride, I guess that's why she was asked. Just in case it was suitable. That's how I met her. Then we

became friends. I even met her – I knew David Cecil, who was a don at New College, in 1938. He was a great friend of Clarissa, that I do remember. So she used to come and he [?] used to – came to lunch once or twice. We became great friends. Then she came to Oxford in the winter of 1939.

GC About Oxford you told me.

IB Perhaps.

GC Why did she come to Oxford? Can't have been the war.

IB Nothing. Oh, because there was a blackout in London. There was a blackout here too, but not so much. And lots of people – it became a kind of small season [?], why not? She went to lectures, some sort of self-education. She and Margesson's daughter.

GC Gay?

IB Gay.

GC [*unclear*]

IB They came together. And people like Fitzroy Maclean.

GC Yes

IB Used to come here and see them.

GC She would come to Churchill during the war for lunches and dinners.

IB Who?

GC Clarissa. Quite often.

IB Would come to whom?

GC To Winston.

IB Winston. Well, she was the niece.

GC Yes, but not everybody …

IB But when, at what time? When during the war?

GC 1942.

IB Mrs Churchill did not like her. Let me tell you about her. She had a nervous breakdown, which lasted about a year and a half.

GC During the war?

IB Yes.

GC Incredible.

IB So that I don't think she went out to dinner then. It must have been after she recovered.

GC I can find out easily. It's in Colville's diary.

IB Colville's diaries.

GC There are some very important parts, so I had to go through it all.

IB He thought she was very attractive.

GC But he got Gay. He was madly in love with her.

IB But Clarissa went to his memorial service, which is more than I did, although I knew him. He wasn't a friend, I mean. Quite a nice man. Not terribly clever, but still.

GC He was pretending to be an intellectual; I met him.

IB He was not …

GC No, he was. His diaries are quite interesting.

IB But of course what's-his-name – Charteris used to talk to him about Palestine and Weizmann. Well, he was a policeman there.

GC Not a policeman. He was a chief of Intelligence.

IB Chief of Intelligence, I see.

GC He was there for a year. After, he came back.

IB Wait a minute, what …?

GC He came back late …

IB What relation did he have to [Baron] Ballantrae, later – to Fergusson, Bernard Fergusson?

GC I don't know. Perhaps they served at the same time in Palestine.

IB The same time.

GC He was brought to Palestine for several months [1946–7], and it was not a pleasant job.

IB Bernard Fergusson left when I [?]. That's when he had to leave.

GC He was in trouble.

IB Exactly. That's why he had to leave, but he was never anti-Israel.

GC No, he was not.

IB They remained quite friendly.

GC Then he came back. From New Zealand he came to Israel, he was [?], I met him.

IB Became quite friendly; I knew him quite well, and let me tell you, Charteris admired Weizmann enormously.

GC I can tell you about Charteris [?] a lot, because before the archives were opened, he was my main source.

IB I understand.

GC He was my …

IB He was quite friendly. He was quite a nice man.

GC And because of Churchill – I mean, because of Weizmann.

IB Not terribly interesting, but perfectly decent. Now he's Provost of Eton.

GC Yes.

IB And I still see him.

GC You do?

IB At dinner parties I meet him.

GC Yes, he once – I think he told me [is this OK?].

IB Yes, I meet him from time to time.

GC I go to see him once a week.

IB Yes, I meet him socially. And so on.

GC Now, he had an open house, Weizmann, when he came to Israel, because – but he knew Weizmann, and he – but he was close to – I think he was even related to him.

IB Could be.

GC And his [grand]mother [Mary Constance Charteris] was a very central figure in the Souls, I think. The grandmother of Charteris.

IB The grandmother is a famous Lady, yes.

GC Yes, and she was a friend of Balfour.

IB Nobody knows what happened. Whether there was an affair, or not. It's only a possible one. He said yes. That is the general idea.

GC Yes.

IB The general idea is that they did have one. Nobody could quite establish it. The biographies don't quite say that.

GC He said that she was a very close friend, or possibly a mistress [?].

IB Well, nobody is sure.

GC [*laughter*]

IB That's what I mean. Nobody is absolutely sure. If there was one, it was she. Nobody else was, that's quite certain.

