

Sir Derek Malcolm Day KCMG

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INTERVIEW WITH SIR DEREK DAY 11TH MARCH 1996

INTERVIEWED BY JANE BARDER

J.B. Sir Derek retired from the diplomatic service in 1987 as High Commissioner in Canada. He was appointed CMG in 1973 and KCMG in 1984. He was born in 1927 and your education Sir Derek?

D.D. Well I was at school in London for most of the war years and then went away to boarding school in 1943 at Hurstpierpoint College in Sussex. Then after a couple of years in the army went up to Cambridge and had three years in Cambridge from 1948 to 1951.

JB Then you joined the Foreign Service straight from university?

DD Yes I did. I had no intention of doing so when I went to the university. There was no family tradition of public service or foreign service at all and it was just something that came out after talking with some friends at Cambridge. I think I applied probably one day before the closing date of the examination and crept in I think on the last or last but one list for that year, which happened to be the year when Burgess and Maclean defected. I often think that that left two vacancies, otherwise I might not have got in.

JB So then you spent a couple of years in the Foreign Office?

DD Yes I think I joined the Office in the autumn of 1951 and then went off to my first post overseas in Israel in the summer of 1953. And what looking back strikes me is joining the Office and going on that very first day to the Head of Personnel Department and being told I was going to be appointed to Western Organisations Department, as it was then called, to be the desk officer for the Council of Europe. And with virtually no training at all one was told to report to a certain room, which is where I was to be working. My recollection is that there was no training course. I was told the difference between white paper on which you wrote minutes and blue paper on which you wrote drafts but that was about all. One literally learned the trade as one went along from the person that one was working with or that one was sharing with.

JB And the person to whom you reported?

DD Yes.

JB So you would get the first sight of papers that you had to...

DD That's right. And then, which I think has changed, the Office worked very much from the bottom upwards. The third room of the department is where more or less everything was initiated. Subsequently the level at which activity was initiated seemed to rise and you found heads of department in my latter years were really doing things which the third room were doing thirty years or so ago.

JB Why Tel Aviv as a first post?

DD It wasn't a choice of mine. I think when I first joined I was asked as I imagine everyone was whether they wanted to do one of the so-called hard languages of Arabic or Chinese or Russian. Having just finished three years at university I didn't feel inclined to start off another two or three years of academic work. So I turned down that opportunity and Tel Aviv just sort of came out of the hat.

JB And that was in the lead up to Suez?

DD Well, it was in 1953. No, in 1953 it was in the very early days of the Israeli State. It was within its post Palestine boundaries, very narrow boundaries. We lived just north of Tel Aviv, a little village called Hertzlia and you looked out and ten miles away there was the border with Jordan. A very narrow track of land. No, we left before Suez. Suez was in the summer of '56 and we left Israel shortly before then.

JB In '56?

DD In '56, yes. We left in June '56. I think Suez was that autumn but it was a fascinating time in Israel in those very early days of the State. Again, one thing, looking back, it occurs to me is the tremendous change in communications since that time. When one got to Tel Aviv I was a third secretary in Chancery. All our communications were still done in Morse code with Diplomatic Service Wireless operators receiving and dispatching messages in Morse code. All had to be deciphered manually with things called one-time pads which were lists of numbers and all confidential communications were transmitted by Morse in numbers with five number groups and then you had a pad and you deducted the number that came over the wire from the number on the pad and that gave you a five number group which you then had to check with a code, which told you that one five number might have meant the government to which you were accredited. I spent many an evening helping with the decoding. Tremendous change now, it's all intensely electronic.

JB Yes.

DD I remember one evening actually spending a great deal of time. A message came in that there was a particular one called D-dip, which meant it had to be decoded by a member of the diplomatic staff, but the thing was called code R, which was slightly easier and I sat for a long time decoding this, which was an instruction to inform the government that the Queen had approved the marriage of Princess Margaret to, I can't remember who. Anyhow, the point is that it was an entirely different age as far as communications were concerned and a great revolution during my time in the Service.

JB Yes, whereas nowadays all the secretaries have to learn to operate everything.

DD Yes. Well, it is all virtually just straight on a keyboard and automatically coded and decoded, but it was a very labour intensive operation in those years.

JB So from there you went straight to Italy?

DD Yes we did. We went to Italy in the summer of '56. I suppose even then economies were being made because I found myself replacing two people in Rome. I went there as

Private Secretary to the Ambassador, Ashley Clarke, and also as the Second Secretary Commercial, which was my first experience of commercial work.

JB With no commercial training

DD No, I did go on a commercial course between Israel and Italy, which was good. One spent some time in the City with the financial banking communities. One went out to visit certain industrial concerns and at times the Treasury and others. It was fairly early days perhaps for commercial training but it was a fairly comprehensive course and certainly very valuable. I think the major commercial activity there was persuading the Italians to buy our first exported nuclear power station, which they did. It was one of the old Calder Hall type stations and they built this on the coast between Rome and Naples. So this was very early days.

JB And you must have been amongst the first of the kind of people to be doing commercial work.

DD I suppose so, yes. My predecessor, John Snodgrass, who was also in the commercial sector had done that as well but it was the beginning really of the Foreign Office, as it then was, regarding trade promotion as a major part of the service's activities. I have a wry smile sometimes when even now people say 'oh the Foreign Office at long last are getting commercially minded'. They've been commercially minded for a very, very long time and certainly in my experience back to 1956. So it's nothing particularly new.

JB Ashley Clarke was in Italy for a long time, wasn't he? What did he think of commercial work?

DD Yes, he was. I don't think his natural instincts were commercial. He was a very, very fine ambassador. Ashley had been in Rome for a number of years when I arrived and stayed on many years after I left. I learnt a very great deal from him. I suppose it taught me one lesson even then that a junior member of an embassy, for better or worse, learns a great deal from their Head of Mission. You soak up an atmosphere. You perhaps subconsciously realise the way they are dealing with their staff, the way they are dealing with overseas governments. Ashley was a fine example and I thought I learnt a great deal from him. He was in a way a renaissance man; he had tremendous interest in the history and culture of the country of Italy; he spoke the language well, he was highly musical and one of my roles as Private Secretary was to accompany him on these journeys where he gave lectures on music in Italian and he would play the piano and sing. My career very nearly came to a rapid end at one stage because he was giving a lecture in Rome in the Academia with all the Roman establishment there in the presence of the public. My role was to sit behind a potted palm and work the tape recorder to provide the illustrations for the music. To cut a very long story short, on this one occasion when I pressed the button the music came out very slowly and what we hadn't realised was that all the floodlighting on the stage was draining the power from the tape recorder. Ashley nearly had an apoplectic fit and I nearly quit the service there and then but it was a great experience.

