Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 10

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IB He [Julian Asquith] used to be the gauleiter in Haifa.

GC Well, yes, he was in Haifa. [*laughter*]

IB The [Assistant] District Commissioner he was, yes [1942–8]. Well, his wife had just been robbed of her jewels, in her house, while she was baking pancakes for himself in the kitchen, which he was eating. He didn't know it was happening. They came in, they took away all the jewels, they frightened her, she came down and saw him cooking pancakes and eating them one by one.

GC I saw it.

IB Sad story.

GC I saw the …

IB … headlines.

GC The headlines.

IB That was the man.

GC And that is the lady.

IB That was the man.

GC Is he your age? Is he younger than you are?

IB A bit younger, yes. He would be about three or four years younger. He might be seventy-five. Seventy-four or -five. Very fond of pancakes. That he was baking.

GC I didn't catch the name of his grandmother.

IB Same one. That's where it happened.

GC Yes.

IB Mells [Manor].

GC Mells.

IB M, E, double L, S.

GC Double L, S. In Herefordshire?

IB No, in Somerset. Nowhere near Herefordshire.

IB Somerset. Near a place called Frome. Why do you want to know?

GC No, I just wanted the name, only.

IB I see. Quite.

GC All right.

IB That's where I met Clarissa. Yes.

GC Yes. I still have some questions about that, but not now. When I told you that Clarissa used to come to Churchill during the war for lunches, it means that she was close to him, because he didn't invite many people.

IB Maybe. I don't know. I know nothing about that.

GC I think that by the way Eden was never invited.

IB Really, never? Probably never.

GC Where do I know it from?

IB From [Martin] Gilbert.

GC No, from Colville's diaries.

IB Colville. Eden couldn't – can't never have been invited.

GC I'm exaggerating.

IB Exactly.

GC But socially.

IB Not terribly much. He didn't enjoy his company, no.

GC He didn't like Eden.

IB No, he didn't much like Eden.

GC There was a constant tension between Eden and Churchill.

IB That's correct.

GC What's interesting is that Churchill considered – regarded the Foreign Office …

IB With extreme dislike. The entire Foreign Office.

GC And he considered them to be too socialist, too progressive.

IB Yes, I think It s true.

GC And there was something. Not socialist .

IB Relatively to his views. For example, he tried to persuade them to have monarchies restored in Europe. They didn't.

GC This, maybe, but in his day …

IB Everywhere. He had a talk with Cadogan on the train, going back from getting an honorary degree at Harvard during the war, in which he said monarchies was the thing. And Cadogan said, 'No, you're certainly wrong about that. The Foreign Office always gets in the way. All good plans are ruined by the Foreign Office.' He hated the Foreign Office. [*telephone*]

GC Coming back to Weizmann for the last time.

IB [*expressive voice*] Noooo.

GC Well, after all, I'm coming back to a problem I raised already. On the one hand, you described and defined his fundamental Jewishness, populism, identification with the Jews of Eastern Europe [?], and yet, personally, he developed quite a modern Western taste.

IB Yes.

GC I mean in art, or take his building in Rehovot.

IB That was remarkable. I don't know who suggested that to him. A man named [Erich] Mendelssohn, you mean.

GC Mendelssohn did?

IB Yes. I think he must have got the idea from Einstein, because Mendelssohn built him a house near Berlin.

GC Yes. He might have been from Schocken.

IB Oh, Schocken, yes.

GC He listened [?] to Shocken a lot. [*unclear*]

IB Yes. You now what he called Schocken? He hated Schocken, of course. Later on in New York. That's the only – he called him 'der hässliche Zwerg', 'the hideous dwarf', which comes from the Brothers Grimm. Those sort of stories.

GC They quarrelled, I think, to begin with. They quarrelled in the university.

IB Could be. Anyway, yes, originally he was a friend.

GC All right. Let's say he got Mendelssohn.

IB He got Mendelssohn, yes.

GC There is more to it.

IB Look. He did not have the tastes of the shtetl. That is quite clear. He's lived in Europe long enough. He was very impressionable. He had a natural sense of how life was lived. He had the deepest admiration for England, whom he regarded as the best of the gentiles. He didn't like any gentiles. But if you had to deal with them, the English were the best. And ne was naturally impressed by Western culture, of which he did become a part.

GC No doubt about it.

IB That is undeniable.

GC I mean the aura of royalty in Rehovot is really impressive. But now, it is a royalty housed in a very modern …

IB Well, not only that. He had a garden. He was the only man in Is… – In the whole of Palestine who had a garden. I know of nobody else. Neither Jew nor Arab.

GC Oh, Arabs have them.

IB Gardens? [*surprise in his voice*] I didn't know,

GC Around the houses, or …

IB Well. He certainly had a garden with trees and flowers and everything.

GC You have Arabs, and you have in the Pica [Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association] Building, in Rosh Pina, it's really impressive.

IB A garden. That's because it was Pica. Yes, all right.

GC Because of Pica.

IB Yes, all right. But in general Jews didn't have gardens. They had no taste for gardens. They didn't feel a need for them.

GC But the oriental Jews had.

IB Oh, they did.

GC Oriental Jews. You didn't know? [?]

IB No I didn't. It comes from Persia, anyway.

GC And even in Old Tel Aviv, you had …

IB Well, then, I'm wrong. All I can tell you is that having a large garden and a gardener, and looking after t he garden – he adored his garden. He walked about in it, and absolutely adored it. Looked at every tree and talked to the old gardener. He had an old Sephardi gardener there. I can't remember what his name was. Something like Yehezkel, or some such name. It was him to whom he talked. But …

GC There was royalty in …

IB There was.

GC But he developed a …

IB … a certain personal taste.

GC I think there is something more.

IB It comes from his wife more than from him.

GC Ah, but that's a possibility.

IB I think so.

GC But I want to come back to my basic question about his ambiguity [?]. If he was – if this modernism, taste, behaviour was not integral in him, at least it developed as …

IB In the West.

GC In the West, and it was calculated.

IB No. I think it became part of his second nature. Yes.

GC Because I …

IB Look. Let me make it plain. What I mean is this. His political ideas were Western. His social ideas were Western. But the human beings out of whom he wanted to create Israel were East European Jews. Because these were the people whom he regarded as real Jews.

