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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

MARGARET BRUCE

BY

RICHARD JOLLY

Mount Kisco, 25 October 2003

Transcribed by Ron Nerio

RICHARD JOLLY: Molly Bruce or Margaret Bruce?

MOLLY BRUCE: I was christened Margaret, but my mother always called me Molly. So I answer to both.

RICHARD JOLLY: We are in Mount Kisco, in Molly's house, on October 25th 2003. Perhaps, Molly, you might just say a word or two at the beginning about your own family background.

MB: My father and mother both came from the industrial part of Yorkshire in the North of England. My father came from a poor background, but he was, in his own way, quite brilliant. He went to work in a textile mill at the age of eleven and educated himself at home and in technical colleges. That led him to want to help the underprivileged get a good basic education. Actually, I have written all this up in my memoirs. I'll let you have a copy of that if you're interested.

RJ: We would like that.

MB: Right after World War I—in 1919 I believe—the "Fisher" Act was passed in Britain. The school-leaving age at that time was, I believe, 14. The Fisher Act required employers to release their young employees one day a week to attend school until 16 or 18 years old. My father went to Rugby to head the Day Continuation School there and apparently kept the scheme alive in Rugby long after it died everywhere else. I'll let you have this copy of my memoirs because Rugby, of course, is the site of a very different type of school.

RJ: Rugby public school.

MB: Exactly. It is called a public school in England but was in fact an elite private school—originally for male students only. Rugby football was born there. So it's interesting how my father kept the concept of the day continuation school alive and gradually built it into a

technical college where radar research was done during World War II. The school worked with the industrial firms in the town—British Thomson Houston was one of the industrial firms. These firms in those days were very liberal-minded—perhaps more than one thinks of them now so much. But I'll let you have more details of that, Richard.

RJ: Tell me when it was clear that you ought to go to university and then to Girton College, Cambridge.

MB: My father, because he hadn't had the privilege himself, was very keen that one of his two children should attend Oxford or Cambridge. I only had one brother and he was already involved in World War II, and had in any case embarked on a career in accountancy. My brother ultimately rose to the top of his profession. So it came to me to go to Cambridge. Academically, I was a little more qualified than my brother. He wasn't intellectually-oriented anyway and in any case we were both young.

MB: I studied French and German, and the European history that goes with it. And I spent my school vacations with different families in both France and Nazi Germany. I became very close to one family in particular, in Paris, and stayed with them several times. I also exchanged visits with German families, where I began to see—

RJ: See the early days of [Adolf] Hitler.

MB: Oh, yes. I was first in Frankfurt, actually with a family who had a daughter my age. I have some lovely photographs of them. I loved the father, who had been a general in the Kaiser's army during World War I. His wife was half Jewish. They came to stay with us in Rugby, and then I traveled back with the daughter and spent a month with them. But my German was really not very good and I was very homesick. I felt they weren't very nice to me except the father but that was probably not true.

My parents were upset over my return journey. The mother and daughter put me on the steamer sailing down the Rhine to Cologne where the father met me. I was amused with all the "Heil Hitlering" that went on among the passengers on the steamer at every historic point on the Rhine.

RJ: Which year was this?

MB: Well, this was the 1930s. It would be 1935 or 1936.

RJ: As early as that?

MB: Oh, yes. I thought it was all rather ridiculous. The mother and daughter had given me some jewels and some incriminating letters to take with me to Jewish relatives in England, refugees. Well of course, when my father saw what I had on me, and that they might have incriminated me he was very upset. I was not particularly concerned at the time.

RB: You weren't worried bringing letters into England? Your father was worried that you might have been caught with them leaving Germany?

MB: He was also worried about my having jewels on me in England. I suppose the German family took a chance. And I was blonde and Aryan-looking in those days, and that is perhaps why they took a chance. I don't know. I think if I had realized the danger I probably would have done it anyway. I would do it today but I wouldn't do it as well.

RJ: Now let's come ahead because of course we want to get to the UN world. There you are, you're studying modern languages in Girton. After that, you joined Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. What was the international side that you felt in yourself at that time?

MB: Because I had traveled and been in Europe, I was interested in other cultures. I think I was always interested in learning about other countries, other views, and other cultures. Well, it was wartime when I graduated from Cambridge.

RJ: 1942 or 1943?

MB: 1940. France had collapsed, and there was that crisis for Britain. I really wanted to join one of the armed forces, but because my brother was actually at Dunkirk receiving the Allied troops being evacuated, my parents persuaded me to look for something a little less dangerous.

RJ: And as a woman that was more of a choice? Had you been a young man, would you have had to go?

MB: I would have had to do something as a woman, especially when the war was going badly—not initially, not when I graduated. It was the Cambridge University Appointments Board that encouraged me to apply to the Royal Institute of International Affairs where there was a vacancy. It seemed to be really up my alley and related to what I wanted to do.

RJ: And you were working then clipping, collecting—

MB: And filing.

RJ: On the face of it, it looks rather mechanical for someone with a graduate degree.

MB: Well no, I wasn't doing any of the actual clipping and filing, but rather deciding where the clippings would be filed. No, it was interesting because we had access to newspapers from occupied Europe and from neutral countries. So you got a different slant on the news and a chance to read it and study it. So from that point of view it was interesting. It was mostly deciding where things should be filed and the institute had a somewhat unique filing system. We

also answered queries from various sources—even including the prime minister, Winston Churchill. We were all university graduates with language skills.

RJ: There must have been a particular preoccupation with the war, the war effort, production levels in occupied countries.

MB: Yes, all of that. In fact, I had a boyfriend who was missing, believed drowned. My friends and I all scanned the newspapers to see whether he had possibly been saved and was taken prisoner. But unfortunately, he wasn't. He had been part of Bletchley. Did you know what went on at Bletchley, by the way?

RJ: Yes, of course, the Enigma Project.

MB: Yes. He was part of that.

RJ: The story of which has been written up by my tutor at Cambridge, the definitive historical account of Bletchley. But coming back, how did you go from Chatham House into the UN, playing a role with the United Nations?

MB: Well, after the San Francisco founding conference, the UN moved to London for meetings of the Preparatory Commission that was set up in San Francisco, and its Executive Committee. These were two bodies that were to make the interim arrangements for the first formal meetings of the UN, which were held in London: the first General Assembly and the first Security Council, held in February 1946. The Foreign Office—the Royal Institute of International Affairs had become the Foreign Office Research Department—was looking for staff to service the UN meetings in London. I was looking to get involved with the UN. I always wanted to work with the UN.

RJ: Why?

MB: I suppose because I wanted to contribute to peace. I had seen enough of war. I had two friends—you met one of them recently. We had gone through the war together. We lived together in London. We all felt the same way, we wanted to get into something that had real meaning.

RJ: Putting an end to war.

MB: Yes essentially.