JB So it was three years there and then back to London.

DD Yes, back to London. There I worked in the Permanent Under Secretary's Department and was working with a small unit in London, which was attached, and I suppose now that it's a declared organisation I can mention it, to the SIS, M16.

JB Why were you doing that?

DD Well, I don't know why I was selected for it but I was and it was the time very shortly after there had been an unhappy incident when Bulganin and Khrushchev visited the United Kingdom in a Russian warship and a gentleman called Commander Crabbe was lost. The suspicion was that he was swimming under water underneath these Russian warships to try and find what was happening and it was felt that there needed to be some kind of oversight into the activities of the organisation so that it didn't cause considerable diplomatic embarrassment. So there was this small unit working within SIS as sort of Foreign Office advisers. I found myself doing that, working with people there who were active in Africa particularly, an area I found myself involved with. At that time, my boss was Denis Greenhill, who subsequently became Permanent Under Secretary. It was a fascinating period really because it gave one an insight into a different aspect of overseas activity. A little difficult at that time explaining exactly what one was doing, but that was a problem many people faced.

JB And a very sensitive time to be doing this.

DD It was yes.

JB And that was what you were doing all that time?

DD Yes, we came back from Italy in 1959 and stayed at home until 1962.

JB And then you went to Washington?

DD Yes we went to Washington. All my postings just happened, as far as I know. I'm not sure what sort of career planning was going on then in the personnel department. It wasn't very apparent. I suppose I, like everyone else, filled out our post preference forms. I don't think I put Washington on it.

JB That was usually the way wasn't it?

DD It was yes. I wasn't greatly enamoured, I must admit, at the thought of going to Washington. I rather imagined it to be a vast embassy, very bureaucratic, rather like working in the Foreign Office again whereas certainly Israel, a small post, was I felt particularly congenial. You could get to know your colleagues very well and it had a wonderful spirit and atmosphere to it. Rome was a bit bigger. But Washington then was vast, very much bigger I suspect than it is now.

JB With lots of representatives of other government departments?

DD Yes, it was a mini Whitehall with a vast military element of British defence staff which operated both within the embassy and within the various American government service departments. So it was very big but in fact when one got there and was established one realised the Foreign Office element of it was relatively small. I think it was an invaluable experience because throughout my career the relationship with the

United States has been central to our foreign policy. To have had that experience of living with, and working with, Americans was very valuable indeed.

JB What job were you doing then?

DD I was there as an information officer in the information department. So my first three jobs, and maybe this was career planning, because the chancery job: in Israel, the commercial and private secretary job in Rome and then the information job in Washington were all different. I must say was a fascinating job because one was dealing primarily with the American and British press corps, written press, radio, television; a very highly intelligent and qualified bunch of people. We saw relatively little of diplomats from other missions. One had no real cause to do much with them, so one's contacts were mostly with Americans.

JB And you had...? ambassadors?

DD Yes, when we arrived the Ambassador was David Ormsby-Gore who later became Lord Harlech. This was during the Kennedy era. We arrived somewhere in the autumn of 62 so we were there during the remainder of the Kennedy period until his assassination. David had been sent there because he had a close friendship with the Kennedy family. I have never had any reservations about political appointments to missions. I think if it was over done and you had very large numbers then I think it would affect the reputation of our overseas service.

JB And the morale?

DD And the morale of members of the service but in that case David Harlech had a sort of entree into the Kennedy family and to the President which was absolutely invaluable. When he left he was replaced by Pat Dean who had been our Ambassador to New York. By then Kennedy had been assassinated and it was the Johnson presidency, so that personal connection wasn't quite as important. I felt that if there is a suitable non-career individual with particular talents and abilities I have no reservations. Then it is a very sensible idea. Not all political appointments have been as successful as that particular one.

The one interesting element of the time in Washington was that one realized, dealing with the American journalists, the American correspondents, the tremendous influence they had upon U.S. policy. They served a rather different role from the British press, almost a sort of question time role. It was the press that was always questioning the presidency, the government departments to a far greater extent than Congress and to a far greater extent than, at that stage, the British journalists did. I think now perhaps there is a change in that the media here with the development of television and the rather inquisitorial interviewing that goes on are becoming far more important from the point of view of political life, but at that time, certainly the American journalists were the great columnists of Walter Lippman, Scotty Reston and others did have a very, very significant effect upon American policy.

JB And you would have met these?

DD Yes, the information department in Washington was very large. There was a Minister just for information matters and I was a poor humble First Secretary and the Minister would tend to wine and dine the Lippmans and the Restons of this world and I would be dealing with the second division I suppose.

JB So then back to London again, back to the Foreign Office

DD That was rather a traumatic experience because we came back to London and I then had been in the Foreign Office, this was in '66, I'd been in the service for 15 years and I ended back in the third room in Western Organisations Department where I had started 15 years before. What I didn't know, but what subsequently became clear was that I would become Assistant in the Department after a while, but nobody had thought to tell me that. I was put into a job for which I was totally unsuited. My job was writing speeches for the Permanent Secretary and helping to do speech writing for the Secretary of State. Now that is not a particular forte of mine at all and it was not a period that I enjoyed greatly.

JB So that was for Paul Gore-Booth.

DD Yes, that is right. Paul Gore-Booth was Permanent Under Secretary then and Head of Department was John Barnes, who was a hard task master. After a relatively short time I did become Assistant in the Department dealing with the then main western organisations which were the WEU, the Council of Europe and NATO. This was before the European Community period. Then, much to my surprise I found myself summoned to the private office one day to be asked, or rather I was being interviewed really to see, whether I should take over as one of the assistant Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State, who was then George Brown.

JB Did George Brown interview you? Or his Private Secretary.