The rest were doubtful. There were American Jews of the same sort. These are East European, they are all right. When Weisgal came to America, it didn't make him less East European, for these purposes. But when they were really West European, there was a distance. When he tailed to Felix Warburg, he was not a brother. When he talked to Jimmy Rothschild, he was not a brother.

GC And yet he charmed them.

IB Very much.

GC By his sheer personality.

IB Yes.

GC Or did he know how to behave?

IB Yes. He had considerable – there are some people who possess very great charm, natural charm, and the ability to use it. He could switch it on and off.

GC That's what I thought.

IB Lord Halifax was exactly the same.

GC Lord Halifax had …

IB Exactly. They could – he was very very charming, but suddenly he could switch it off. It was an instrument.

GC And he new what would charm an Englishman.

IB But he had – it was something instinctive, some instinctive knowledge. It was not calculated. He didn't have to learn it.

GC Not instinctive.

IB [*hesitates*] Intuitive. He grasped it by some kind of *Fingerspitzengefühl*. Not by taking lessons. He didn't know how to consult people, or how to treat people. Never.

GC How to consult, but …

IB Never. Never said, 'How should I talk to so and so?'

GC No. That I am sure.

IB He grasped the kind of people they were immediately.

GC And was he the same with Frenchmen?

IB That I have no idea. He was a great friend of Blum. But then, that proves nothing. I don't know what Frenchmen in life he ever met.

GC He met some other junior ministers. Well, he met Giles Mock when he was a junior.

IB Who?

GC Giles Mock.

IB Giles Mock. Ah, well, he was a Jew.

GC Ah yes, that's true.

IB No good. He was a Jew, Giles.

GC There was one gentile, I believe he was a gentile, Jean Godard [?], Who was friendly to Zionism.

IB I have no idea. He was probably polite to him, treated him exactly like an Englishman. That worked perfectly well. He had no dealings with Germans as such, nor with Italians, as far as I know. Towards the end of his life, he became very tactless [?]. He was very pathetic, in the end – he was. We all know that. That was Ben-Gurion's fault. He was cut off from everything. Eban has this funny story . He went to see him and he said to him, 'You know, I've been told that the President of the country symbolises the State. I sit here symbolising.'

GC [unclear)

IB It's quite funny, really

GC It remains really true. But he was

IB He hated the Executive, hated the Government. He said Have you seen Moses lately?' That meant Sharett. I'm told he has three hundred secretaries. Is that true? What does he want three hundred secretaries for?'

GC He was bitter.

IB Very.

GC At the end.

IB Deeply.

GC But it started from …

IB By far the funniest story was when he met the Argenti… – you know the story about meeting the Argentinian Ambassador. The Argentinian Ambassador was a man called Jose Mirelman, who was sent by Perón. Weizmann was then President. It was already towards the end of his life, [I'm] rather vague about where he was. He used to say to me, 'Are we in London? Are we in Israel?' His mind wandered. He said, 'Mr Mirelman, you come from Argentina?' ''Yes.' 'Where did your father come from?' 'From Poland.' 'I see. He came from Poland. Why did he go to Argentina? White slave trade?' [*laughter*] Well, Mr President.' Uncanny. 'I don't know,' he said; 'in the town where I lived, in our town, if a man went to Argentina, there was only one reason.' [*laughter*] That's fairly typical. It's not what Ben-Gurion would have done. [*long pause*] He bullied Josef terribly.

GC Pardon?

IB He bullied Josef Cohn. Treated him as a doormat.

GC Also Ernst Bergmann.

IB Yes. But Bergmann rebelled, of course.

GC He was so servile.

IB No, he wasn't servile. I knew Bergmann. He behaved exactly like a Nazi. That's quite different. Bergmann was like a German officer who was in a state of adoration and often of a disciplined officer towards the Field Marshal.

GC Apparently there was more than that. I think he was the type of man who needed a father figure.

IB No doubt.

GC It was Weizmann and Ben-Gurion.

IB And Ben-Gurion, quite.

GC And then Dayan.

IB And then – Dayan I didn't know. But all I can tell you is that he behaved like a well-trained well-disciplined German official, who adored authority. And then of course he rebelled, and then Mrs Weizmann treated him as a son, and called him David, and then when he went off with this lady [?] it was regarded as a ghastly betrayal, and Weizmann's sister made him a maximum number [?] of bad blood between them, and then he was expelled from paradise. Then he went over – traitor – went over to Ben-Gurion. All that I remember.

GC Do you remember it?

IB Well, I stayed with Weizmann in 1947 – partly I remember [July 1947: E 30].

GC Did you stay with Weizmann once or twice? You came in 1947.

IB At least twice. I m not sure whether three times: 1947, and then again, I think, in 1951. Now, when did I? In 1952? About then. I think it must have been 1951 – 1950 or 1951. I don't think I stayed again. I may have stayed in – where did I go to in 1950? I don't know. I know that I stayed with him one day when the United Nations Commissioner arrived.

GC 1947.

IB That was 1947. And again, I remember travelling in an aeroplane with Samuel and Hore-Belisha, so you can go and verify that.

GC That's 1947 or 1950?

IB Hore-[Belisha] and Harry Goldsmith [?].

GC When was it?

IB 1950. That's what …

GC Maybe [1949?]. [*unclear*]

IB No. I don't [think] it's 1949. I didn't go to Israel in 1949. Maybe 1950 – 1950 [April 1950: E 175–6].

GC So it was. [*unclear*]

IB It was in 1950. I went as I say with Harry Goldsmith, Samuel, and Hore-Belisha. Same plane.

GC So Samuel …

IB And he wouldn't see David or Goldsmith.

GC Who?

IB Weizmann. Too ill. He was bored. He didn't want to. He was pretty ill by then, and he had to be protected. From people. Samuel, I think, came to tea.

GC Samuel: it was the first visit since he left Palestine.

IB That's what I imagine. That's 1950, was it?

GC Not later. Because I think that Yigal Allon was still the commander of the Southern …

IB Could be. [*cough*]

GC Is it? Yes. I'm almost sure.

IB I remember very well that visit, so I must have been three times. Because I was again with Aline, and he wasn't on this journey. In, probably, 1951.[1]

GC And you were with Aline in 1951.