RJ: Were you aware at that time of the Charter?

MB: Not in detail.

RJ: But you followed it in the newspapers and so forth.

MB: Oh yes, to the extent that we got news. There wasn't an awful lot. It was a very different world. You didn't have television.

RJ: But surely the newspapers, *The Times* of London would have given the Charter in full.

MB: I don't remember that.

RJ: Really?

MB: I don't remember it, but that isn't to say—

RJ: But I imagine that there in Chatham House surely—

MB: Yes, we would have, you're absolutely right.

RJ: But it doesn't spring to mind that when you read it you were really enlivened by it.

MB: No, not at all. In fact, I'm not sure we even fully knew what was going on regarding the UN until we met as part of the UN staff in Church House, close to Westminster Abbey. Our offices were around a bomb crater. Just recently, when I was in London, I walked around there and I spoke to the man who ran the tour. He couldn't have cared less.

RJ: No sense of history.

MB: None whatsoever. He was more concerned that I shouldn't walk across the lawn.

RJ: Yes. So what were you doing in London at the time of the preparatory meetings?

MB: Well, that was very routine, really. You know, I just took a job wherever they needed someone. They needed someone in the documents office, organizing, filing, and translation, and all of that. I remember hearing that the Chinese translation was a bit of a problem because they didn't have any typewriters that could type Chinese. And I understand that some poor individual wrote it all out by hand overnight. There were incidents like that.

RJ: You never lost any critical documents, did you?

MB: Well, I don't think so. That's when I met my husband because he was working in that area, too.

RJ: He had been in charge of the administration in San Francisco?

MB: Of processing, printing and distributing documents in five languages. He came to all of this, initially, because he was indignant at how the Americans treated the Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor. He volunteered to help run one of the camps in California and to try and ease the conditions. And then he volunteered to go to Washington to try to get at least the U.S. citizens of Japanese origin released. He joined the Executive Office of the president, actually. Well, he never got them released, but he was seconded to the State Department to go and help with the San Francisco conference, and then they sent him to London for the follow-up meetings.

RJ: By then he was a UN official?

MB: No, not at all. He was from the State Department. Well, really, he was from the Executive Office of the president seconded to the State Department. And he went back to the

State Department. He didn't actually join the UN Secretariat until the middle of 1946, when he joined the UN Statistical Office. He was trained in economics.

RJ: He stayed in the Statistical Office?

MB: A few years but he moved around a bit. He was on the UN staff for twenty years or so.

RJ: But to come back to yourself. Here you are in London. You met your husband-to-be.

MB: Yes, but we parted. He was married to somebody else then, and we parted—a rather sad parting, not expecting to see each other again.

RJ: So when did you decide to go to the United States and under what circumstances?

MB: Well, they were looking for people to send, actually.

RJ: The UK government?

MB: No, Gladwyn Jebb of the British Foreign Office was in control of the administration of the UN staff and it was they who selected people to send to the U.S. I was one of those—one of the first, in fact. I flew over—it was my first flight ever—with one of the first teams and landed in New York after twenty-four hours. I did not like New York. I thought people were rude and pushy. Did I tell you about my first night in New York?

RJ: No.

MB: Well, I was in the Hotel New Yorker, which later became the headquarters of the Reverend Moon but was then a commercial hotel. I couldn't understand what people were saying. They spoke very fast. I wanted to send some clothes to be pressed. Have you ever heard of a "servidor"?

RJ: No.

MB: Well, it's something that no longer exists. If you wanted clothes to be pressed, you put them in the door on your side and the staff took them out on the other side. I could not understand this, and the person at the desk got very impatient and said, "I'll send you an interpreter." So I had an interpreter for my English my first night in New York.

RJ: So you were then employed in the UN. What was your position at the time?

MB: Anything I was asked to do. But my wish was to get involved, as soon as I could, with the human rights side of things because of my background in Nazi Germany and in general. We were working—you know, it's a little hazy in terms of dates. It was March of 1946 when I came over. The nuclear Commission on Human Rights, which I was not actually involved with, met somewhere around then, and the nuclear Sub-Commission, as it then was, on the Status of Women. I wasn't really involved and didn't know much then, but I was trying to find out.

RJ: Then, within a year or two—perhaps less, you were there at the side of Eleanor Roosevelt, acting as the secretary to the committee.

MB: Yes, I was involved either directly or indirectly in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights both in the drafting committee and the Commission on Human Rights. I was recruited to the Human Rights Division of the Secretariat by the acting director of human rights, who was a Dutchman, Pete Schmidt. He had been very active in the Dutch resistance movement. I think he liked me. I was young, and I was—

RJ: You were quite glamorous, if I may say so, judging from the photographs you've been showing me.

MB: Well, I think four or five of the first staff members of the human rights division were recruited by Pete Schmidt.

RJ: And all dazzling.

MB: I'm not so sure about that. But then Pete was transferred from human rights to political affairs. This initial period of the organization of the Secretariat staff was rather difficult and somewhat confused. Several Departments each headed by an assistant-secretary-general were set up. Henri Laugier, a French national, was put in charge of the Department of Social Affairs and the human rights division was made part of that department. During the war years Laugier had known John Humphrey who was a law professor at McGill University in Montreal. I don't know the whole background, but anyway, Humphrey was appointed as the first director of the human rights division, and Schmidt was transferred. They were very different. Humphrey was a lawyer who hadn't been through the war, and Schmidt was a member of the resistance who had been running an underground newspaper. So whether the human rights program might have taken off in a slightly different direction, one can always think of that.

RJ: If Schmidt had remained. One of the interesting questions for us is the paths not taken. Just what do you think might have been the different direction?

MB: I don't know, I really can't say. The mandate under the Charter was to set up a Commission on Human Rights, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) decided that the commission's first task was to draft an international bill of rights. That was the first thing they had to do, and the first decision they had to take was in what form should the international bill be drafted? Should it be a declaration or a legally binding convention? Well, it was in 1947, at the second session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, with which I was quite involved, that the Commission on Human Rights decided that the international bill of human rights should be in three parts: a declaration, which the Americans wanted; a convention or conventions, which the British wanted at that time; and some kind of enforcement measures, which the Australians wanted. The Australians in fact wanted an International Court of Human

Rights in 1947. The commission decided that all three—declaration, convention or conventions (to be called covenants), and measures of implementation—would together constitute the international bill of human rights.

Eleanor Roosevelt's role in that was quite interesting because she knew that the U.S. Senate was highly unlikely to ratify any convention, even then. So she was pressing for a declaration. She carried the commission with her. She was quite formidable in the way she did things because she never lost her temper. But she could be tough. She herself worked extremely hard and expected the staff to follow her example.