DD It was then the Private Secretary. What I think had happened was that Richard Parsons, who was in the job, either didn't hit it off with George Brown or George Brown didn't hit it off with him. Richard and I were direct contemporaries in the Service so we swapped jobs. He went back to take over as Assistant in WOD and I found myself sitting in the private office as the number two Private Secretary, first with Murray and then with Donald Maitland. This was a fascinating time because just working with and for George Brown himself was an experience, but it also gave one a wonderful insight into the whole politics, the Parliamentary politics of overseas policy. I think sitting in a department if you haven't at some stage worked in a political office you don't quite understand the political pressures that are upon Ministers.

JB The Foreign Office is often accused of being particularly lacking in this respect, isn't it, amongst Whitehall departments.

DD I think they are, and I think part of the problem is that we so rarely have to take legislation through Parliament. A home department is constantly having to take legislation through parliament. The Foreign Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office now, rarely have to do this so we are not quite as subject to the Parliamentary political pressures on a department as many of the home departments.

JB Are many aspects of foreign policy bilaterally agreed across the parties?

DD Well, I suppose in a very broad sense throughout my career there have been relatively few occasions where there has been sharp party political differences over foreign policy. There maybe nuances but I think all the political parties have accepted the importance of NATO, of the Western Alliance, the relationship with the United States, although some might feel that the relationship need not be, or should not be, as close as others might feel. I think it's now more in recent years when you are seeing divisions appearing on issues like the European Community. One saw it over sanctions on South Africa where of course there were fairly sharp differences between the parties but I think that period in the Private Office added a dimension to one's understanding of the restraints that there are on Ministers in pursuing policies which the Foreign Office might think are eminently sensible but would be difficult for a Minister at times to sell to his party or to Parliament.

JB Were there any particular examples?

DD During the time I was there I spent time with George Brown and then also with Michael Stewart. When I was in there George resigned from the government and Michael Stewart took over. It was the time of Vietnam, which, of course, was a very divisive issue both in the United States and in this country. Michael Stewart as Foreign Secretary was resolute in his support of American policy. I think there were certainly those within his party who were less certain that that was right. But it was interesting because that was also the time when the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices finally merged, and like so much in the United Kingdom it happened probably for all the wrong reasons at that particular time and it happened just because George Brown resigned. Michael Stewart was appointed and Harold Wilson as Prime Minister decided well if we are going to have to make that change let's bite this bullet and merge the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices.

JB But it was going to happen anyway?

DD It was going to happen anyway, and there had been a joint administration before that but there were still two separate Secretaries of State. George was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, George Thompson was Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, both in the Cabinet. When George resigned and Michael Stewart was appointed, he was appointed as the first Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and George Thompson was as far as I recall was then made, I think, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster as a Cabinet Minister within the joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office. But the timing of it just happened because George resigned.

JB Was that the time when there was just one permanent ...

DD At that time I think that Joe Garner who was Permanent Secretary of the Commonwealths Relations Office.

JB Morrice James was trying to merger

DD Yes Morrice was in the Commonwealth Office but I can't quite remember whether they ran two Permanent Secretaries in harness for a while but if so it was only for a very short time.

JB Did that make much difference in the running of the Office from what you saw in the Private Office?

DD Surprisingly little really. Administratively it created some problems and some personal attitudes were difficult, which we might talk about in a moment, but no, it seemed to operate fairly well. It took a little time for the organisation to be readjusted and all the departments to be sort of shuffled around but when the time came it happened remarkably smoothly. But it faced people with new problems. Again, I remember Michael Stewart who found himself Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and also, by inheritance, Colonial Secretary, because the three elements of government now came under one Secretary of State and Michael Stewart found himself in the position of having to decide whether to commute death sentences, which had been imposed in independent territories. I shall always remember one evening, he was a very honourable man, agonising as to what he should do when this appeal came to him. In that particular case it was one of the Caribbean Islands, I can't remember which, he decided he would commute the sentence because he felt he just did not have time to sit and examine all the evidence in detail and he felt that if that was not possible the only thing he could do was to commute the sentence. But this merger of what were three independent services imposed very considerable burdens upon the single Secretary of State who suddenly had to take on not only overseas foreign responsibilities, but Commonwealth relations and responsibility for the remaining dependent territories.

JB And you have seen also the effects of this merger in your next job when you were Head of P.O.D.

DD Yes, that again, like most of my jobs, came rather out of the blue. I suppose because we'd been home by then I suppose four or five years, four years, I'd been expecting an overseas post and was asked if I would take over as Head of Personal Operations Department, about which I was very apprehensive, I must admit, because this was shortly after the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Services and also coincided with the first occasion when the Diplomatic Service decided to retire early thirty senior officers as part of an economy drive. And also, I think on reflection, to get rid of what some people regarded as some dead wood. I found myself as Head of Personnel Department inheriting this task of, in a sense, not personally dismissing but being responsible for the departure of thirty senior members of the Service, people of ambassadorial and ministerial rank. This was quite a shock to the system because I think it was the first time that people who had expected a full career up till 60 realised that this might not be the case. The Chief Clerk at the time, Peter Wilkinson, I know, anguished about this.

JB But the pressures were economic.

DD The pressures were partly economic and partly to make way for promotion. It was a problem one saw throughout one's time in personnel departments and subsequently as Chief Clerk that if you get a log jam at the top of the Service of too many people, you preclude any form of promotion of younger, highly talented, ambitious people, and if you can't provide a reasonable rate of progression, progress and promotion through the Service, then that has an adverse effect on morale. You may find you lose some of your

better people who are tempted to move out into other jobs. One did see that at that time. We are now talking of the late sixties, early seventies.

JB Was that the post war intake.

DD No, I think a lot of those at the top were the pre war intake who had come in either immediately before or immediately after the war, who'd moved very rapidly to the top of the Service, because as foreign policy developed missions were reopened; a lot of people became Heads of Mission at a much earlier age than perhaps they would have a little later or as they do now. So you had quite a number of people sitting in the upper reaches of both the Foreign and Commonwealth Services who could have sat there for perhaps another 6, 7 or 8 years, blocking the progress of anyone else. So that was a rather difficult and sort of traumatic time for the Service. It wasn't just me, the Permanent Under Secretary, the Chief Clerk and others of course were deeply involved with it but it was the first experience that I'd had of, frankly having to sack people and some of those concerned took it very badly, which was understandable.

JB There have been a lot of management changes in the Diplomatic Service, particularly in recent years, and you have been concerned a lot with management. Was that your first experience of down sizing at that stage?