GC So …

IB It doesn't matter, no; shake this. When I shake this, does it make a difference?

GC I think not.

IB No. Now, wait a minute, let's go on.

GC So you said that …

IB Weizmann.

GC You would meet Martin in 1947 after he came back.

IB Martin I'd only met later.

GC Charteris, when he came back.

IB Oh, much after that.

GC In the war.

IB Long after that.

GC After 1948.

IB Oh yes.

GC Ah, that's another story.

IB Long after that. I didn't know him then. I don't know when I first met him. I think he was probably already the Queen's secretary.

GC The Queen's secretary. Oh, OK.

IB Let me see now, you had begun with Clarissa. She took me to dinner where Lady Cunard then took to me. Oh, I used to go to dinner there, I don't know, about once a month, once in two weeks. She used to go to these dinner parties, at which I met a great many people, of a smart kind. But my social life really began in 1942. Before the war, the only country houses I'd ever been to were the house I've just told you, Mells [Manor], which was the house of Lady Horner …

GC When did you tell me?

IB Just now.

GC The mother of Julian Oxford?

IB Grandmother. Grandmother and mother both lived there. And Rothschild's, where I'd been asked to lunch by Jimmy, in the spring of 1933, because I'd been made a Fellow of All Souls.

GC Really?

IB And for a Jew to be made a Fellow of All Souls caused excitement.

GC Those were different times.

IB Well, of course those were different times, but for a Jew to be – he knew what – All Souls was much grander than it is. It was regarded as the absolute top of – nobody could go higher. And he became terribly excited. He couldn't conceive of how this could have happened. So John Foster, my friend from All Souls, was instructed to bring me to lunch. So I then went to lunch. There was Jimmy and there was Dolly, and there was Victor, and there was Miriam, his sister, and there was Venetia Montagu, and there was the Liberal Chief Whip whose name was – can't remember [Walter Rea] – was [*almost a sentence*] who was a man about town, and there were footmen by empty chairs, wearing white gloves, and then I made friends with Victor, too. Miriam I had just met. And I got on with Jimmy extremely well. And after that I used to go and see him frequently in London. From time to time. And in Waddesdon. I've stayed in Waddesdon, which was unusual in those days, because only about five rooms were open. The whole of the picture area and all of the treasures were locked. Double key. Nobody saw them. Everything was absolutely shut. But he used to sit in a huge leather armchair, and loved gossip. We got on extremely well, which was the only reason Dolly likes me. Anybody Jimmy liked, she liked automatically. [*laughter*]

GC By the way, she told me he liked – respected Bevin.

IB Could well be. Of course, well, it is possible.

GC [?]

IB Exactly. Why not? Certainly. So he's come to be an enemy, but as a man of some power, yes, exactly. He liked Beaverbrook, too. He liked Winston. He was very fond of Churchill. Friend of Beaverbrook. Friend of Lord Charles[?], probably. He was the friend of this thing called the Other Club. There was one called the Club, which was founded in the eighteenth century, to which various people like Joshua Reynolds and Dr Johnson belonged. Then there were people who were not elected to the Club, because

it was thought to be rather caddish. And they created the Other Club. That was Winston …

Side B

IB That's where Jimmy used to go. He adored the people there. They were full of temperament. I'll tell you who was a typical member of it, [Ted Manners sincerely afterwards [?] *unclear*]

GC Spiers [Spears?].

IB Spiers[?], yes, exactly. You could see this sort of thing. I should think anybody might be. Halifax would not. And there were certainly no socialists or anything of that sort. Never in all those years, might have been [?], I don't know who they were but the smart club of, oh, Duff Cooper, certainly – so you see the kind of thing. Tremendous rows. They used to get drunk. Scenes occurred. Rough – chaffing[?], they used to call it, and so on. Jacob was a member [of TOC].

GC Now.