IB Yes. We stayed – no, I'm sorry, I stayed with Aline and Mrs Weizmann. Much later, 1956 or 1957 [April 1956].

GC And then I took you to Eilat.

IB Exactly.

GC To see Ben-Gurion.

IB Not to Eilat. I know where it was.

[1] It seems not, but IB did visit Weizmann a number of times outside Israel, in addition to his trips to Rehovot – see E chronology.

David Ben-Gurion with IB and Aline, Sde Boker, April 1962; on left, Frances and Jack Donaldson

GC Not Eilat. To Sde Boker.

IB Sde Boker. Yes.

GC And we once went to Eilat.

IB Eilat via aeroplane, but we never got down. We flew back again.

GC But Aline was in Eilat.

IB I've never been. Aline, yes. But not I.

GC I remember. Aline was very impressed by the beauty of the Moroccan girls, the newcomers.

IB I was not a part of – I have never been to Eilat.

GC I mean we went to Sde Boker together.

IB I remember.

GC With the two children.

IB Yes, I remember.

GC And you.

IB Yes.

GC And then I went with them to Eilat, and you came here – you went back to Jerusalem.

IB Yes.

GC Are you sure you've never …?

IB Eilat? Never. Quite sure. We travelled about in the Negev. Never in Eilat.

GC I stayed with Aline and the two children in Eilat that night?

IB Could be. I must have gone back. And Walter Eytan was there, I remember, I recall, at Ben-Gurion.

GC That I can't remember.

IB He was there.

GC That should be either 1955 or early 1956.

IB Yes. It could be.

GC When Ben-Gurion came back in early 1956 in Sde Boker he was – was he Prime Minister? [yes]

IB I can't remember. I think he probably was.

GC That might be after Suez.

IB Yes. It was certainly after Suez.

GC Ah.

IB Because he said her awful Eden was. [*pause*] After 1956.

GC You argued with him about history.

IB Could be. I saw him a good many times.

GC Pardon?

IB I saw Ben-Gurion more often than I saw Weizmann.

GC I know. But …

IB You didn't come with me to Israel. No. You came with me the first time, 1956 or 1957.

GC Why was he going to …?

IB 1957: did you come?

Aline Berlin [AB] Why are you arguing about Eilat? We went 1962.

GC It was 1952?

AB 1962.

GC 1962.

IB I never went to Eilat.

AB I thought you did.

IB I've never seen Eilat.

AB We stopped for lunch in Sde …

GC In Sde Boker.

AB And then there was that accident, that ambush with that lorry.

IB All that I remember. We went to – I went to Eilat?

AB You came all the way.

IB I went all the way to Eilat.

AB Of course. We stayed in a room in a hotel.

GC Yes. I remember.

AB We spent the night.

GC I remember.

IB My, I'm getting old. I'm getting old. I've no image of Eilat.

GC Because you never remember places [?].

IB True.

AB [*unclear*] places.

IB No recollection.

GC I remember the children getting excited. I think Peter was frightened because of this thing with the ambush.

AB And Ben-Gurion said, 'You're the youngest, you must decide whether you're going or not.' Poor thing, and he was so frightened.

GC Yes, but we were in …

AB And he said yes he would go.

IB Stuart is rather frightened of going to Israel at the moment.

AB For his own safety?

IB No, himself and his wife and children, everybody.

AB Are they all going?

IB I think they're all going. The whole lot.

GC Now?

IB Yes. They're going to do something. I can't remember. He's invited to something, some conference or other.

AB Can I offer you anything to drink, some tea?

GC No, thank you.

AB Coffee?

GC It's all right.

IB Oh, I would[n't?] mind some coffee. What about you?

GC Eh?

IB Would you [*to Aline*] like some coffee?

AB I had tea. But I [*unclear*].

IB That was Roberto Calasso, on the telephone.

AB What did he want?

IB About printing – I knew it [?]. He says he'll send me all the clippings. He didn't [*tape turned off*].

IB Yes. Quite.

GC And you tried to persuade him that history was something, that not science …

IB Was important. Yes.

GC Now, did Weizmann try to recruit you?

IB Yes.

GC As an aid?

IB Yes.

GC [*unclear*] Active politically in Zionism?

IB [AB?] No. But he tried to recruit him [me?] as an aide to him when he was President.

GC On a voluntary basis?

IB I refused so violently [?], that it didn't come into it. And he was very angry.

GC Was he?

IB Extremely cross. What Weidenfeld became …

GC For a short while.

IB … is what he wanted me to be.

GC Who was his entourage then? In London?

IB In London? We're speaking about what date? Let us see …

GC From 1945, 1946.

IB Well, I was already back in London in 1946.

GC Ah, 1946. Oh, I'm speaking about 1948.

IB No. The offer was made after 1948.

GC I don't know.

IB 1947 maybe. Sort of towards the [creation of the] state.

GC Baffy was not there. Baffy died in 1948 [16 May]. Namier was not there.

IB Who?

GC Namier.

IB Namier was there, yes. In London, certainly.

GC No, but with Weizmann.

IB Well, he never was with him in that sense.

GC No, but there were periods when Baffy and Namier used to read every letter …

IB I know nothing about that.

GC … that Weizmann would write.

IB I know nothing about it.

GC I know. I remember.

IB He used to say about Namier, 'He dips his pen in vitriol, and then he writes [to] *The Times*.'

GC I mean in the early 1940s and then, I think, in 1945–6 again.

IB Could be. Very likely.

GC And he and Baffy were actually the closest to him.

IB Yes. Quite.

GC And they worked hard: every letter of Weizmann was rewritten two or three [times].

IB By various people.

GC Namier and Baffy.

IB I see. It doesn't surprise me. That is called being a Latin Secretary.

GC [*laughter*]

IB That is – Milton did it for Cromwell, he would translate into Latin …

GC Yes. Now, was there a 'hatzer' [courtier].

IB Not, yes, no hatzerim, but at the Dorchester where he lived.

GC No, hatzer, I mean.

IB I know what you mean.

GC I know.

IB No, there was no court.

GC No court.

IB There was Josef Cohn, perfectly in session [?]. Weisgal when he was here, Israel Sieff used to drop in, mainly to talk to Mrs Weizmann, who liked him. Weizmann liked him but despised him. He did a lot for Zionism and he was grateful to him, and he thought he was a lightweight.