Well, the draft of the Universal Declaration was completed and adopted in 1948, in Paris, with a few countries abstaining, but none voting against it. Of course, over the years it has had very considerable influence and the lawyers have argued whether it has the full force of law or not. They will go on arguing that for some time. But the two covenants were not completed and adopted until 1966.

Then, of course, the membership of the UN was growing. The former colonies wanted the right to self-determination written into the covenants, and that's when the British backed off pushing it. And, of course, the Australian—it was Colonel Hodgson I think I have some pictures of him—pushing for an International Court of Human Rights. He didn't get very far at the time.

RJ: Well, they have now got an International Criminal Court.

MB: Yes, they have but the United States is against it.

RJ: Just recently. But to come back to Eleanor Roosevelt. She was, of course, one of the major figures you were with in meeting after meeting in a supportive role. What was she like—in the way she treated you and others? Did you get a glimpse then of someone who really

was head and shoulders—I suppose physically head and shoulders, I suppose physically as well as metaphorically, above the other women and men?

MB: Well, she was much taller than me. My main task was to keep her supplied with the texts, in some sort of order, and tell her of anything that was going wrong or going on. She was always on time, and most of the rest of the committee was late. On one occasion, there was an old man, over 90, who came and asked me if he could say hello to Mrs. Roosevelt. So I mentioned this to her. She said, "I will go and shake his hand." That was the kind of thing she would do.

RJ: That's nice, but it doesn't strike me quite as unusual as all that.

MB: Well, if you had worked in the UN at that time you would. To me, it was impressive because she had actually been first lady of the land, and yet she herself was very humble. She often took her lunch in the staff cafeteria and always insisted in keeping her place in line whenever a staff member offered her his or her place.

There were many other things that she did that probably have more substantive value for the discussions. It was the Cold War, obviously, and the Russians would love to needle the United States. After a time she decided she wasn't going to bother to answer their attacks in detail any more. She would submit a reply in writing, which is what she did.

RJ: That was a rather skillful move, so it didn't disturb the flow of the discussions.

MB: It infuriated the Russians. And she had a few techniques.

RJ: Any others?

MB: They don't readily come to mind. It was a long time ago.

RJ: What comes to mind is very impressive. Now, let's come to the women's rights issue. Originally, women's rights were handled in a sub-commission of the Human Rights

Commission, but then it became a separate commission in its own right, with which you were then—

MB: No, no, I came in much later.

RJ: Ah. But you had a special role in the women's commission?

MB: Not as a member of the commission. In 1962 I was made head of the staff that serviced the commission. It was the Status of Women Section within the Division of Human Rights, and was first headed by someone from Chile, then someone from India, but neither of them stayed very long. The section was run for many years by an Australian, Mary Tennison Woods, and then by a rather tough and able French lawyer, Sophie Grinberg Vinaver, who had some clashes with John Humphrey, the director of the division. The commission itself had a number of militant feminists among its members. I remember Minerva Bernadino of the Dominican Republic who remained active on women's issues well into her nineties. There was also Marie-Helene Lefaucheux who chaired the commission for a number of years. She was killed in a plane crash on returning from a visit to Mexico. Marie-Helene Lefaucheux was quite a character—tough, but very different from Eleanor Roosevelt although she was okay.

RJ: But she was much tougher.

MB: Yes, she was more of an active feminist. Actually, Eleanor Roosevelt wasn't an ardent feminist. Eleanor was one of those who thought that if you improved human rights women's position would automatically be improved. That was a view that was held and is still held, to some extent. Eleanor's views changed somewhat because the women on the Status of Women Commission were saying was that the Human Rights Commission was so bogged down, or had so big an agenda with the international bill of rights, and the procedure they had set up for handling violations of human rights in the beginning, that they wouldn't have time to deal with

women's rights. And, of course, the political rights of women was a very key issue in those days because in the 1940's in many countries women didn't have political rights.

RJ: Rights to vote, for example.

MB: Or to hold public office, even more. And then the whole situation of family law, where the man and husband was the dominant force. That was much of the focus of the Commission on the Status of Women in the beginning, to try and get the legal status of women changed.

RJ: What was your involvement in the Status of Women Commission?

MB: Well, I was directing the staff and the program from 1962 to 1977.

RJ: Were you doing research work? Were you documenting the actual situation?

MB: Yes, all of that. The research was done by the staff that serviced the commission and it began from the point at which the League of Nations had left off, and studied the legal status of women, particularly in family law. Very good work was done in setting standards at this time. Many recommendations were addressed to governments and three conventions were adopted on political rights of women, nationality of married women, and consent to marriage and minimum age of marriage, as well as both a declaration and convention on the elimination of discrimination against women. The staff and the commission also worked closely with the ILO (International Labour Organization) and UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) on labor and education issues of interest to women.

The focus of the status of women's program expanded as the membership of the UN increased, and more and more former colonies became UN member states.

RJ: This was in the 1960s?

MB: In the 1960s and 1970s. That's when human rights, and even more the advancement of women, began to get involved in development issues. There again women had a battle to prove that women have a separate role to play and should not just be considered as beneficiaries of better conditions of development. And that's been an uphill battle.

RJ: You were following this picture of the Status of Women Commission in which years?

MB: Round about 1962 to 1979.

RJ: Very critical years.

MB: I like to think I made something of an impact.

RJ: Were very many people involved in the commission women? Were most of them women?

MB: Yes, all of them, unless it was a political issue—a strictly political issue.

RJ: What is meant by that? Men would be brought in to take over?

MB: Yes. I think it was most obvious actually at the world women's conference in 1975, which was in Mexico, where two men, from two Arab countries—I forget which—went to Mexico specifically to get the women to equate Zionism and racism in that famous resolution that created such a division. And then the men from the other delegations who were fighting it came to help.

RJ: I want to stick for a moment with the earlier years. Do you remember any particular battles in the earlier years? Do you remember any occasion when Eleanor Roosevelt took a specific line?

MB: She wasn't involved with the Status of Women Commission at all, not at all actually.

RJ: I am getting a bit confused. You were there assisting her on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights until it was passed in 1948?

MB: Yes, although I was not in the General Assembly when it was passed. But then she herself left the UN when the Republicans took over in the 1950s. That's when she joined UNA/USA (United Nations Association of the United States of America).

RJ: Did that make a big difference as far as you saw?

MB: Oh yes, to human rights, yes. Of course. Mary—

RJ: Mary Lord.

MB: Yes. When Mary Lord came, it was quite interesting because she announced that the United States would not ratify the covenants. They would present, and they did present, a three-pronged program establishing the advisory services program on human rights, annual reports by governments on human rights in their countries, and global studies on specific aspects of human rights. And that was part of the established program of the Human Rights Commission and Secretariat for a number of years. And actually, the advisory services program in human rights was interesting because it was funded out of the regular budget. It wasn't part of UNDP (UN Development Programme). It sort of melted in. They moved together a bit later. But they used to have seminars on human rights, and actually the women did benefit from it. It was agreed that the women would have one seminar a year on women's issues.