IB Now. Yes, but now it's quite different. Or Jenkins or Goodman [both members of TOC]. I refuse to become a member, it' s no good to me. I don't like political clubs, which this was. Now, what about – Jimmy, yes, the country houses, 1942. That is because when I was in Washington in 1942, I met – both in Washington and later in New York in the Prop… – in the Information Office in which I had some business I met a man called Ronald Tree. Tree was a junior minister during the war, whom I knew very very well. He was a very rich grandson of Marshall Field from his mother's side, and son of Judge [Lambert] Tree of Chicago from his father's side. He married [Nancy Lancaster,] the niece of Lady Astor. And he bought a country house called Ditchley. That's exactly where he lived. Exactly. And he was with Eden, was anti-appeasement. He was a very honourable man. Totally honest. Extremely stupid. Perfectly decent. Large, fat, red-faced sort of gentleman. Pure American by birth. He went to Winchester and Columbia [*laughter*], that's where he went. But he was a millionaire, and he stuck to Eden and so on, and Macmillan and all that. And he was no. 2 in the Ministry of

Information, or no. 3. Harold Nicholson was no. 2. Duff Cooper was the Minister. By that time Brendan Bracken [?] – in 1942 Brendan Bracken was no. 2 [BB was Minister 1941–5], I think it was no longer Harold Nicholson. Anyway, he was a parliamentary secretary or something like that.

GC Yes. He knew …

IB He was an MP.

GC [?]

IB No.

GC No, Walter, Woolton [?].

IB Woolton?

GC Somebody who afterwards became a Cabinet Minister in the later Churchill Administration.

IB Not Woolton. Woolton was the Minister of Food.

GC And not Kilmuir.

IB Certainly not.

GC So I'll find it.

IB Kilmuir was a lawyer. Oh, yes Kilmuir was strict – maybe an Attorney General [Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain]. Not – could well be, but not that. The Minister was Bracken
.
GC Yes.

IB The head of the Ministry [Director-General] was Cyril Radcliffe. Harold Nicholson was no. 2 in 1940, but I don't think he was under Bracken – under Duff Cooper he certainly was. Not sure whether he stayed, maybe he still was. Maybe. Could be. Anyway, Ronnie Tree was parliamentary secretary or something of the Ministry.

Being American, he used to come to America in order to get Americans to help him. He came to America in 1941. That's where I met him. On the very day – quite, I met him on the very day when Hess flew to England. I remember. And he thought that that was a tremendous event, and probably the end of the war, or something. Anyway, he was not very intelligent. But loyal, devoted, energetic, decent, everything, and so on. But Member of Parliament for Market Harborough, defeated in 1945 when it was Labour, that's right, he said by Communists. The number of Communists in Market Harborough, which was the most rural district imaginable, can't be very great. Well, I got on with him, I met him, and I had long talks with him, and he invited me to Ditchley. Now, Ditchley during the war was a house which was not rationed. He had enough timber for their use and enough food, because Winston used to go there every fortnight. To stay.

GC And that was the place of the decoding of the Enigma.

IB Oh, no.

GC It was not Ditchley?

IB Oh, no, no. Enigma was – what's its name?

GC Bletchley.

IB Bletchley. Yes.

GC Oh yes, I'm terribly sorry.

IB Bletchley, certainly. No, Ditchley house was near Oxford. All these conferences meet.

GC Yes.

IB They have constantly anti-Israeli stuff going on.

GC Yes.

IB It's about [19 miles/45 minutes] from Oxford; it's in Woodstock [no: 20 minutes/10 miles away].

GC Yes, I know it.

IB Anyhow, yes, exactly. So there was his country house. His wife, as I told you, was a niece of Lady Avon, whom Winston liked, and Winston used to spend the weekend there. It was a kind of Chequers. Chequers was too dangerous. So he used to – and then Tree was more or less compelled to invite whomever Churchill wanted. When I went, Churchill wasn't there, but Duff Cooper was, and Brendan Bracken was, and all kinds of other people were, and he made friends with me, and I began going to – when I was in England on leave, I was asked to Ditchley twice. There I met a certain number of what might be called the governing class. And when I came back in 1944, these persons asked me to lunch and dinner. And after 1945, when I came to Oxford, I used to go regularly to Ditchley, and became great friends, and Aline independently, and so on. And there I used to meet all kinds of people. And his son married the daughter of Julian [?], and that was his kind of company. And then he divorced his wife and married an American Lady who was called Marietta FitzGerald. She was a very high-minded American sort of Democrat, still there [d. 1991], who was a great friend of Mrs Roosevelt. She was a kind of human rights ambassador to the United Nations. She's his widow. He finally died. And she's a hostess in New York. Her brother [Endicott Peabody] was Governor of Massachusetts. Her father [Malcom E. Peabody] was a Bishop [Episcopal Bishop of Central New York, 1942–60].