GC But he respected Simon Marks..

IB Much more

GC Because he was a [*unclear*].

IB Much more. He thought Israel was light stuff, a lot of talk, and of course he was an amiable, sympathetic, sweet, but no good, I

mean, he didn't talk about politics too much. Simon, yes. Now – well, who else was there?

GC In the office there …

IB I've never been to the office in my life. I've never been to the Zionist office in London. In my life. My memory may be playing me false, but I can't remember it.

GC [*unclear*]

IB Never.

GC It was very shabby.

IB Oh, shabby. I'm sure it was. And let me try and think. Who else was one? Linton was probably walking around, yes.

GC Berl Locker was there.

IB Berl Locker was, of course, yes. But in the Dorchester Hotel, I know, there were – who used to come to see him? Flora Solomon.

GC Well, that's more or less, I…

IB It was purely social.

GC I went through all the papers of Weizmann in this period, but I don't remember now. So you said that he wanted to recruit you after 1948, and you refused to be recruited.

IB Yes.

GC Why?

IB Because I, first of all, I refused. Sharett telephoned me in 1947. I was sitting in my room in New College, talking to David Cecil. The telephone rang. It was Sharett. He asked me whether I would join the Jewish Agency, and become responsible for South, Southern – no, for Eastern Europe, I think. For some reason. Eastern Europe,

maybe South too, I can't remember. Eastern Europe, under the orders of Eytan. And that I wouldn't have accepted anyway. But quite apart from that, I said, 'No thank you, it's no good.' But I'll tell you in a moment why. 'I can't. I'm very sorry, but I just can't do it.' He said, 'You know, the pension will be very good.'

GC Really?

IB He did. To which I said, 'No, even that doesn't excite [?] me. Very sorry. Not the kind of thing I can do.' Why didn't I? I'll tell you why.

GC Are you sure it was in 1947, and not after the statehood [?] war?

IB Before the state.

GC Because Eytan was not in …

IB Before the state. It was the Jewish Agency that I was asked to join, and not the state.

GC Eytan was not there …

IB Eytan was being groomed to be the head of the Foreign Office.

GC [*unclear*]

IB When we created it, they were all potential …

GC This, yes. He was the director, actually, of the first school of diplomacy.

IB I know. I went to it. I addressed it.

GC You talked?

IB Certainly.

GC [*unclear*]

IB Three talks. My first talks were all right, the third talk was not liked. The third talk I made critical remarks about the Soviet Union. That went down very badly.

GC In 1947?

IB No, much later.

GC Ah, you mean after the state.

IB After. Certainly.

GC [*unclear*]

IB The school went on.

GC Yes, but in 1947 it was …

IB I know. When I went in 1947 I saw him . He said he founded it, and he was prepared by Sharett to be the head of the Foreign Office. And I was to be the representative for [the] South, and so on. And Walter Ettinghausen wrote me a letter, said, 'I'm sorry you missed the Israeli bus.'

GC He wrote that?

IB [*laughter*] Yes. But the very idea of being under the orders of Eytan was itself not very tempting.

GC [*unclear*]

IB No, because I thought two things. First of all, learning Hebrew, becoming adept – it was too late. I thought it would be too difficult. Second thing was, I thought that I knew enough of Israeli politics already from New York and from Washington, and so on. I thought I would simply be torn to pieces. I just thought I didn't have the temperament or the character to be involved in day-to-day struggles, rows, quarrels, intrigues. It was all right in the British Embassy, which was a very staid, extremely well-disciplined institution. But in the new state I thought the jealousies and the envies and the [*coughs*]

and the dynamics of the whole thing would do no good to me, and I'd go mad quite quickly.

GC But potentially you could still hesitate in England, between diplomacy and philosophy. or …

IB No!. Never

GC You made up your mind that you wanted to stay in academia already, or …

IB I was offered a job in the Foreign Office at the end of the war. Quite officially. Originally, to be the head of the library, not a diplomatic post, but a quite grand [?] one. A man called Stephen Gaselee [?] , was to be my predecessor and it meant looking after all the documents, archives and all that. And they knew I was a Zionist. I was rather surprised. But then they said, 'If you are a Zionist, accept this job.' I was told that by a man who's still alive [no], called David Scott, who I think is about ninety-four. He must have been the head of the American Department,[2] maybe during the war, that kind of thing. He was the cousin of the – what was it? The Duke of Argyll, Duke of Edinburgh [?]. What is it called? What's the dukedom of Scott [Buccleuch]? No I think Duke …

GC [*unclear*]

IB I think – what?

GC [*unclear*]

IB No. I wouldn't have thought Scott. No. I can't remember what Dukedom Scott is.

GC [*unclear*]

[2] Sir David John Montagu-Douglas-Scott (1887–1986), FO 1911–47, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1938–44, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Administration 1944–7.

IB Oh, all right. 'We have a plan to incorporate you in the diplomatic service. You needn't think you will always be in the outskirts.' And I said, 'No, thank you very much. I wish to go back to Oxford.' And Michael Wright, of all people, said, 'I think you're mad. I can't understand it. You could serve the country. You would be a good servant of this country.' So he knew vey well that I was a Zionist – and he was anti-. We had these arguments. He was under no illusion, he particularly, and [Harold] Beeley, after all, could have told him. Not much doubt about it. I did it – for two reasons I refused. To perpetrate – each reason was conclusive. One was that I was a Zionist, and I knew there would be a conflict of loyalties and I would become upset at some point, upset by something, and I had no business to be, although they'd never give me Middle Eastern business. Still, I would see telegrams, I would hear about it. So first of all, I couldn't accept their policy, even if It was benevolent. And secondly, I didn't want to be discreet for the rest of my life. I didn't want two lives, in which I couldn't I talk about business of the office: too boring. And in Oxford I could do what I liked.

GC By the way, that's why I refused.

IB Exactly. I understand.

GC Now, will you have your coffee now? [*tape off and on again*]

IB [*unclear what precedes*] When Duff Cooper resigned.

GC From the cabinet?

IB He was very pro.

GC He was a junior, yes?

IB Junior? Duff Cooper? He wasn't at all.