RJ: Out of how many?

MB: Three or four. They didn't have that many because they had to have a host country willing to shoulder the costs—the local costs. It was an interesting part of the program, actually.

RJ: Do you remember, at the time, any efforts when the Republicans took over and they announced a shift in the United States policy? Was there any attempt to resist that?

MB: Not as I remember very much. It was the period of the Cold War and, of course, in the 1950s you had McCarthyism, and there was a certain amount of resistance to that.

RJ: Perhaps I should just ask you about [Joseph] McCarthy because you, at that time, you were—

MB: In New York.

RJ: But still with the title secretary?

MB: No, I never actually had the title of secretary. I was chief of the section and later—in 1969 I believe—assistant director of the division.

RJ: Give me your perspective on how the McCarthy attacks on the UN and the fingerprinting—how that seemed to you.

MB: I would say most of us strongly opposed it, certainly in the Human Rights Division—because if we weren't going to oppose it, who would? And I must say Humphrey did back us.

RJ: John Humphrey.

MB: John Humphrey, the director of the division. But that was not so true of the top UN administrator. I think it was Byron Price at the time.

RJ: Or of the Secretary-General, Trygve Lie.

MB: Well, he was threatened by the Americans, or scared of the Americans. And it was a very tough period because people were being fired without just cause. And one of the people fired just happened to be a member of the staff council, as I was at the time, and we were all indignant. It was mostly the non-American citizens who were speaking up. The Americans were quite frankly afraid. It was the 1950s because I had only recently been married and my husband had been assigned to what was then British North Borneo (now part of Malaysia) on a

technical assistance mission. We had just moved into a house in Mamaroneck in Westchester county New York. The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) came to all the neighbors inquiring about my husband. One of the neighbors never spoke to me again. Most of them just ignored it, but it wasn't too easy living by myself.

RJ: Did any of them tell you in more detail what the FBI said or insinuated?

MB: No, and I didn't really want to find out because by then my husband was divorced, too. So there were questions I didn't want to get into.

RJ: Do you think the FBI played on those things, if I may ask?

MB: I have no idea.

RJ: But they're not beyond it, as we know from many other cases.

MB: No, not at all. In fact, for years later, any American national recruited by the UN had to be cleared by them.

RJ: Security check. That was going on in the 1980s, when I joined. It's not going on today?

MB: Well, it probably is. They came in, not to investigate me but one of my staff, and I refused to say anything. It probably is going on again now. It's a return to those days of witchhunting.

RJ: Do you remember any other aspects of Eleanor Roosevelt at that time? She's such a big figure that the human reminiscences are always fascinating.

MB: Yes certainly. I have to read up about her again. I have quite a few of her books here. I first saw her—I didn't have any contact with her, but I remember seeing her in London. She herself comments that she was walking on eggs all of the time at the London meetings. She was part of the U.S. delegation, but she knew she was not very welcome and if she didn't do a

good job no other woman would be given a chance, which is an interesting comment on the attitude of a Democratic administration towards women.

RJ: Now the Latin American women were very much in the lead in the UN because under the Organization of American States (OAS) they already had a commission on women?

MB: Yes, way back, from the 1920s.

RJ: But did that mean that they were really the driving force on women's issues?

MB: Certain individuals, but as countries, not necessarily. Well, of course there was a big division between the educated and the masses. And there were big political problems. They were a driving force within the UN. They did good things for women in their own countries, but they didn't always prevail on their governments. As a matter of fact when I was following women's issues, Cuba, under [Fidel] Castro was the only country that obliged husbands by law to do their full share of housework. How they enforced it, I don't know, but it was on the books. It is a small and perhaps interesting detail.

Women had the right to vote in some countries in Latin America. I think did have the right to vote. But at that time very few women held public office—certainly not in Europe or for that matter in the U.S.

RJ: Were you aware of any groups, lawyers' groups, or men within the UN, or on the commission, trying to dismiss these issues? What was the nature of the opposition, and did it maneuver behind the scenes or publicly? Can you perhaps tell us a bit of that?

MB: Well, one of the issues that came to the fore, probably in the 1960s, was the position of women in the Secretariat. I do remember once when I was in Geneva in control of the staff running the Commission on the Status of Women, when the commission wanted to be given statistics of the number and grades of women serving on the Secretariat staff. I knew that

this was a very touchy issue both with my director, Marc Schreiber, and the UN Office of Personnel. I cabled immediately to Schreiber to tell him what was going on. Of course, he nearly had a fit because anything like that upset him. The personnel people sent instructions to me to reject the commission's request.

RJ: But one of the interesting things about history is to remind ourselves what it was like, and of the driving forces of the time.

MB: I have some records of this that I will eventually sort through to refresh my memory on it. It was quite tough, in terms of my own personal relations with the personnel people.

RJ: For example?

MB: Well, I can’t think of a specific one at the moment, but they didn’t want to release any statistics to the Commission on the Status of Women or establish any targets for recruitment or promotion of women. These are readily accepted now.

RJ: Probably the proportion of women in senior or professional positions.

MB: Yes. You know, even on other issues things have changed considerably at the national level. For example I think Anthony Eden’s divorce was the first time that anyone divorced could serve in the British Foreign Office. I think I’m right in saying that.

RJ: And his divorce was roughly which year?

MB: That would be the 1940s.

RJ: During the war.

MB: It must have been, I suppose. You know, I have these bits in my memory, but I have to check the authenticity of it.

RJ: I am wondering what else.

MB: Have you seen the film that the *American Experience* made on Eleanor Roosevelt's life? I appear in it, towards the end. In fact, I think I have a copy. I can lend it to you. The film company came here and interviewed me for it. They also invited me to the launching of the film when it was completed, and that's when I met David Roosevelt for the first time. Of course, I knew Curtis Roosevelt. He was the Roosevelt's daughter's son. In fact, I knew him quite well since he worked in the Secretariat for a number of years.

When I worked directly with Eleanor Roosevelt I was a relatively junior professional officer. One of the reasons I mention this is because today I am the only survivor of the staff of the human rights division of those early days. People tend to forget that I was not at that time a senior officer. That came later in the 1960s.

RJ: Do you remember the British trying to manipulate you, or manipulate through you in any way?

MB: No, far from it. In fact, they would ignore me.

RJ: That was my experience in the UN.

MB: Absolutely. But they did change. It came much later, I think. I don't know. It's hard for me to say. The thing that has distressed me about what is going on now, and the criticism of the UN, did not exist in my day. We on the staff were really neutral and accepted as such.

RJ: Exactly.

MB: That is what really distresses me. How far has that changed? I really don't know.