GC He was FitzGerald?

IB No, her husband was [Desmond] FitzGerald. Her first husband. The original name was Peabody.

GC Peabody.

IB The grandfather [also Endicott Peabody] was the founder of Groton, which is a kind of Eton. The son [of EP] was a Bishop of I don't know what, New England somewhere. The brother was

Governor of Connecticut – of Massachusetts, pretty stupid, too. Quite nice. Anyway.

GC So it's through them that you …

IB She comes to see us; I know her very well. Comes to stay with us, still. Right. That's about my social life. Now, what with Lady Cunard on top of that, then I was asked by Lady Colefax, who had luncheon parties every week, for at least 15 [50?] people, and whom Winston didn't like, and every letter always ended 'Winston may be there.' He never never was. It's logically not impossible, but it was materially and socially impossible for him to be there. And there people always used to accumulate, and you used to meet people there, and so on. So I became a salon-visiting person, until I met Aline, and then it stopped.

GC Then it stopped.

IB Absolutely. I didn't particularly enjoy it, but she didn't like it very much, and I was very bored with it. And then – didn't entirely stop it. More or less stopped. [*here he is probably talking to someone (Aline?) who came into the room, says 'It's all right' several times.*] I'll tell you the story of how I came to America in the first place, in 1940.

GC Instead of going to Russia.

IB Instead of going to Russia.

GC On the …

IB With Burgess.

GC Yes.

IB [*unclear*]

GC [*unclear*]

IB Very good.

GC Now, during those periods when you had intensive contacts, or more frequent contacts with Weizmann, did you have a conversation of a more general nature about Zionism, nationalism?

IB No. I don't think so. He was not at all interested in that kind of thing.

GC Not at all.

IB When I had to write about him, an article for the Jewish Encyclopedia [*Encyclopaedia Hebraica*], and I said that he was not an intellectual, Vera was extremely offended, and he wasn't. No, general ideas didn't preoccupy him at all. According to Crossman, he read Nietzsche. Well, maybe he did. Certainly none of that could be visible by the time I met him. No, certainly not. We talked simply about practical Zionism of a very concrete kind. Not exactly – who was for, who was against, what was going on.

GC You know that in …

IB Politically there was no doubt he was left of centre. The people he inclined towards – he quite liked Mapam people, and above all – and he quite liked the non-Gurion parts of Mapai. He was on the whole a sort of populist. He liked Kibbutzim. He liked the young Dayan.

GC I'll tell you whom he liked. He liked some Hashomer Hatzair [Zionist youth movement] …

IB Colonists.

GC And in Mapai he liked – in Mapai you had two main streams. The very activist one, Ben-Gurion, Tabenkin, and all those, whom he didn't like, and Sprinzak, Kaplan …

IB Whom he did like.

GC That he liked. I tell you, more humanistic politically.

IB Exactly..

GC [*unclear*]

IB Sprinzak he genuinely liked. Kaplan he certainly did business with.

GC And he was more moderate.

IB Obviously

GC And there was Sprinzak, and there was a third one, I don't remember now. Now, is …

IB Not Remez?

GC Not Remez, no, Remez didn't belong to this group [*unclear*].

IB Certainly not [?] what's-his-name, not the one who I mentioned earlier. The contact with the Labour Party.

GC Locker?

IB No.

GC Yes, but …

IB He knew him.

GC Locker was torn between Weizmann and Ben-Gurion.

IB I understand. Because Namier was a great ally in the 1930s, until the baptism. All

GC But I think that Namier was disappointed with Weizmann even a little earlier, because Weizmann didn't – he wanted to be elected to the Executive.

IB I know he did. He used to call it the Yeshiva.

GC Yes. And he was not.

IB He used to talk about 'The Rabbanim'. In Polish, in Polish–Jewi… – in Yiddish. 'The Rabbunim' was the Executive. He despised them. Well, he was offensive about them, that he could not have been elected. About [Selig] Brodetsky – he called him 'ein fetter Null' which means 'a fat zero'. Not very polite.