GC In 1937 he was not a senior minister.

IB He was the first officer [First Lord] of the Admiralty. He was …

GC Was he?

IB Absolutely. He was in the Navy.

GC I thought that …

IB He mobilised the fleet in 1938.

GC I see.

IB In 1938. And he was the only member of the Cabinet who resigned over Munich . Not the only one [?]. He stayed on when Eden resigned for a bit. He did. Then he resigned. He voted against Munich.

GC Oh, yes.

IB But he was a Cabinet Minister. Great friend of Winston, and a very prominent Cabinet Minister. He was a very central figure in the Cabinet.

GC That I forgot.

IB Not at all junior. Anything but that. Obviously he was a [soldier?] in the First World War. A contemporary of Macmillan.

GC Of Macmillan? So he was a little younger than Eden, or was he, no, ne was not.

IB No.

GC He was not.

IB Same age [seven years older].

GC Yes.

IB Same age. A year older. If anything, he was a little bit older. A year or so. In that Cabinet, he was the closest person to Churchill.

GC Yes.

IB Nobody else wanted to …

GC Yes.

IB Bracken only came in during the war.

GC The paradox is that the Eden group and the – there were two groups of anti-appeasers. One around Eden, and there was another one. Macmillan and a few others were not connected with Eden.

IB Yes they were. I assure you. The group around Churchill was simply Duncan Sandys, Boothby, Brendan Bracken, among Members of Parliament.

GC I see.

IB The respectable one was Eden, Ronald Tree, Macmillan and there was four or five others.

GC There was Duff Cooper.

IB Duff Cooper. They had nothing to do with the real sort of Churchill intimates.

GC Not exactly.

IB That was a kind of kitchen cabinet.

GC But there was no real connection between Churchill and other people.

IB Not Macmillan – well, he liked Macmillan.

GC Yes.

IB But the respectable Tories were anti- – anti-Chamberlain.

GC Yes.

IB Didn't – weren't some of the deal. Churchill wanted his own people around him.

GC Yes.

IB His sons-in-law – his son-in-law Boothby [not WCS's son-in-law] certainly.

GC Boothby was, yes?

IB Yes. That was the Churchill, that the one that [?] during the war. No. Macmillan was Eden for these purposes. They were not friends. That was the group. The one person that was not, that they disliked, who was against them, was Rab Butler.

GC Well, I know.

IB [*unclear at all*] I suppose Tree told you [?].

GC Yes.

IB Same age as he. Same generation. Prominently against him.

GC Yes. He was Junior Minister in the Foreign Office.

IB He was No. 2.

GC No. 2.

IB Yes, No. 2 to Halifax.

GC And Douglas-Home was there.

IB He was under-secretary.

GC Yes.

IB Douglas-Home was the Parliamentary Private Secretary …

GC PPC[?], PPS. And the interesting thing is that the anti-appeasers still bore some anger towards Butler and not towards Douglas-Home.

IB For some reason, although Douglas-Home was pro-Munich now. Defensive too [?]. Russian presented a greater danger than – anti-Yalta [?]. The Russians are a greater danger than the Germans.

GC Yes.

IB He went to Munich, which Halifax did not.

GC Who went? Butler or Douglas-Home?

IB Douglas-Home.

GC Well, of course, Private Secretary. He needed him. And Halifax didn't go because he didn't want to go?

IB All mysterious. The only Foreign Minister that didn't go.

GC I see.

IB Martin Gilbert – talk about that privately.

GC Yes.

IB About his meeting in the Cabinet, and so on. But I can't remember who were the other people around Macmillan.

GC I know all of them but I can't remember now.

IB I don't remember whether Oliver Stanley was there.

GC Not exactly. He was not in the group. He was anti-appeaser, I think. He was anti-appeaser but …

IB In a quiet way. Didn't go to meetings.

GC Yes.

IB Little private meetings.

GC I think that Winterton was anti-appeaser.

IB Could well be.

GC He was anti-Zionist but anti-appeaser. Usually there was a correlation. Amery [?] was. Amery was in the group.

IB I'm sure he was.

GC Oh, yes, Leo Amery was very active.

IB Most certainly.

GC Yes.

IB Amery, yes.

GC I don't remember. I can't remember Walter Eliott, whether he was in the group or not.

IB I would guess not.

GC No, because he was in the Cabinet. He was in the Cabinet.

IB He was in the Cabinet, yes.

GC He was Minister of Agriculture then.

IB Hore-Belisha was not.

GC He was not.

IB Pro-appeasement.

GC I know.

IB Belisha. Yes. Who else was there?

GC He was – oh, I'm sorry, he was not in the Cabinet then.

IB Yes. He was Undersecretary for War[?]. That was as far as he got. He went to security [?].

GC Now, let's go back. We'll come to appeasers from another angle, maybe even today. Again, back to. Weizmann. Do you think that some of your attitudes towards some personalities, at least at the beginning, you were influenced by Weizmann, from Ben- Gurion, even towards Nahum Goldmann.

IB That may be. How can one tell? He always talked about the 'wild man'. That meant Ben-Gurion, yes. Nahum I can tell you, was always called 'the faker', 'the fakir' [?], and sometimes 'brother-keeper'. No. Goldmann I met independently of that. I think when I went to [New] York, to – rather, to Washington, in 1940, I had a letter to Goldmann from Weizmann, I think. He was certainly in the Agency , just the same, and so on. Just to talk to me and so on. And Goldmann pretends I said to him, 'Should I go on to Moscow?', which was not on my – no, there was no question of my going or not going. That's a pure invention.

GC Goldman could …

IB Oh, he invented it. Absolutely . Certainly. Hardly [?]. So that's not the point. But he thought I came to him in a very great strait of not knowing what to do, confusion, should I go to Moscow, should I stay here? There was no question either of staying here or of going to Moscow. It was not in my whatnot, but anyway, so this was a pure invention. And, and I'm trying to think, yes. [*long pause*]. I'm trying to think if he influenced me against Ben-Gurion. No. He didn't. I'd never met Ben-Gurion. I'd met Ben-Gurion as a small boy, purely accidentally at my uncle's house in London. There was a meeting of Zionists. My uncle was not at all prominent, a typical Russian Zionist, and for some reason organised a meeting in his house for the Russian Zionists whom he'd known in Petersburg, in Petrograd, before the war. And Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion were in London. Both.