RJ: I remember when, even as a graduate student working for a summer job, I would get invited once or twice for cocktail parties. But it was the rule at that time, in 1960, that you

would never go to the cocktail party given by your own government lest you be thought to be particularly favoring your own national government.

MB: That was true of the Americans, too, as a matter of fact, in those far gone days. A striking example of that was when I was in, actually, Mongolia of all places.

RJ: What year?

MB: 1965. We had a seminar on the participation of women in public life in Outer Mongolia, largely because John Humphrey thought Outer Mongolia would be an interesting country in which to discuss women's issues. He persuaded the government to invite us. At the time, we had a few political problems because according to the rules governing regional seminars all countries in the region had to be invited and from a practical point of view travel had to be through the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was not on speaking terms with some of the countries concerned. But we managed to negotiate with the Soviet Union to allow the participants to travel. The British were the only western country that had any representation, and it wasn't at an ambassador level. It was a *charge d'affaires,* I think. I remember distinctly that the Cubans were there. Humphrey was representing the Secretary-General, and I was the next senior UN official. The Cuban representative had children, and asked my advice as to whether she should send her children back to Cuba to be educated or leave them in Outer Mongolia. So that was how they viewed the Secretariat and even consulted us on personal matters in those days.

Actually, as a member of the Secretariat I felt that I was generally accepted by most countries, including the communist countries, because the UN staff were looked upon as neutral participants. On women's issues, I think it was a little easier to deal with communist countries than on some of the human rights issues. But still, I always felt that I had their confidence. I am

not sure that I would feel that today. Well, I don't know, I'm not working there. But when, in Iraq in 2003, they blew up Sergio di Mello and some of his colleagues I was terribly upset. The staff in Iraq were obviously not being seen as neutral.

RJ: That was very painful. Why don't we pause for a moment?

RJ: This is Richard Jolly, interviewing Molly Bruce in Mount Kisco on the 25th[st] of October, and this is side two. Molly, you were saying to me something about the early procedures of the Commission on Human Rights that, in retrospect, have made things very difficult. Perhaps you would elaborate on that.

MB: Well, initially, in 1947, which was one of the key sessions of the commission, when they were adopting a positive approach on the international bill of rights, they adopted rather a miserable procedure for dealing with alleged violations of human rights. We had received many letters from individuals all over the world complaining that their rights were being violated. I remember Charles Malik of Lebanon saying the Commission on Human Rights should consider complaints from the "last lunatic in the last lunatic asylum." But the procedure established for handling these communications sought primarily to protect the governments complained against. And, of course, the colonial powers still had colonies and they didn't want complaints about their territories made public.

The Economic and Social Council endorsed the commission's proposals for handling these communications, which opened with the phrase: "The Commission recognizes that it has no power to take any action in regard to any complaints concerning human rights." It instructed the Secretariat to compile for each session of the commission a confidential list of the communications received with a brief indication of the contents without divulging the identity of the author. Any discussion of the list and follow up action would be considered by an ad hoc

committee of the commission in a closed session. The Commission on the Status of Women, to its credit, refused to say that it had no power to act on complaints, but the council endorsed the same procedure for both commissions. This was also in 1947 I believe.

A few governments did look into the complaint and responded to the allegations. The U.S. generally responded, and the UK, but there was no obligation to respond and we didn't know which governments actually looked into the complaint unless they informed us. I think the French and most of the other western powers did, and they usually but not always defended themselves. Well, then, twenty years later, I think—

RJ: 1968.

MB: That's right. The procedure was amended to jazz it up a bit for gross violations of human rights. Now, I wasn't really involved when they expanded the procedure, so I don't know the details too well. The Commission on the Status of Women never really amended the procedure which was the same as the Commission on Human Rights. As far as I know, at the second World Conference on Human Rights—

RJ: The one in 1993?

MB: That's right.

RJ: The Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, was that when that was adopted?

MB: Yes, but I'm not too informed on the details of that and it only applies to countries that are parties to the protocol. However the procedure for handling human rights violations has advanced a great deal since the early days, and several of the conventions adopted later allow a right of petition by individuals.

RJ: Let me come back to the beginning. Although you described this as—the word was what procedure?

MB: It was called communications concerning human rights.

RJ: But it was very messy?

MB: It was very limited.

RJ: Could you have imagined that it might have been done in a different way? Were there any governments that were more open to a more open process, a less limited one?

MB: I think Charles Malik of Lebanon personally was, and I think probably some of the other members of the commission personally were, but probably not their governments.

There is another interesting bit of information on the selection of members of the Commission on Human Rights, which no longer applies today. But in the very early days, the commission members were not meant to be purely representatives of their governments, but rather individual experts in the field of human rights. The Soviets objected to commission members not being government representatives and a very cumbersome procedure was worked out as a compromise.

The ECOSOC elected the countries that would nominate experts to serve on the commission. The Secretariat then submitted to the council the names and background of the experts nominated, and the council then approved the individual concerned as a member of the commission, and only he or she was authorized to vote. We in the Secretariat applied that rule very strictly, to the great annoyance of the Americans in particular when we would not let their expert vote because he or she had not been individually confirmed by the council.

RJ: One of the arguments of the Americans must have been that the Russians may call themselves experts, but they are all people who have to be loyal to the government. Did that worry you in the secretariat?

MB: Up to a point, yes. But we still wouldn't let anyone other than the approved nominee vote.

RJ: You stuck with the procedures, even though the procedures would have been operating in a very different way in a state-controlled country.

MB: Of course, we would have much preferred to have had real individual experts from all countries represented on the commission. That was the original idea, but it's completely gone now. If we had been following the earlier procedure the recent issue of Libya being elected as chair of the commission might have been somewhat less divisive. The individual concerned has apparently been quite an objective chair from what I have heard. She is the Libyan representative in Geneva. But all you hear about the issue is [Muammar] Gadhafi—certainly no champion of human rights. I doubt if he had much to do with her personally. She's a figurehead for that matter. But it was an unfortunate development, and doesn't reflect well on the commission.

RJ: The Committee for Development Planning (CDP), which was the committee set up at the end of the 1960s. The Nobel Prize winning economist, Jan Tinbergen, was the chairman. That committee always had individuals and experts—economists, mostly—appointed in their own right. They were not representing governments in the slightest. And mostly it did work that way, although the representative of the Soviet Union came along with a hatchet-man who would insist on language that would not embarrass the Soviet government.

MB: Yes, the Russians always acted like that. And then, of course, the Americans, and the British, and the French, and all the westerners started doing the same thing.

RJ: Just show me a moment the photographs here of the commission in its earliest stages because it's such a good way of you commenting. This one, of course, shows Eleanor Roosevelt at the podium. I'm not quite sure where. But certainly she is standing tall above—she was taller than many of the men, too.

MB: Yes, she was.