DD At that stage. And then of course subsequently when coming back as Chief Clerk in 1982, then the pressures upon all government departments were intense with the annual public sector reviews. I think undoubtedly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, like other departments, had developed over the years quite a bit of fat. We weren't totally financially accountable in those earlier years, we were voted a budget and if we ran out of money then somebody would produce a bit more. I think it was absolutely right that government departments should be made much more financially accountable for their activities. What I found and this was more so when I was Chief Clerk, is that what had become

JB Chief Clerk being...

DD Yes, Chief Clerk is a strange title. Chief Clerk is basically the head of the overall administration of the Diplomatic Service and as Chief Clerk one had responsibility for all personnel matters including recruitment, all training, all security, both at home and overseas, the finances of the Diplomatic Service, negotiating and subsequently managing the budget. During my time as Chief Clerk we also assumed responsibility for all of the overseas estate, all our missions overseas, all the property, all the houses that we owned, so it was really the running of the entire Service, not the policy side of it but the management of it. As such, one worked very closely with the Permanent Under Secretary of the day. who throughout my time as Chief Clerk was Anthony Acland, and we worked very closely together in these matters. One also had certain responsibilities outside that for things like the Consular Department, the Passport Office and some of the other departments. It was a fairly wide remit but the point I would make is that at that time, and I am now back in 1982, the Diplomatic Service had been under very great pressure to cut back on its costs and each year we had to either get nil increase or cut back one percent, two percent or whatever it maybe. I strongly believe by the time I finished as Chief Clerk in 1984, that if we were to retain an effective, professional and world-wide

Diplomatic Service we really could not do so with fewer financial resources. If we were to cut back even further, then the only way you could achieve that is by closing missions. Most of them by that time were down to the bone. There wasn't a lot of fat left on the bone, but I felt that the politicians and ministers, and at that time Geoffrey Howe was Secretary of State, don't really like taking difficult decisions. I would say to Geoffrey Howe, 'look fine, you know can tell me that I have to cut my budget by one percent, two percent, three percent, I will then tell you what you have got to give up if you reduce our budget by those means 'and they would never bite that bullet. It was always, 'oh, you'll get by, you'll manage, I'm sure there's a little bit more we can save here there or somewhere else.' When I left the job of Chief Clerk in 1984, I wrote a note to the then Permanent Secretary, Anthony Acland. By then I had been a Third Secretary, Second Secretary, a First Secretary, a Counsellor, a Private Secretary, an Assistant Under Secretary and a Deputy Under Secretary in the Foreign Office. I had more or less done a job at each level within the Office so felt that I had a certain amount of experience of what it was like working in London. So I sent this note to Anthony saying in as many words that I really believed that if we had to face further economies ministers had got to take some fairly harsh decisions. Do they want to maintain a global diplomatic service with representation virtually everywhere or are they going to decide where our major national interests are, geographically, and put our effort into there? Do we have to be fully represented throughout Central America, do we have to be represented throughout South America or in parts of Asia? What actually happened was interesting because I sent that note to the Permanent Under Secretary. He saw fit to pass it to the Secretary of State, who was then Geoffrey Howe. Geoffrey Howe said would I mind if he sent it to the Prime Minister, then Mrs Thatcher. Well, by then I had nothing to lose but my chains, and the answer came back there can be no question of our withdrawing from any part of the world; our interests are global. I think it went on to say, and I don't know that I'm betraying the Official Secrets Act, that certainly we must make sure that we devote sufficient resources to it. But since then it's been a history of constant cuts all the time.

JB And opening now new places.

DD Opening many many more posts and I am rather relieved to think that one is no longer Chief Clerk, because if I thought that I had difficulties, the present difficulties must be infinitely greater. But one thing one did realise during that time, both as Head of Personnel Department and as Chief Clerk, and that was the tremendous resilience of people within the service. Many posts were not all that comfortable. I did a number of trips as both Head of Personnel Department and as Chief Clerk to places like Ulan Bator and Aden and one or two other emerging places. Some of those East European posts during the period of the Cold War. Conditions were not easy for members of the Service or members of their families but there was then and I believe still is a tremendous dedication from all members of the Service towards the job that they were doing. But one thing we touched on a little bit earlier was this merger of the two services, well, it's really the three services. I think it was not easy for many people to accept this merger. Certainly I think amongst former Commonwealth Relations Officers there was certainly in those early years a feeling that they had been taken over by the Foreign Office, that their careers had been blighted by this change. It wasn't perhaps helped by the fact that when I was appointed Head of Personnel Operations Department I replaced someone

from the Commonwealth Office, Frank Mills, who became head of one of the other personnel departments, and during my time there was a feeling that if ever an ex Foreign Office person was appointed as a High Commissioner to a Commonwealth post he was taking over one of our jobs. I suppose, if I look back now, numerically possibly a few more Foreign Office people went to head Commonwealth posts than Commonwealth Relations Officers went to head Foreign Office posts, partly because CRO officers didn't have great linguistic abilities so that it was easier for a Foreign Office person to move into an English speaking post than for a Commonwealth Relations Officer into a French or Spanish or German speaking post. But there was I think a degree of resentment, which lasted for a number of years.

JB Presumably until...

DD Yes I think people were less concerned after four or five years because it had all begun to settle down by then and people were moving more freely between the Foreign and Commonwealth posts but it was a difficult time and I can understand the sensitivity of people who had perhaps expected to be head of a mission by the time they were 45, as many Commonwealth Relations Officers were, and then found perhaps they weren't to head a mission until they were 50.

JB Or that the more glamorous CRO posts went to the Foreign Office?

DD Yes, they did undoubtedly. It needed a certain, as I say, sensitivity in dealing with this and there was also the problem of staffing the colonial posts. A number of colonial service officers which was the overseas branch of the Colonial Office. The Colonial Office was really home based, the Colonial Service overseas based. A number of Colonial Service officers left the service when their territory became independent but some of them moved across into the Commonwealth and then into the joint Diplomatic Service. But the qualities and training you need to administer a dependant territory were not those which came instinctively to people who'd joined the Foreign Office or even the Commonwealth Office and it was not easy at times to find people suitable to appoint as governors to the remaining dependent territories. In '69, when I became Head of Personnel, we still had a number of dependent territories dotted around the world and some people who had joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office suddenly found themselves being shot off as a governor to a fairly small and sometimes rather remote territory and finding themselves in a quasi sort of monarchical position. They seemed to adjust to it reasonably well though there one or two that didn't work out. But it was another dimension of the work of the Diplomatic Service as a whole which those of us who joined the original Foreign Office would never have envisaged.