GC Yes.

IB [*traces of laughter*]and he said the same thing about the rest of them. Berl Locker he had total contempt for, and he was very rude and very overbearing. Well, Weizmann genuinely liked him, but could do nothing for him.

GC Surely he could not. I mean, to be elected to the Executive, you needed the support of the Party.

IB Somebody

GC Some Party.

IB Or votes of some party [?]. All

GC Brodetsky was in a way elected by the general party [Hazionim Haklaliyim, the general party of Zionists].

IB Now, mind you, Mrs Dugdale did become – members of the Executive. Literally.

GC Yes.

IB Because they liked that. Mrs Dan [?], yes.

GC It was a gesture.

IB Yes.

GC Now, in January 1947, after Weizmann was so disappointed by the Congress, in – he thought of – Weizmann, he had in him – one

of his weaknesses in 1946, 1947, 1948, or 1945 even, he wanted to repeat his successes of the late First World War.

IB Correct. It didn't work.

GC Of the International Affairs.

IB Yes.

GC Internal Affairs. After this shock he had in the Congress, when he was not elected, he wrote letters to you and to three or four other people, I can't remember who, I think Namier, I'm not sure.

IB Yes.

GC I think Eilat. I think Goldman. And suggested that you should establish a new faction that would be in opposition.

IB Did I get …?

GC A repetition of what happened in 1905.

IB Did I get such a letter?

GC Yes. It was sent.

IB I have no recollection of it.

GC I can show it to you.

IB I'm sure you are right. I've no recollection of it.

GC It's in [*unclear*].

IB I understand. I know.

GC And …

IB Yes, I understand. Ridiculous, I know.

GC And it's rather pathetic. And there's was no follow-up; I don't think I saw …

IB No, nothing happened at all.

GC Maybe someone replied; maybe Goldman replied, I don't know.

IB No, it was no good.

GC Very pathetic.

IB Very. Oh yes, very crushed by it, of course. And he used to tell me stories of this sort. He told me once that he was arrested by a policeman in Moscow for staying the night, which he was not allowed to do, because he was outside the Pale. He had no permission. And the policeman said, 'What do you do?' He explained to him that he was part of a Jewish movement called Zionists. The policeman didn't quite understand what Zionists were, but he said 'If you are working for Jews, let me tell you, they'll kill you in the end. There is no doubt about it. In the end they will kill you. This is as certain as anything can be.' Weizmann said he was quite right. That's exactly what they did. That was a typical story he repeated.

GC [*unclear*]

IB Of course. He was very funny about Russia before 1914. He said, 'You know, they are very strange people, the Russians. I remember a Russian who was sitting in a sort of tea shop, at the table next to mine. The Russian said "You know, I went to Paris. I went to a cafe. Next to me – a Jew. The waiter came, he ordered something, the waiter brought him a cup of coffee – the Jew. And he said something else, the waiter came again. He was brought the newspaper, began reading it – the Jew.' This was out of the world, like saying the elephant.

GC Fantastic.

IB You see? To sit in a cafe with goyim and just behave like that – incredible.

GC He certainly managed to charm certain kinds of politicians.

IB Lord Salisbury told me – I think I may have put that in my lecture – that all politicians tried to avoid seeing him, because they always in the end found that they gave something which they didn't mean to give. And they always got into trouble with their civil servants for doing it. And he – Salisbury – admired that very much.

GC Salisbury: you mean Cranborne?

IB Cranborne, yes. As he then was.

GC He was a very decent man.

IB Perfectly decent. Towards the end, when, after [the] two Sergeants and all that, he became slightly less. He said to Aline, when we came to dinner – we were at the same dinner party – he said, 'Is Isaiah very very Zionist?'

GC [*laughter*]

IB And he did make a speech, after the commander [?] of the *Struma*, or the *Patria* [?], saying this ought to never happen again. No, all that. No, all Cecils: they are fundamentally pro-Zionist. He became somewhat shaken when they became too anti-British, which was quite natural. Until then, he was absolutely all right. Unlike Eden, who was anti-Semitic from the start. Now, yes, they liked him, but they were always a little frightened of seeing him. Halifax quite liked seeing him.