GC This was 1920–1?

IB Yes.

GC About that year?

IB About then: 1921. Could well be. In 1921 I was twelve. So …

GC And you remember Ben-Gurion?

IB Yes. I remember Ben-Gurion and I remember Ben-Zvi. And I remember Alenikov [?], who was an early Russian Zionist. I remember Victor Jacobson, of course.

GC That was the meeting you told me about?

IB Yes.

GC And Ben-Gurion and Weizmann participated?

IB Weizmann was not there.

GC no. Ben-Zvi and Ben-Gurion?

IB Yes. They were there.

GC Them and not the …

IB They just were there. All I can tell you is, they came – that for some reason they came. I don't know who invited them or why. Ben-Zvi could be regarded as a Russian Zionist of some kind.

GC Oh, yes.

IB People would talk Russian with each other. Ben-Gurion's Russian wasn't very good .

GC Was not very good?

IB He could manage it, yes. And in our billiard-room, in our house in which my uncle was living, in No. 33 Upper Addison Gardens, W14, about five minutes from Weizmann's house, not far away, that I remember, that's where I first – technically – I forgot what he looked like, but I knew that I'd seen him. And then next time was [*pause*] – my next meeting with Ben-Gurion, I don't think in London. He was here during, during the Blitz, although I don't think I saw him then, and certainly not in Palestine in 1934. In 1947, did I meet him then? I wonder.

GC I'm not sure.

IB I think not, no reason. Anyhow, he was in Paris.

GC He was …

IB In Paris. That was where the Jewish Agency was arrested [?].

GC In the summer.

IB That was he. I saw him in 1946, not 1947: 1947 he was back.

GC He was back and partly in America, partly in Palestine.

IB Don't think I met him then. I think I met him, I can't imagine, I know the meeting in New York, in 1941.

GC With Ben-Gurion?

IB Oh yes. But then he knew me already, then we must have met before. Somewhere in America. We must have met in America somehow.

GC Before 1941.

IB Before 1941, afterwards, when I was there, in 1941, but before this – have I never told you that story?

GC No.

IB I'll tell you. Certainly. In 1941 was a British propagandist in New York. And my great friend – one of my great friends was Ben Cohen, who was in Washington. He had a habit of coming to New York for the weekend, and then sitting in his hotel till about one o'clock in the morning, and then going to the station, getting into a sleeping car for Washington, in which he slept for six hours, because the sleeping car, the train, you didn't have to get out of the train for two hours after it stopped, for the convenience of the passengers. So if you wanted to see him , the best time was late at night. I went to dinner in some suburb of New York, I remember, and came back by train. I'd made an arrangement to see him at eleven. About eleven, eleven-fifteen, I went to the Winthrop Hotel in New York, and asked where Ben Cohen's room was.

GC Ben Cohen?

IB Ben Cohen. I went up to the fourteenth floor, number fourteen hundred and something, I tapped on the door. No answer. I was surprised I rang the bell that was there. And suddenly the door opened and Ben-Gurion, in pyjamas appeared. Ben Cohen and Ben-Gurion. [*laughter*] He knew me.

GC He knew you?

IB Well, obviously, because he said, 'Do come in.' That's what I assumed. He didn't know why I'd come to see him. 'Sit down.' He wanted to talk to me about something. I didn't want to talk about anything, but I didn't like to tell him this was just a mistake. I thought he would be terribly offended. And he thought that Weizmann had sent me to him, he thought that I was a friend of Weizmann. At that time were the negotiations leading to the Biltmore program, leading to Biltmore in 1942. And he and Weizmann had different views. He thought I must have been his agent. Weizmann had to sound him out, make proposals. I could see he wondered. We had a long conversation for about three-quarters of an hour, about nothing. I then left him, wished him a very good night, and went to see Ben Cohen, who was surprised that, between my arrival downstairs, because, you see, I telephoned him – three-quarters of an hour passed. Not at the hotel, no. I telephoned him at the station when I arrived. Grand Central or

something. Or Pennsylvania. That I was coming. He said, 'I thought something happened to you. I was very worried', and so on and so forth. That is, I certainly saw Ben-Gurion then.

GC Did you then know Artur Lurié?

IB Yes.

GC So you knew Artur Lurié.

IB I would have known, yes.

GC He was very close to him.

IB I know that.

GC To Ben-Gurion.

IB I know.

GC So he might have represented [you?].

IB He could, he might well. Artur Lurié was then in Washington.

GC He wasn't in New York.

IB In New York. It was called the Zionist Emergency Committee.

GC He was in it [?].

IB He was in it, yes.

GC He came from London [?].

IB Correct. He was then, he had already quarrelled with Weizmann. Not quarrelled, but he – Weizmann dropped him, because [*or:* so?] he went over to Ben-Gurion. He was with Ben-Gurion in London.

GC Yes.

IB Very much. You're quite right.

GC He was a loyal friend to him.

IB Deeply. He became a loyal friend – loyal follower. He might well have introduced us.

GC [*unclear*]

IB Exactly.

GC Ben-Gurion was in London in 1938 for the St James's conversation.

IB No, I didn't meet him. I met Weizmann then. No, I didn't know him.

GC So it might be somebody like Artur Lurié.

IB Yes. I don't know when I met Nahum, either. Must have been in Washington, in 1940 or 1941, yes.

GC All right. We came to this only through my question whether you were influenced by Weizmann in your attitude to …

IB Well, I listened to him talking, and I was influenced in the attitude of saying that it was – I was somewhat anti-Biltmore, yes. I thought Weizmann and the Jewish State would tear each other to pieces [?], they are not ripe for having a state. It won't do, it will –they might have a state, but it's – they would need much more political education before they create an independent state. That was his view. In that way he preferred them to remain under some kind of British umbrella.

GC Now, your opposition to the revisionists and Jabotinsky was instant?

IB Always.

GC Always. From the very beginning?

IB Absolutely. I met Jabotinsky twice.

GC Once in Oxford.

IB Once in Oxford and once in – twice in Oxford!

GC Before 1939?