We've talked a little bit about the finance and the problems of cuts. One element of this which is perhaps not so widely recognised is that the Foreign Office vote encompasses the votes for the World Service of the BBC and the budget of the British Council so that if the overall Foreign Office vote is cut that also in theory applies both to the resources going to the World Service and the British Council. Both of those organisations have very effective lobbies and if there is any suggestion that either should have their budgets reduced they activate these lobbies, often very successfully. Which means of course if those two elements of the overall budget are not reduced there has to be a proportionately

larger cut within the rest of the Diplomatic Service vote and this was a battle that one faced almost annually as Chief Clerk when the budget was being negotiated. Something that I'm not even sure ministers fully took on board when they decided on the allocation of funds because certainly the World Service became quite rightly a sacred cow and it is an extremely valuable element of British overseas diplomacy. I personally strongly favoured maintaining the budget of the World Service although sometimes when considering some of the perhaps more remote languages, one questioned whether the Somali service was absolutely invaluable if one was having to compare it with keeping a mission open somewhere in Central Asia or Central Europe.

JB But to go back to 1972 when you left POD you went to Cyprus is that right?

DD Yes, I suppose it is the only posting that I had some say in where I went because as Head of POD you knew what jobs were coming up. I think I was invited at that time to indicate whether there were any particular posts of interest and I mentioned two or three, of which Cyprus was one. So we ended up in Nicosia in the summer of 1972 and, slightly strangely, I arrived there without any High Commissioner. He had left because of some sort of personal problem that had arisen so I found myself Chargé d'Affaires the moment I arrived. It was a very interesting time. We had two years there. Makarios was President while the Greek colonels were in charge in Athens and then, towards the end of that two years, the coup instigated by the Greek colonels occurred against Makarios. Looking back, it is really interesting that Makarios fled the presidential palace in Nicosia which was attacked and in fact burnt out by the Greeks and he fled to Paphos. There was a contingency plan that if any such situation developed the British in the sovereign base area would rescue this head of a Commonwealth country, and this was done. A helicopter was sent from Akrotiri to Paphos where Makarios was holed up and took him to the sovereign base area in Akrotiri and eventually flew him out to England. But had that helicopter not arrived I think within probably 15 or 20 minutes Makarios would have been captured and probably killed.

JB Did you have to arrange the helicopter?

DD No, it was done by the Commander of the base at Akrotiri in conjunction with the High Commission but it is one of those little incidents had it not happened history perhaps would have changed. This is purely a personal view, Makarios was the single greatest obstacle to any kind of settlement of the Cyprus problem. I don't think he had the vision or the statesmanship to see that some accommodation with the Turkish Cypriots could have preserved the unity and identity of Cyprus. I think he had a very closed mind. He would say that he was a prisoner of ENOSIS and that if he'd attempted to come to any accommodation with the Turkish Cypriots it would have been unacceptable. My own view is that his personal prestige was such that Greek Cypriots would have followed him had he have come to any kind of settlement; but that is purely a personal view. So it was stirring times really because it was the first occasion on which one had been involved in a war. Shortly after the coup, the Turks invaded Cyprus and the High Commission was literally on the dividing line between Greeks and Turks in Nicosia on the Green Line, and I still remember being woken up at five o'clock in the morning from the High Commission which was only about 100 yards from where we lived to be told it seemed that the Turks might be planning to invade. So I walked into.. ..

JB And that was as much warning as you had?

DD Yes, it was building up but one had no clear idea and until someone looks at all the records, all the information it will be difficult to judge whether we should have been more alert. But I went into the office, walked in the 100 yards, and didn't get home for three days. During that time the war started and it was quite impossible to move the 100 yards back to our house because it was literally on the front line. It was a strange war really, it was a very civilised war. It started in the morning and finished in the evening and the nights were fairly quiet. The street lights remained on in Nicosia throughout, the telephones continued to work so that we could ring up the Turkish Embassy on the other side of the line, and I remember doing that at one stage with the Counsellor. I was there as the deputy and ringing up my opposite number in the Turkish Embassy after the Turks had bombed the prison which was about three hundred yards from the office saying 'you know, it's all getting a bit close. Could you perhaps persuade your people not to bomb quite so close to us?' and he said 'well, I'll do my best but it's a bit difficult with these military.' But it was a very strange atmosphere.

JB Strange also because it was a war between two

DD I'm not sure that anyone could have avoided that war. I think the British were in some way held responsible as the guarantor power of the Cyprus settlement for not having intervened. I'm not sure on whose side we should have intervened. The Turks clearly feel we should have intervened on their side after the Greek intervention through the Greek government, then the Greek Military government, but I think probably it was an incident waiting to happen.

JB Were the Americans there?

DD The Americans were present but not perhaps as influential as we were there, because not only were we a guarantor of the settlement but we had these two sovereign base areas with large numbers of troops there. We talked earlier on about communications and again one memory that remains in one's mind is I think during the second phase of the war. There was the invasion then there was a ceasefire and then the second phase. It looked as though the Turks were finally going to assault the airport, Nicosia airport, which also housed the headquarters of the United Nations forces there. The Commander of the UN forces, General Prem Chand, an Indian, had a British Chief of Staff, Frank Han, a Brigadier, and they had some prior warning the Turks were likely to assault and bomb the airport and we were rung up and asked if we could arrange for British air cover to be made available. And there it was remarkable how quick the communications were because a message was sent from the High Commission to London, ministers must have obviously met to decide whether they were going to respond to this request from the United Nations and within something like ninety minutes we were told yes, and aircraft were being dispatched forthwith from the United Kingdom to Cyprus.

JB So these were beyond the steam driven days?