RJ: Point out this one because this is Eleanor convening a session of women delegates at the first session of the General Assembly in London, and with a copy opposite of the open letter to the women of the world.

MB: That was read to the General Assembly.

RJ: You said, when you first showed me this photograph, that this is what Eleanor would often do—assemble groups of delegates for informal off the record discussions. Can you think of other cases in your more than thirty-two years in the UN, when other people brought together the women in the UN on any issue? Were there ever meetings of just women, in the secretariat, for example?

MB: An ad hoc committee on the equality of women in the Secretariat was set up—some time in the 60s I believe. Did you know Pat Tsien?

RJ: No.

MB: Well, she was Wellington Koo's daughter. He was prominent in the Chinese nationalist government and attended the San Francisco conference as a Chinese representative. She worked in the Secretariat with the staff assigned to trust and non-self-governing territories. But she was very active on behalf of women in the Secretariat. As head of the Section on the

Status of Women, while I supported the work the ad hoc committee was doing, I didn't feel I personally should be seen as too heavily involved because it was somewhat political, and also because of the attitude of my own director and the office of personnel. I also felt that it might detract from the work we were trying to do for women around the world. And Pat was willing to take it on.

RJ: How do you spell her name?

MB: T-s-i-e-n. She calls herself Patricia K. Tsien, I think.

RJ: Stick to this point about why you were hesitant to assemble the women more. I can well imagine that, but in retrospect, looking back on your career—

MB: Looking back I might perhaps have done more at the time.

RJ: I would like to hear a little bit more your thinking on that. Are you more activist today than you were before?

MB: Yes.

RJ: Some of us become that way. You said your boss wasn't helpful. Was this John Humphrey?

MB: Well, he didn't view women's issues as a special priority, and Marc Schreiber, who succeeded him as director of the division, shared that view. You see, they were very, very touchy about the situation of women in the Secretariat. They didn't like the issue being raised in the commission, and the personnel people didn't like it. They didn't want to be asked for statistics. And the commission on the Status of Women kept asking for statistics. And I had followed through on that, but I didn't altogether want to be seen right in the forefront of the work of the ad hoc committee. Actually, my deputy worked closely with the ad hoc committee and kept me informed.

RJ: Your deputy being?

MB: Sol Nahon. She was a lawyer from Morocco. I felt that the ad hoc committee should know what was going on in the commission and that we should be represented, but at the time I felt that my presence was not essential, and might detract from our wider goal of helping women around the world. At the time it seemed the right decision.

RJ: And again, why do you think—does this relate now, if I may ask, to upbringing?

MB: Yes, perhaps.

RJ: Do you think—well, Pat Tsien is one example. I don't think you have told me on tape of the more active feminists, or feminists with a much sharper—

MB: Well, the Commission on the Status of Women was full of them.

RJ: How many were on the—

MB: It was fifteen, initially. But it has grown substantially since its establishment.

RJ: And how many active feminists?

MB: Probably most of them—certainly from the western countries.

RJ: And you didn't feel then—

MB: You see, initially I wasn't part of the staff dealing with the Commission on the Status of Women. I was working on other human rights issues, and we didn't have too much to do with women's rights on a daily basis, although I was personally very friendly with Mary Tennison Woods and the other members of the section. When I was asked to assume the position of chief of the section in 1962 I really had a difficult time. The members of the commission viewed me with some suspicion, since I was not a lawyer and am not an aggressive personality. But I will fight hard for what I believe in. I did win them over, but it took a while.

RJ: They didn't win you over?

MB: Yes, they did. You see, I didn't experience an awful lot of discrimination in my own family life—maybe my brother, but not my husband at all. On the contrary. So you have to learn things, to some extent, from personal experience, before you can go out and preach. But as I told you, my mother's brother had to go to help support the family when their father died, while she and her sister were later able to attend a teacher's training college in London.

There's also another point, Richard which is the attitude of many men towards women of that generation. I don't know if you watched the television program of *The Battle of Britain* recently? No? Well, it was very interesting and rather moving. It told the story of a young English woman who fell in love, and her boyfriend, who was part of the Battle of Britain, was ultimately killed. But there is one moment towards the end—and it's very poignant—where they met, and they might have had sex, or whatever. And neither of them did, and afterwards, looking back, she's expressing—it's very cleverly done—

RJ: Regret.

MB: Yes. And I was talking to my daughter about it actually. You know, in those days, it seems to me that men really respected women in a different way, particularly if they liked them. That does not seem to hold true to the same extent in today's world.

RJ: Really? I don't know enough because my own children are in a different phase.

MB: Well, with what we see on television and the internet.

RJ: Let me just stick to the sexual theme, if I might. I don't think we've interviewed anyone, and actually had the courage to say whether sexual relationships, even flirtatiousness, played a role for better or worse in any of these committees at this stage.

MB: I don't know. I must say that when the ECOSOC met in Geneva—

RJ: Away from home.

MB: Yes it was even suggested that special houses were made available for delegates from some countries and that doesn't entirely surprise me from the contact I had with certain individuals.

RJ: That's slightly different from what I was really hinting at, which was flirtatiousness, affairs, or whatever within, among committee members.

MB: Oh yes, I'm sure that went on.

RJ: Was that in any way related to—

MB: To what they discussed?

RJ: Or the positions that people took?

MB: No, I don't think so.

RJ: But you got the feeling that Eleanor was high above this.

MB: Oh yes, absolutely

RJ: Her force of character was in a more sexually neutral way?

MB: In this film of the *American Experience* I mentioned earlier there is even a hint that she was lesbian.

RJ: Well, that has been written up now and has come up.

MB: I doubt it, really. I think she was so hurt by Franklin's disloyalty, especially at the end, when her daughter was, in fact, maneuvering with him to get his mistress whatever her name was—she was there when he died, and Eleanor herself wasn't. In many ways, Eleanor is a tragic figure, with tremendous strength of character.

RJ: And tremendous achievement.

MB: Yes, much of it on her own.

RJ: But you were never at the time conscious of this dimension of her?

MB: Well, I wouldn't say that I saw it, necessarily. In fact, I didn't learn about it until later. It was a little bit later that I learned of some of the things she became famous for—I was in awe of her, obviously when I worked with her.

RJ: Who wouldn't have been?

MB: Yes. Even our director John Humphrey.

RJ: Was there anyone on the commission who was not in awe of her, anyone who annoyed you and others because they did not have a sense of her presence?

MB: No, I think they were always. Well, most of them were polite, generally, except the Russians occasionally would—

RJ: Be snide.

MB: Yes. But generally, she had their respect.

RJ: Show me some more of the photographs because they lead to interesting discussion. Now these are some of yourself, are they?

MB: Yes, that's at Lake Success with my first roommate. It was very interesting, when I shared an office with her because she was a communist, and she joined the—

RJ: Pusheng Kung of China.

MB: Yes. She later married someone quite high in the communist government.