GC How did he interest them? Was it his natural character?

IB No.

GC Or was he shrewd enough to employ charm tactics?

IB No. He appeared before them in a solemn manner. He did not crack jokes.

GC He did not?

IB He did not amuse them. No. He was the Jewish people incarnate. He came out of the Middle Ages. He was tall [? torn], he was solemn. He spoke for the historic Jewish people. And they were terribly impressed. The Old Testament prophet. That was the role he played. Not, he didn't charm them in the sense of sitting down with them and making jokes, or asking …

GC No, he …

IB He didn't give his love to their wives. He didn't say 'Please remember me to' them. None of that. She tried that, but they didn't like her. She said, Lady [?] said to me, 'I think Dr Weizmann is a wonderful man. Mrs Weizmann is a little bit tiresome, don't you think?'

GC I can see what you mean, but …

IB He came out of the – he was a historical personage.

GC But even so, did he play this role deliberately, or was it natural?

IB I don't know.

GC Because …

IB You and I – when I met him, he was not like that. [*unclear*] He used to march into the rooms. There was no private intercourse. He didn't ask me to dinner. Or if he did, it was on very few occasions. He did not go to dinner with them. He saw them officially. Or maybe there were interviews. Maybe – I don't think any English statesman – Balfour I can't tell you, but all these Colonial Office and Foreign Office people he more or less was formal with. Because fundamentally he did not like goyim. Of all goyim, the English were the best, but I told you before, he was only happy with Yiddish-speaking Russian Jews. I mean even I was a little bit too Westernised for his taste, you see. What he liked was Shmaryahu Levin. He would have got along with Goldman, if he didn't despise him. He used to

call him 'the brothel-keeper', 'the faker', that was his usual name for him.

GC And he didn't like German Jews?

IB Not at all. But he got money from them, and when it was necessary, he made himself agreeable. But that was charm. With English statesmen, it was always a question of asking for something, so then there was no good in being charming. The important thing was to say, 'We are in this position. We are suffering.' Persecution was going on. 'We need this, we need that. Can you do this? Why don't you do it?'

GC Many many people, either or each, either said about him or wrote about him …

IB Yes, this is called charm. Yes, they all said that. That's because his voice was beautiful, and he smiled enormously, and a kind of honeyed talk flowed, but he was not social talk of any kind. He was not one of them, and did not pretend to be one of them.

GC I think that he pretended to be a statesman, above [?] them.

IB He was a representative of a government in exile. Although there was no government, he created the illusion, as if he had a people behind him.

GC I remember, for example, somebody …

IB He was rather like Masaryk, or something to them, which was something which Sokolov never was.

GC Did he admire the aristocracy?

IB Yes. He thought they were elegant, decent people, who were gentlemen, and wouldn't do anything shabby or underhand. He did not trust civil servants. With the Conservative aristocrats, he was all right. He never got on with the Labour Party.

GC Never. There was a very small [?], the Labour aristocrats.

IB He never knew them. He didn't know them, it didn't work.

GC [*unclear*]

IB It didn't work for social reasons.

GC There was an element of snobbery. There was. You see, all these friends of Israel Sieff all know more about it [?].

GC But Sieff and Marks had friends in the Labour …

IB Sieff particularly. Sort of P.P.[?]

GC Yes.

IB And all that.

GC That saved Weizmann in a way; in 1947 and 1948 it was the only comfort he had.

IB Oh, I can well imagine. I imagine so. He never – I don't know if he could have known anybody from the Labour Party in the 1930s, or 1920s. Who were they? Reynold[?] and [Ramsay] MacDonald, those were no good [?]. Hines …

GC No. And Morrison visited Israel, Palestine, in the 1930s.

IB All right.

GC And as you said, Greenwood, Attlee [?,].

IB Lord Passfield, I mean the Webbs, no good, Cripps, no good.

GC [*laughter*] Until 1939 Malcolm had gone home.

IB Henderson not much good. He might have done business with Henderson. And it was not impossible with uncle whatever he was called.

GC Maybe..

IB After Henderson

GC You know that in certain respects Bevin was …

IB I know, he appeared on Jewish platforms. I didn't quite know why he turned.