DD These were beyond the steam driven days. At least we weren't sort of adding numbers or working by Morse but it demonstrated to me that when you really needed

urgent communication it took priority and within a very short space of time the United Nations were able to tell the Turks that there was a potent force of British aircraft en route to Cyprus which would act for the United Nations in the event of any Turkish assault, which in fact never happened. But it was an interesting time because to see the reactions of individuals to that sort of situation which has become increasingly part of diplomatic life. I think when one joined the Service in the early fifties one didn't regard it as a dangerous occupation. It has become an increasingly dangerous occupation with, as we know, a number of members of the Service having been assassinated, one being involved in wars, revolutions, civil disorders, in many parts of the world, and I think that is demanding not a different but added qualities in people now serving in Diplomatic Service posts overseas. One needs the high intellectual content but you also need people who have reserves of stamina and resilience to cope with the kind of situation which we saw in Cyprus and, later, we saw in Ethiopia during a revolutionary situation. Although we ourselves were not in any major physical danger one was living in an environment of bloodshed and murder which can have an effect on the psychology of an individual, and of their families, their wives certainly. One needs perhaps an added dimension to the character of people who are being sent to serve in these remote and sometimes isolated and very often rather dangerous places.

JB And actually you also need a different public image don't you, and public recognition?

DD Yes, this is true. I'm not too worried about the public recognition but I think the fact that it is not a soft life, and in some places obviously it hasn't changed too much, but with the growth of international terrorism, the increasing lawlessness around the world you never know from one minute to the next where there is some threat. As a member of an overseas mission you could be caught up in a very violent situation and one needs the sort of reserves of character to deal with that as well as the other qualities expected of somebody in the Diplomatic Service.

JB I suppose to some extent also you need the support services from home don't you, the welfare department, medical etc.

DD Yes you need that, but very often in those circumstances you're thrown very much on your own resources in the country itself. If the worst comes to the worst you'll hope for some sort of evacuation facilities to be arranged but even there the best laid evacuation plans, when it actually comes to it, you find don't work. In Cyprus, we did have an evacuation plan for British subjects but when it actually happened they weren't relevant. It was very interesting that it just happened at the time of the Turkish invasion that there was one of our aircraft carriers in the neighbourhood. It cruised along the North coast of Cyprus picking up British subjects who wanted to get out. They'd cruise along and send boats ashore if they saw somebody flying a Union Jack. There was one problem because I think in Kirenia there was a troop of Russian ballet dancers who were performing and there was considerable debate as to whether one should allow these Russian ballet dancers on a British aircraft carrier. Eventually I think they did pick them up but on condition that they remain on the flight deck throughout the journey round the island back towards Limasol where they were transhipped direct on to a Russian ship, but

as I say, I think the character of overseas life has changed very much during out time in their Service. Where you didn't expect to be shot at then, now you do.

JB Particularly when you were Ambassador in Ethiopia. Ethiopia had been a feudal monarchy, rather a grand exotic place to be and while you were there you experienced a revolution.

DD Well, yes the revolution had taken place about a year before we got there. We arrived there I think about a month after the Emperor had died, or been killed whichever it may be. As an example of the sort of challenge that the Diplomatic Service faced overseas: in our first thirteen months in Ethiopia we had thirteen British subjects kidnapped by various rebel groups, not by the then so called government. So one spent quite a lot of those early months negotiating with, as far as one could, groups of people of whom one knew very little, to try to secure the release of these people. In fact all of them were eventually released unharmed but it s a new kind of problem that the overseas service faces and as you say there was an element of physical danger, although, ironically, in Ethiopia we never experienced any real personal animosity and the only Head of Mission, the only Ambassador to my knowledge whose car ever got stoned was the Russian, and at a time when the Russians were dominant in Ethiopia. We found more or less friendship amongst the population, but there were restrictions; one's travels were restricted.

JB And you also did a lot and certainly your wife did for the morale of the British community? I mean they got very beleaguered.

DD Yes, I think they did. One was lucky, as you know only too well, in having a compound where one could live a more or less normal life amidst all the mayhem which was going on all around one, and there was then still a fairly significant British community, commercial community, a lot of people working in the aid field, people in education, the universities. The Embassy did then provide a refuge for them in what was a very difficult situation because they were unable in many cases to keep in close touch with our Ethiopian friends; we at the time were the beastly imperialists and it wasn't very helpful for Ethiopians to be seen to be too friendly with the so called enemy.

JB Did you have any lines through to the incoming government? Was it still very fluid?

DD Very little indeed. One of the frustrating elements there was that try as one might, and this wasn't just ourselves, I think it was any other Head of Mission apart from some of the East Europeans when they became dominant, the government, at least the military government, would not have very much contact with Western Heads of Mission. Occasionally one met one or two of them but they kept themselves very much to themselves and one had to deal with sort of fairly minor officials in the government departments. To that extent professionally it was a very frustrating experience because they were just not interested in talking to one at all.

JB What about the Americans?

DD When we first arrived in Ethiopia the Americans were in still a fairly dominant position. I think the first military parade I went to, although all the speeches were highly

anti American, during the fly past of the Ethiopian air force all the planes were piloted by Americans. It was that sort of schizophrenic attitude. That didn't last all that long and the Americans were summarily booted out of all their various military facilities in Ethiopia. It was sad really but the Ethiopians were, I found, a wonderfully philosophical lot. They were very proud of their long independence as an African state. They'd seen off over the centuries all sorts of occupiers. This century, there were the Italians, they'd seen them off, they'd come and gone. Then the British had had a dominant position, immediately after the liberation and then the post war years. Then the Americans had come in with their major influence replaced then by the Russians and the East Germans, the Cubans. Over a period of time they've all gone and I think the Ethiopians took the view well we'll just sort of lie back, history will sort this out for us and in a sense it does, surprisingly.

JB You went back to London in 1979 and were dealing with Africa. How does Ethiopia fit in to the general African pattern?