RJ: Now, she was from the communist government?

MB: No, she was hired by the international secretariat.

RJ: But I was imagining they would have taken someone from the Chang Kai-Shek regime.

MB: I think she happened to be in New York and got herself hired.

RJ: And the Chang Kai-Shek government did not object?

MB: The Chinese Revolution was 1949, wasn't it, when they actually took over?

RJ: I see, and this was 1947.

MB: 1946/1947. It was interesting who came to visit her when we were sharing an office, even from the Secretariat. And this was pre-McCarthy.

RJ: When you say it was interesting, who came? What do you remember?

MB: They weren't of any great significance, but they were members of the Secretariat who seemed to be—

RJ: Members of the party, or at least—

MB: Or sympathetic. Americans, too.

RJ: Did that worry you?

MB: No. I was never all that anticommunist. I felt there was some good to be had from what they were doing. For that matter, I think the Americans have always been somewhat blind or short sighted on things that fall in the area of economic and social rights.

RJ: Of course.

MB: They have never ratified the covenant on economic and social rights.

RJ: That was a point that already was arising in the reaction to conventions. Tell us a little bit more of reactions at the time to economic and social rights.

MB: Well, of course Eleanor herself was sympathetic, and freedom from want is one of the four freedoms specified in Franklin's State of the Union speech of 1941. The UK member Charles Dukes, being a trade union leader, was pushing inclusion of these rights. And the Russians, and the Latin Americans, they were all interested in the economic and social side of things.

RJ: And the Universal Declaration has quite a number of articles that deal directly with economics. So did the main opposition to the economic side come after Eleanor has moved on, when there was a Republican government in the U.S.?

MB: I suppose that is true. It's after Mary Lord came because the Declaration was adopted with Eleanor, obviously. And the covenants were sidelined to some extent by Mary Lord on the commission.

RJ: And then the polarization really began.

MB: Yes, then it set in. But you know, the Americans have only recently ratified the genocide convention.

RJ: Yes, there is a strange thing about the—

MB: Conventions. They don't like being committed, and never have. They tend to see conventions as a threat to their national sovereignty. Well, these pictures are all drafting the Declaration.

RJ: And there's a picture of yourself sitting on the left of Eleanor Roosevelt. There's René Cassin. And you showed me this nice letter from René after the birth of your daughter. You say he was very interesting, what—

MB: Well, I think he even lost a leg in the First World War.

RJ: He walked with a limp?

MB: He had an artificial limb—I think, I'm not absolutely certain. Of course, he was with [Charles] De Gaulle in England during the war. He was part of the Free French. He was a very fiery little Frenchman.

RJ: But passionate on human rights.

MB: Oh yes, absolutely. And very genuinely so.

RJ: And growing out of the Second World War experience and the repression of the Nazis.

MB: And Jewish.

RJ: Jewish, I didn't know that.

MB: Yes, he was Jewish. But he had a very open mind.

RJ: A legal mind.

MB: Yes. I was very fond of him, actually.

RJ: And how did Eleanor get on with him?

MB: Oh, very well. At one commission session, he had a somewhat arrogant advisor, a young Frenchman who had been educated at Eton. He spoke perfect English.

RJ: With a perfect Etonian accent?

MB: Yes. And there was one occasion, when we were meeting at Lake Success, when the driver was stopped by the police for speeding. These New York cops are not noted for politeness, and this young Etonian said, "Do you realize who you're speaking to?" The cop replied: "I don't care who he is. He's still speeding." I think it had to go through diplomatic channels to be resolved. It was rather amusing.

RJ: Show us some more pictures. Now, this is Geneva, is it?

MB: Yes, it is. This is the 1947 Geneva session. I look very earnest.

RJ: Slightly earnest, yes. Lots of charm, if I'm allowed to say that.

MB: I think that's one of the Russian advisors, I remember. This one actually hangs in Hyde Park. This is a photograph of me in the corner, with Eleanor chairing it.

RJ: Let's go on to a few more.

MB: These are just pictures. These are just chatting. This is more social.

RJ: Secretariat members got invited to—

MB: Oh, yes.

RJ: But you were saying there was a story of someone taking you to meet Gladwyn Jebb.

MB: Oh yes. That was way back, in 1945. It was a young American who had joined our unit. It was a documents unit; it wasn't any great work or challenge. As an American, he thought that I should be taken to meet Gladwyn Jebb, the boss. Now Gladwyn Jebb clearly couldn't have cared less.

Oh, there is a story of one night meeting of the London General Assembly that you might enjoy. It was after a reception given by the Soviets. I wasn't at the party, but I was at the evening meeting after it. Many of the delegates came back somewhat inebriated, even Gladwyn Jebb, sitting at the top table. They kept drinking water, which made the effect of the vodka stronger. Finally, they decided to adjourn the meeting early.

I had hoped to have written the next part of my memoirs before you came which would have refreshed my memory of events so long ago.

RJ: Of letters to your granddaughters?

MB: Yes, covering the part when I came into the secretariat, and when I came to New York because I do have letters I wrote home from there. I didn't like New York or America very much initially.

This is a photo of Tex Goldshmidt. Did you ever know him?

RJ: I did, indeed. I haven't seen a picture, though, of Tex looking much, much younger than I ever knew him. I interacted with him when he was involved with CONGO, the Conference of NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). Tex retained an interest in the history project right to the end of his life.

MB: He lost his daughter very tragically.

RJ: I don't remember that.

MB: I think he did.

RJ: There was a meeting—I think it was his 90th birthday, in his apartment, where he made a lovely speech and reminisced about the early days with a roguish wit. But, also a number of his old friends who remember the early days were there.

MB: This picture is very typical of cocktail parties, and we all wore hats and gloves.

RJ: Hats and gloves, and two strings of pearls, as I'm observing.

MB: This is a human rights seminar which was held in the Hofburg palace in Vienna.

RJ: In 1960.

MB: Yes, and this is Tehran, Iran.

RJ: The first International Conference on Human Rights.

MB: Yes, it was.

RJ: What do you remember about that? This is 1968. And twenty-five years later, before the next one, in Vienna. So yes, do tell me.

MB: I do remember my boss, Marc Schreiber, telling me not to waste my time with women's rights.

RJ: Really? What were you doing with rights at that time, that he was saying don't bother?

MB: I was trying to help the women. They did draft a comprehensive resolution at the conference. Leticia Shahani was there as part of my staff.

RJ: She was then a P-3?