GC He turned because – it was just politically; he thought that …

IB He could solve it.

GC That he may solve it.

IB And nothing happened. Yes.

GC And he was a Foreign Secretary and he had to take into account that the Middle East, that the Arabs count [?] and so on. And it was natural. And the bitterness that we managed to turn Truman and the Americans against him. He wouldn't talk with him. He was very pro-American, Bevin.

IB He was. I know, and he had trouble with the Jews in New York.

GC And the fact that this was his main failure [?], he was in a way a politician who is not used to failures.

IB He was very very vain. Enormously vain. Egomaniac.

GC And he was used to success.

IB And to be [looked?] up to and to flattering and to …

GC And he was admired by the Foreign Office.

IB He was admired by all Conservatives.

GC Yes. And these were his main friends [*unclear*]..

IB That is correct

GC And usually when one of his character fails, he looks for a scapegoat, backspace; he wouldn't blame himself.

IB That's how Mayhew became anti-Zionist.

GC Yes, but Mayhew is not a man …

IB No, but – Mayhew, I know, but as Mayhew had no particular sense of success or anything, but was no failure, just out of worship of Bevin.

GC We were not the scapegoat, in Palestine, it's the Jews of New York.

IB I know.

GC That's the …

IB Big, cigar-smoking millionaires who sent people in leap-yearships [?]. They don't go themselves. There's a lot of poor Jews. The other thing about Bevin was this. I think he felt like all people like him feel; he wanted to be with the intellect to some extent, power of the Labour Party. He wanted to be with Fabian Society [?]. He was in some way snubbed by Laski. And his image of Zionists – he hated [?] intellectuals anyway, he was like Khrushchev. He intended – he had an image of a lot of New York, cigar-smoking rich Jews sending a lot of Laskis to Palestine, where they deceived and cheated the Arabs. You see, the Arabs were perfectly good schoolboys who occasionally rioted. The Jews were clever and cunning and intellectual. Just the kind of people he couldn't get on with.

GC You know that Harold Beeley was very candid in saying why Bevin was admired by the Foreign Office.

IB Then, deeply.

GC And he said, very candidly, that he was admired not because of his qualities, but because he was a strong minister.

IB That's all very true, yes. He defended them. He could carry anything in the Cabinet.

GC There was no …

IB No. He could carry anything in the Cabinet.

GC Now, I can even …

IB George Brown, even, terrible as he was, according to O'Neill, who just died, told a great thing about George Brown, whom he loathed, [which] was that if he said he'd get the Cabinet to agree, he frightened them. They always knuckled under.

GC With Bevin it was even more so.

IB Quite. He actually loved it.

GC Churchill in the war years. Even versus Oliver Stanley. Oliver Stanley was stronger than Eden in the Cabinet.

IB Oh, I don't doubt it.

GC He was [?] secretary. Now, in Attlee's cabinet, Bevin opposite Creech-Janes, I mean, he carried it.

IB No, but Attlee loved Bevin. And Bevin defended Attlee. When Morrison tried to get rid …

GC [*unclear*]

IB When Morrison tried to get rid of Attlee, Bevin wouldn't play.

GC And Attlee knew.

IB I knew he knew. Exactly. Created a great alliance. He used to call Attlee 'that nice little man'. But certainly that's true. Certainly.

GC But after 1948 he was very reasonable [?].

IB Who?

GC Bevin.

IB Really?

GC After 1949.

IB When he ceased being Foreign Secretary?

GC Even, when he sent the first Ambassador to Palestine, and his directive was better [?].

IB Eliash, which [sc. who?], of course, who got on very well with him.

GC I don't know [?].

IB The first Ambassador. Oh, yes.

GC And the Ambassador who came to Israel, his directives were …

IB Ah, that was what's-his-name, he was – what?

GC In Israel or in …

IB The first Ambassador [Chargé d'Affaires (later Minister), 1949–51] was a man I knew in Washington.

GC To Israel?

IB Yes.

GC Yes. Knox Helm.

IB Knox Helm.

GC Was he in Washington or was he in the American Department?

IB He was in the Embassy. In Washington. He was a promotive [?] Consul. He was an Oriental, his father was in Kabul [?].