IB Certainly. I told you the story. He came in 1936, about, to talk to the Jewish Society, and he was very eloquent. And Walter Eytan, who was a Don, said [*slowly*], 'Mr Jabotinsky, why do your boys fight the Histadrut boys in the streets of Tel Aviv?' That should give you the date. So Jabotinsky said [*with accent*], 'Professor Ettinghausen, the next time somebody says to you the Jews use Christian blood to make matza for the Passover, do not believe him at once.' Typical answer.

GC Was it 1936 or 1935?

IB Don't know.

GC Because …

IB It doesn't matter. It's some time when he was in London. I went and heard him speak, about that time, too, in Russian.

GC In London?

IB In London. To, I suppose – there must have been Russian Zionists, enough to have gone to hear him, enough Russian Jews. He was absolutely marvellous as a speaker, unscrupulous [?] to a degree. But terrific eloquence.

GC And then he came again in 1938 or 1939?

IB Tremendous things about *iusta causa* [just cause], *die rechte Sache* [the right thing]. [*laughter*] Davar ha-yashar [the right thing].

GC And then in 1938 again.

IB Then he came in 1939. And he was introduced by Beeley to the Cheltenham House which was then in Oxford.

GC Ah, I see.

IB Foreign Office Relations. He was then going to New York by clipper. It was his last voyage, the last journey before his death. But then he talked there too. I didn't – I heard him talk, Webster was there, and …

Side B

GC Now we stop with Weizmann, and go to another question altogether.

IB But then I met – are you switched on?

GC No, I am switched on.

IB but when I met Ben-Gurion in America, nothing Weizmann said to me modified my impression of him. Such as it was, it was direct [?]. Weizmann's dislike for him didn't make me dislike him in any way.

GC Weizmann's dislike for him didn't make me dislike him in any way.

GC You mean in 1941, or later?

IB At any time after I met him for the first time. He made such – I saw what he was like, or at least I saw what I thought he was like quite independently of what was said about him.

GC But then, in the 1950s, but after Weizmann died, when did you first go and see Ben-Gurion?

IB Oh, when I was staying with Weizmann. Certainly.

GC Really?

IB Oh, yes.

GC Really?

IB Yes, in 1950.

GC Ah. Was it your initiative, or …?

IB I don't – no, it wasn't my initiative. No, it was his. He asked me to come, and I went to see him in Tel Aviv, and then Weizmann said, 'Tell him [Ben-Gurion] we've got to hit the Arabs on the head, I can't let this go on.' That was what his stand then was. And I said to him – Ben-Gurion – 'The President wrote me to inform you …'.

GC [*laughter*]

IB He said, 'Yes, I know, he's being very militant.' He said, 'Very militant – in Russia [?], Being very militant and vehement, I noticed – vehement' – very ironically.

GC Why did he invite you?

IB To talk [*cough*]. To ask about England, to ask what the mode [?] in England was, about what the politicians – what the Labour government was saying. Partly that, and partly to offer me a job. Not a specific kind. He said– well, he was very, for some reason, impressed by me. When he heard that I was in Israel, he said 'Lisgor et ha-gevulot' [Close the boundaries]. [*laughter*] That I remember. Which flattered me.

GC For a man like Ben-Gurion, it's possible that his admiration for Churchill was …

IB Total.

GC Total. And had he known, and probably knew, that Churchill was impressed by your reports, and so on and so forth.

IB Maybe.

GC That would …

IB Maybe.

GC Because it's true that Ben-Gurion in this period tried to attract 'anshei ruah' [intellectuals], and Oxford was for him – that would be one reason, and the other reason was Churchill.

IB Look, I could have been wrong before. I had talked to the diplomatic school in 1947 [March/April 1951], you are right.

GC In 1947.

IB Yes. You are right. I made a separate journey – or 1948 or something like, or – not 1948.

GC What was in 1947?

IB I went With Richard Kahn [in 1951], now Lord Khan, he's an economist at King's who was Keynes's pupil. We went together, and we both talked. Kahn was in Cairo during the war. He was not at all Zionist.

GC And Sharett knew.

IB He was not Zionist, but he turned Zionist, because of the anti-Semitism among the English in Cairo. The usual story.

GC So he told you. Yes. I read a lot about – many of his papers in Cairo. The brains trust that they had in Cairo in the Middle East Supply Centre was really incredible.

IB The what?

GC The accumulation of brains.

IB Of talent. Yes.

GC Incredible. There were three future Nobel Prize winners in Economy [?] except Kahn. I mean the best men In England were there.

IB Yes. He was there and he was very suspected [respected?] – he talked to Sharett.

GC Yes.

IB When Sharett came, and he was accused of having relations with Zionists, he was very offended. That threw him into the opposite camp.

GC And he came in 1947.

IB Was it 1947? I wish I could remember. We both went entirely at the invitation of – I'll tell you who was the head of it then. He was a member, of course, of Mapai, and he became probably something in the Jewish Agency or something like that. You can remember who were the …

GC It was not Eytan?

IB No.

GC So it might be in 1949 or 1950.

IB Yes. Who was it in 1950? Who was the head of it in 1950?

GC I don't know. I'm sorry.

IB I remember what he looked lie. He was a Romanian Jew or a Polish Jew, or something like that.

GC Was it Leo David?

IB No.

GC Yuval [?].

IB No. Doesn't matter. I remember I talked about England, I talked about America. That was all right. I talked about the Soviet Union making all the mistakes. That was thought to be no good at all. The whole criticism of the Soviet Union was rejected by these people.

GC So it can't be 1950. In 1950 only a minority remained pro-Soviet.

IB Well.

GC Or maybe it was not the Foreign Office.

IB It was.

GC Not the Army?

IB Could be the Army.

GC Not the …

IB I wish I could …

GC Officers.

IB No, maybe it was officers. Who was the head of that?

GC Now, the head of that in 1950 was either Laskov or Peltz.

IB Who?

GC Peltz.

IB No.

GC I don't know.

IB Not Laskov.

GC It was not in a tent?

IB No. It was in Herzliya – no, Netanya.

GC Netanya?

IB Netanya.

GC The army.

IB It is the army. It was in Netanya.

GC Well, I'll find out.

IB Anyway …

GC By then, in 1950, I already knew and I [*end unclear*].

IB Teddy Kollek said, 'They thought your first two talks quite good; the other talk, on the Soviet Union, was thought no good at all.'