MB: Yes. There were two main committees, and I was acting as the secretary of one of these which Princess Ashraf [Pahlavi] of Iran (twin sister of the Shah) was chairing. I had to write everything for her that she said from the chair. On one occasion, I think one of the delegates raised a point of order. I didn't quite catch what he said. So I wrote for her, "This will be noted in the record." Realizing my predicament, the delegate didn't actually press his point further. The conference was right after the Yom Kippur War, so it was politically very charged. I had an Iraqi colleague counting the votes for me. He was part of the staff but rather careless in his vote counting. He would say, "So many, so many. It doesn't really matter." But it did if the vote was close and I had to watch him. So it was an eventful conference. I have to put some of these stories in my letters, I suppose.

RJ: Yes, you must. But tell me, you were told by your boss, "Don't spend time on the women's issues." What did he want you to spend your time on instead?

MB: Trying to sort out some of the political problems that were going on. It was very charged. He thought I was a good negotiator. That was really what he wanted me to concentrate on, and not women's issues, which to him were not so vital in the context of the conference, and could be handled by others.

RJ: Was that quite typical of the bosses?

MB: No, I don't think so necessarily.

RJ: Let us just see if there are any final points. You must have had a sense of occasion at the Tehran meeting. That was the first international conference.

MB: Oh yes. The first world conference on human rights.

RJ: There were the politics of the Yom Kippur War of the year before, and the politics of the Shah, even then. The regime was seen as an oppressive regime. There must have been a

number of people who said, quietly at least, "Why did we pick Tehran to hold the conference on human rights, in a country where people disappear?" Was there big debate in the Secretariat or in the UN before this decision?

MB: Not that I remember, really. I think they were just happy to have a host. And the Shah had recently made some positive moves on women's rights.

RJ: That seems a little unprincipled.

MB: I have to look at some of my records of this to make sense because I confuse it a bit with the Commission on the Status of Women that met in Tehran when the Shah was also in power.

RJ: Before or after the human rights conference?

MB: I don't remember. I'd have to check it. I know that there was a lot of feeling that we would all have to stand together—and that was true of this, too.

We were lavishly entertained on both occasions. As I mentioned to you earlier, as we approached the Shah's palace outside of Tehran for one of the receptions the windows of the buses were rolled up and secured for security reasons.

RJ: Of the buses you drove in towards the Shah's palace.

MB: Yes, and we weren't allowed inside the palace at all. I do remember one of the British representatives commenting that the teacups we were using were almost too heavy to hold because of the amount of gold surrounding them.

RJ: As we have got about five minutes more, let me ask you about Mexico and the first world conference on women. You were deputy to—

MB: Deputy-secretary-general to Helvi Sipila—the first woman to be appointed with the rank of assistant secretary-general.

RJ: Deputy-secretary-general of the first world women's conference. Now that's a big challenge, and also being deputy means an awful lot of the organization and work behind the scenes. Most of falls on you. What do you remember about that?

MB: Being absolutely exhausted before I got there. No, it was very difficult. It was extremely difficult because the Americans, who had pushed the Mexicans—originally the conference was to be in Bogotá and was switched to Mexico. The Mexicans themselves were not too happy to be the host, so there were problems with them. Then there were rumors that militant feminists from the West were renting whole planes and coming to the conference in force—which wasn't true, but it was true enough—to make it a terrible headache about how we would handle—

RJ: Now, is this a headache as seen by the Secretariat?

MB: Yes.

RJ: What was the Secretariat's real concerns?

MB: That we wouldn't be able to control the meetings. It was more a headache for the Mexicans, really. They arranged all the NGO meetings to be as far as possible from the main meetings, which caused problems for the Secretariat to pacify the NGOs. There was a lot of that kind of thing. Then there were a lot of private discussions, particularly on "Zionism as racism." There is an interesting tidbit, I don't know whether I shared it with you. One of the men I was working with was from an Eastern European country—Bulgaria, I think. We were sort of friendly. I said, "Can't you help stop this? It doesn't belong in this conference. I know it's a strong issue, but it really doesn't belong here." He said, "I can't stop it, but I'll tell you one thing. I won't be here when they vote." And he wasn't.

RJ: That's a pretty weak cop-out.

MB: But he wasn't. It was at least something.

RJ: Yes. You used the phrase though, "the Secretariat was worried because they couldn't control," if there was going to be a big invasion of feminists from the United States. Some people might hear that in very suspicious ways: "Ah, the Secretariat is trying to control." Do you want to elaborate a little bit what was meant by that?

MB: Well, when you're responsible for organizing a conference, you prefer to have things discussed relatively amicably, without violent protests or demonstrations, and the kind of thing that happened recently on globalization in Seattle. In the days when I was working in the Secretariat, UN meetings usually did not get out of hand, and we were afraid that if this conference, which clearly had some difficult political issues before it, might receive only negative reports in the media on such issues, and would not benefit the cause of the advancement of women which had been its primary goal. Diego Cordovez, who was then secretary of the Economic and Social Council was supposed to be assisting us. He was not too helpful really because he had little interest in women's issues.

RJ: He was macho to an extreme.

MB: To an extreme. And the one who just missed being killed in Iraq was there, too. He was not helpful. They both thought the whole thing rather a waste of time, and they were supposed to be helping us on a daily basis. So that is what I meant, really—keeping the meeting from getting out of hand, not muzzling the discussion in any way.

RJ: And in the end, do you think there was a bridge at that meeting between the western view of women's issues and the Third World view, or was that more in Nairobi?

MB: No, I think it was launched in Mexico. There were definitely some important and positive actions taken. The proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year and the world

conference in Mexico were the beginning of a major turnaround for women's issues at the UN. The slogan now was equality, development, and peace. The decade for women was proclaimed in Mexico and the foundation was laid for the UN voluntary fund for women (now known as UNIFEM). But when you are right in the throes of running a conference that you hope does not get out of hand, you don't always immediately see the positive side. And at the time I was having some personal difficulties with Helvi Sipila, although I must say she played an important and effective role in Mexico.

RJ: Do you want to be a little analytical about what these difficulties were?

MB: No I don't think that would be appropriate. I welcomed the fact that the Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, had appointed her as the first woman assistant-secretary-general, but I was annoyed at the attitude of some of her male colleagues. I knew what was going on behind the scenes and I knew that the men were negotiating to keep her out of really being an assistant-secretary-general because they were grabbing many of the bits of her program.

RJ: These were Secretariat people.

MB: Yes

RJ: Mind you, that's pretty nasty.

MB: Yes it was.

RJ: I think with that, Molly, I have to say thank you very much. I hope we will have a chance to talk more. But also, good luck with your own writing down of your memoirs. What matters most is the human color, it's these insights. Thank you so much.

MB: Thank you very much Richard. I have enjoyed talking with you. My only regret is that in the rather short time available we have only been able to skim the surface of human rights and women's issues with which I was personally involved for over thirty-two years. I regret also

that my memory these days is not as sharp as it once was, and events that happened so many years ago do not spring readily to mind. I will certainly cover these events in greater detail and I hope with historical accuracy in the future letters to my grandchildren, which will be my memoirs.

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