DD Well, I suppose I hadn't had any experience before we went to Ethiopia and was rather surprised to go there but delighted we did because it really opened a whole new dimension of one's life and thinking. We had never served before in a poor country and Ethiopia is as poor as almost any other. We got there in the aftermath of the first highly publicised famine, and it was the headquarters of the OAU, the Organisation for African Unity, so one had dealings with Africans throughout the continent there who were represented at the OAU. When I came back, as you say, as the Assistant Under Secretary for African affairs and initially I suppose, and this was when the Labour government were still in power, David Owen was Foreign Secretary, the main emphasis was on trying to find some solution to the Namibia problem with contact group activity and David Owen and Cyrus Vance were working closely together to try to bring about some resolution of the conflict in Namibia or South West Africa as it then was as part of the South African, I was going to say Empire but sphere of influence, and then in, I don't quite know when it was, it was either late '79 or early '80 the government was changed and the Conservatives came to power with part of their election manifesto a commitment to solve the Rhodesia problem. That was extremely interesting. I think it was Mrs. Thatcher's first term as Prime Minister. It must have been '79. I think she probably came in with the view that we must settle this Rhodesia problem. I think her inclinations were rather more favourable to the white minority than the previous Labour government's had been and I think she felt that by some device they could recognise what was there and bring Rhodesia forward to independence. At that stage Peter Carrington had taken over as Foreign Secretary. He I think was more conscious of the international implications of any settlement in Rhodesia which did not to a reasonable extent meet the aspirations of the majority community in Rhodesia and certainly majority international opinion, who had very little sympathy for Ian Smith and his regime, so there was a certain, I won't say conflict, but difference of emphasis between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on the Rhodesian issue. One of the pledges that the Conservative government had made during the election campaign was that they would re establish links with the government of Rhodesia which you recall was then a government in rebellion against the Crown and I think it was probably in the spring of 1980 that there was a meeting in the Foreign Office with the American Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Peter Carrington and a

gathering of officials, of which I was one, when Vance said to Peter "didn't you read Peter you were going to send somebody out to Rhodesia and be a government representative". He said 'yes, I suppose we've got to get round to this sometime', and he looked around the room and said 'well, what " are you doing Derek?" so I said "well, you know I'm going to do what I'm told" and he said "well you'd better go". And this was the first time that this had been presented. So I then went off to Salisbury as it then was, in the May or June of 1980 as a government representative in Rhodesia. This was at the same time that Rhodesia was having elections for an internal settlement which produced Bishop Muzorewa as the first black Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia as it was then called. It was a hyphenated state and I think I still have a copy of the Salisbury Herald of that day, the headline of which is 'ZIMBABWE - RHODESIA IS BORN' and a little headline down the side of the front page "Tory envoy arrives" which was the first time I'd been labelled as a political envoy. But that was a fascinating time.

JB What was your brief?

DD Well, the brief really was to establish contact with what was a new Zimbabwe - Rhodesia government which was a mixture of black and white ministers. Muzorewa was Prime Minister, Ian Smith remained in the government as a minister without portfolio, the Foreign Minister was one of Ian Smith's former ministers, the Finance Minister was still a white and there was a sprinkling of black ministers amongst the cabinet. One's brief was to establish relationships with these people and discover what their thinking was, and I think at that stage the expectation in London was that they would be able to recognise this internal government of Bishop Muzorewa as the legitimate government of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

JB Did you have a staff?

DD Yes, there had been someone there before. We kept the old High Commissioner's residence, Morimba, and I think there was a grade nine Frazer Elliot who was there with me. He was there already and one had rudimentary communications back to London. Most of the people I was doing business with, the white community, and the Muzorewa government would of course have been very happy to have international recognition. But it was becoming very clear that international opinion would not regard this as a genuinely freely elected government. The guerilla war was going on, and Joshua Nkomo and Mugabe were still leading their forces in guerilla activity against this new government. Had Britain decided to recognise and legitimise it I think they would have been very isolated amongst the international community.

JB And particularly in the Commonwealth.

DD In the Commonwealth certainly. So, then this sort of dance began to try and find some means of making this internal settlement respectable to international opinion. That led up to the Commonwealth Heads of government meeting in Lusaka, I think in September of that year, and that in turn led onto the Lancaster House Conference on the independence of Rhodesia.

JB Did you go to the Lusaka Conference?

DD No, I was still in Salisbury then and having some difficulty getting communications from Salisbury to Lusaka, which although it was a very short distance, there was no direct communication at all. I suppose, in due course, all sorts of theories will be developed as to why a settlement came at that particular time in the early '80's but I found, during those months in Salisbury talking to many of the white community, that war weariness had developed, that the farmers were farming under siege conditions, they had to build protective walls and barriers around their houses and their farms, they were sending their children away to school in Salisbury where they would be safer, very often their wives were away as well. The menfolk were called up for service in the reserve police, the children, the white children were being called up for the Rhodesian army. Talking at that time to the President of their National Farmers Union, the Commercial Farmer's Union, he told me that many of his members had decided they would plant one more crop and if there was no political settlement thereafter, then they would pack up and leave. At the same time, the black guerilla independence movements, Robert Mugabe's, and Nkomo's people were in the field, had been fighting for many years and were coming to the conclusion that they would have the utmost difficulty in inflicting a military defeat upon the Rhodesian forces, particularly now that there was a black Prime Minister sitting in the Prime Minister's office in Salisbury. So these two elements came together at the same time and people felt, well, neither of us are going to win a total victory so maybe the time has come to sit down and try to find some negotiated settlement. And the white community believed that they were far more likely to achieve a satisfactory settlement with a new conservative government under Margaret Thatcher than they would be likely to achieve under any other British government. So I think it was a combination of circumstances that persuaded them all to come together to the conference in Lancaster House, which did turn into something of a marathon. I don't remember exactly when it started, probably late September and it dragged on till very nearly Christmas time, and everyone was getting very weary.

JB There was an enormous diplomatic resource development at that time.

DD Oh yes, tremendous resource, there was a tremendous amount of effort put into it and I think probably all of us felt both on the British side and I suspect the others that the thought of having to come back after Christmas and pick up the threads was almost more than body and soul could contemplate, which resulted eventually in an agreement which nobody really wanted, I don't think it met the aspirations of the Africans or of the white community but it was, as all these things are, a compromise which would work provided the parties concerned were prepared to make it work, which happily they were. I suppose at the time there was a belief, a hope in some British circles, that in the elections that eventually took place that either Muzorewa would be confirmed as Prime Minister or Joshua Nkomo, who was regarded perhaps as the less fanatical of the African leaders, would achieve a majority. I don't think Mugabe was the favourite son then by any means but as we all know he won a convincing victory. What I think is remarkable is that after that, when one would have expected a certain amount of retribution from the African majority, now Mugabe as Prime Minister, that Ian Smith remained in parliament, not of course in government. He was able to stand up in the Rhodesian parliament and debate and discuss and criticise for something like a year or two. Mugabe retained as his Chief of Intelligence a man who'd been the Chief of Intelligence under Ian Smith. One would

have thought that that post of all posts would have been changed. So there was a degree of maturity after the settlement that I'm not sure any of us would have really foreseen. I personally don't think one could have achieved, from the point of view of Rhodesia, the point of view of the British government, a better settlement. The alternative was the continuation of the war and growing bitterness.