GC Teddy in 1950 was already anti-Soviet.

IB No. That's why he didn't say it critically, he just reported.

GC Now by then you were already friends with Teddy?

IB Yes. I met Teddy in 1947.

GC In 1947.

IB In Israel. In Palestine.

GC Now, later on, whenever you would come to Israel, you visited Ben-Gurion.

IB That's probably true..

GC He saw to it that you …

IB Yes. He quite liked talking to me. He quite liked discussing – by far the most amusing visit I ever – he used to talk about things in

general. Foreign [?] history, the importance of nationalism, how nations are created. He liked, and of course I saw him in Oxford, as you know.

GC Later.

IB Yes, but he came, no longer Prime Minister. [?]. He came to Oxford one weekend, because Crossman told him to buy books in Blackwells.

GC He came three times. Once in 1950, and then in 1960 and 1961.

IB Must have been 1950. I'll tell you why.

GC That was his first visit, and he bought books in Blackwells [?].

IB I'll tell you what happened to him. He was staying in the Mitre hotel, and I was told he was there, and of course I knew him by then, evidently. So I went to see him and I found him warming his feet in front of a fire in some squalid little drawing-room there and I took him with me to New College, and talked. Then I went with him for a walk around Oxford at around 11 o'clock at night. And afterwards we went to All Souls, where there was only one man sitting in the Common Room. That was a man called Hubert Henderson, who was at that time, I think, the Professor of Economics, and became, later, the Warden, and he had a long argument. Henderson had no idea who he was. He asked me the next day, 'Who is that intelligent little man?' That went on until one in the morning, then I took him back. Then Balogh asked me to introduce him to him, but I don't think I did. Then I saw him again the next day. He had some bodyguards with him, undoubtedly. I can't quite remember who they were. Probably what's-his-name

GC Nehemiah Argov.

IB What?

GC Nehemiah Argov.

IB Nehemiah must have been there.

GC He was from Riga [?].

IB Nehemiah was. The one who committed suicide. He was here, yes. Was from Riga [?]. I think he was there, Nehemiah. I know, exactly. But they were never there when I was – they used to leave the room, *à deux*. And we had a long conversation about this and that. We used to go for walks. I saw him quite a lot then, and then he left. Then when he came again, he came to lunch. We asked Dolly Rothschild.

GC In 1961.

IB Probably.

GC In 1960, 1961. In 1961 he came back from speaking with – his visits with Adenauer. In 1960, I can't remember what it was.

IB Anyway, he came to Oxford. He stayed near Oxford.

GC Near Oxford in a small country house.

IB Correct. Exactly.

GC A little one. Not anybody. There was a problem of security.

IB All that. And he came to lunch. With Dolly Rothschild and Aline and me and Paula [B-G's wife]. I think. That was all right. It was quite nice. 'Doroty', he called her.

GC He was then in his peak.

IB Absolutely.

GC But was it interesting to argue with him?

IB Always. I remember telling him something that unfortunately made an impression on him. I said to him that the French reactionary political philosopher de Maistre said that it was absurd to think that people crave for peace. They crave for war, they crave

for fighting, they crave for violence. That is, if you watch all these – it is ridiculous to suppose that peace is one of the ends of man, and that in fact states as often as not are made by conquests. And I said to him, 'You know, America' – what did I quote to him? [*pause*] Something along those lines, that America was really made into a proper nation by the Civil War, which made for them a real American history. Before 1960, there was no – they didn't think about themselves historically. After that they did. And he said, 'Yes, it's the shedding of blood that makes nations.' That he believed in. Then of course I told you my story about when I went to him [for?] Bible class. When he was living on Ben-Maimon St.

GC In Rehavia, yes. He had …

IB On Saturday Bible class – he invited me to it. I went. I was staying in the King David. I suppose I was probably doing Weizmann or something already.

GC No, that was later.

IB No, not by my being …

GC Ah, Weizmann.

IB The interviews, probably.

GC Yes, you are right.

IB [?] or not, I don't know. I was on some job. Paula let me in and said – the first visit, I remember very well, in Tel Aviv – she said, 'What would you like to drink?' And Ben-Gurion said, 'Give him some orange juice.' And she said, 'Why *davka* [even] orange juice?' Ordinary water was quite enough.

GC [*laughter*]

IB She gave me a glass of water. I loved that. Then when we came and there was this class, there was Shazar, one of those judges in the Supreme Court.

GC [Moshe] Zilberg, or [Shneur Zalman] Heshin.
IB Zilberg, certainly. The other one I'm not sure. Then there was Kaufmann, and various other people. A kind of shiur [Talmud lesson]. Around the table. And Paula said 'Look. It's very boring what they're doing. Ben-Gurion doesn't enjoy it in the least. He pretends he does, he thinks he should. Why don't you come and talk to me? Why be a hypocrite? You'll find it much [more] amusing to talk to me in the corner. It's terribly boring.'

GC I never heard this, but it's very typical.

IB Very, I know. So I rejected this advance and I sat down and they talked about the prophet Nathan. Nathan ha-Navi [the prophet]. And the problem was, what was a prophet, Nathan, who talked to David [?] 'ata ha-ish' ['Thou art the man'].[3] What was the position of prophets? Were they called prophets, was it 'navi he-khatzer' [court prophet] or were they dervishes? Exactly what the position of prophet was, in the kingdom of Israel. Quite interesting. They talked about him, and Eliyahu [Elijah], anybody you like, Elisha and all this.

GC Could you follow?

IB Oh yes, I followed, in some way. Then somebody mentioned the fact, then 'ata ha-ish' came up. And they said, well, of course it was well known that David couldn't build the Temple, because he was a man of blood. That's why Solomon, who did not shed blood – at this point Ben-Gurion simply lost his temper, blew up, and said it was a monstrous interpretation. 'Whatever the Bible may say, David was the greatest king we had. Everything he did was perfect.' And I swear he identified himself with David in every possible way, and defended David against all this monstrous …

GC To his last days.

IB I know. And I saw that he had to do it. After that the class broke up. But I was amused. This passionate defence. Shall we stop? All right.

[3] 2 Samuel 12:7.

GC Want us to stop?

IB Five o'clock, yes.