JB So we've already spoken about your years as Chief Clerk between '82 and '84 so we're now looking to your last posting in Canada as High Commissioner. You went in '84.

DD Yes, we arrived in Canada in '84 in a sort of interregnum because the Prime Minister of the day, John Turner, had called an election shortly before we were due to arrive so we arrived in Canada in the middle of an election campaign. One of these funny little quirks, going to Canada as a High Commissioner you're not there formally as a representative of the Queen because the Queen is Queen of Canada so one goes to a Commonwealth country not with credentials from the Queen but with a letter from the Prime Minister to the Prime Minister of the receiving state. So I had a letter addressed by Mrs. Thatcher as she then was to the Prime Minister John Turner, who was in the middle of an election campaign. Normally one would have an interview with the Prime Minister to hand over this letter. The days and weeks were going by and I was still sitting with this letter in my hand and all the polls were suggesting that John Turner would not remain Prime Minister after the election so eventually I decided since no one could really help with the protocol to take matters into my own hands. I never delivered this letter personally. I just wrote to the Prime Minister saying in effect I had hoped to call on you to deliver this in person but since you don't seem able to spare the time to see me you'd better have it now. So that was how my accreditation to the government of Canada went. But it is an interesting thought, and it is not always appreciated; that as a High Commissioner overseas in a Commonwealth country, of which our Queen is their Queen, one has no special relationship if the Queen is visiting that country. For example, shortly after we arrived the Queen did come on a formal visit but as British High Commissioner I had no status any different from that of the Ghanaian High Commissioner or the Indian High Commissioner. One wasn't received by the Queen, you didn't see the Queen formally in any way and the Canadians, perhaps more than some other Commonwealth countries, are very protective of their sovereign. There's no question of one expecting any kind of special treatment and, on that particular occasion, the only way we saw the Queen was standing outside the residence and waving as she went by in a carriage on her way to open parliament. But it is something that is not always appreciated. It didn't worry me at all because I fully recognised that in Canada She is the Queen of Canada and not of the United Kingdom but I know it did irk some of my colleagues that they didn't have, shall we say, this privileged position, in respect of the Queen when she was visiting. But Canada was a delightful place to end up in. We had no major problems or difficulties with the Canadians. What I did find, which was interesting, was the commercial relationship. The business relationship really prospers without any intervention from governments and High Commissions at all. Most business people have their long standing connections with the country they do business direct with, their Canadian partners, many will have Canadian subsidiary companies, and they have no need of the official services at all. It is only perhaps people coming into the market for the first time who need just a few sign posts put up for them.

JB Yes, you have your Consulates.

DD The Consulate in Canada, the commercial business, banking centre was in Toronto, having moved down from Montreal some years previously and most of the business was done there. We did have a Consulate General in Toronto and the Consul General there would see far more of the British business community that I ever would in Ottawa, although one would visit from time to time for particular occasions. But it is a natural and easy relationship which prospers and doesn't need a vast amount of prodding from the government services so I found that a lot of one's time in Ottawa was certainly spent in promoting British commercial activity but dealing very often with third country issues like South Africa, where there were fairly sharp differences between our two governments on the issues, particularly of sanctions against South Africa, but it was a relatively trouble free time. I suppose the Canadians felt not embittered but felt that to some extent we, the United Kingdom, would turn our backs on Canada through our membership of the European Community, now the European Union, that we'd lost interest in them as a trading partner, as a political partner; to some extent that was true. But as I pointed out to them, they too had shifted the focus of their activities to the United States where that was the paramount trading relationship for them and a very important political relationship as well, so that, in a sense, both of us were being drawn into our own geographical orbit, almost subconsciously. It wasn't a deliberate decision either by us or the Canadians to sever the more historical and traditional contacts with the United Kingdom on the one hand and the United States on the other.

JB What about your relationships with your French colleagues; there was no sense of competition or anything like that?

DD No none at all. We had a very, very close relationship with our French colleagues and indeed with our European Community partners. This isn't something we've touched on, but of course during my time in the Service the development of European co-operation had its effect upon one's work overseas both in Ethiopia and in Canada. One had regular meetings with one's European community colleagues. In Ethiopia one had to share a lot of information because it wasn't easy to come by so the relationship there was extremely close. Similarly in Canada, but with the French, yes, we did have a particular relationship and rather symbolic in a way because the British High Commissioner's residence was on Sussex Drive, one of the main roads in Ottawa, two doors along was the French Ambassador's residence. Britain and France were the two founding nations if you like of Canada. The next house along was the Canadian Prime Minister's and just round the corner was the Governor General so you had this sort of symbolic little nucleus of Canadian history. The French Ambassador said to me once he reckoned as a British High Commissioner one was almost more welcome in French Canada than he was at times because the French Canadian, and one generalises grossly here, felt rather looked down upon by Metropolitan France as being peasants who went off to Canada, whose French was still somewhat different from French French, and a French Canadian who would travel to France somehow was made to feel rather inferior. This affected to some extent the relationship that he had with Francophones in Canada. I found when visiting Quebec there was no restraint, no inhibitions. I was very struck the first time I went, I think to call on the Prime Minister to find the Union Jack flying over the Parliament building in Quebec, which they put up as a sort of symbolic little honour for the visitor, which was

very attractive. Of course, it is a most fascinating country. It is the second largest country in the world geographically but with a minute population, a population half the size of the United Kingdom but a country many many times the size of the European Community.

JB But a very nice last post.

DD It was a fascinating last post, and I suppose my very last formal activity was at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Vancouver in 1987 which was attended by our own Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary and by the Queen, who was there as Head of the Commonwealth, so it was a tremendous climax to one's career. The only sadness I suppose was that it also coincided with a fairly bitter argument between the British and Canadian governments on the question of sanctions towards South Africa, on which Mrs. Thatcher was adamant and in her forthright tones made it absolutely clear that she was not going to be bullied by the rest of this Commonwealth, I was going to say mob, but you know what I mean, so it was a meeting of some acrimony. I felt that maybe it was the right time to pack up one's bags and retire, which we did from Canada.