

Interview with Paul H. Robinson Jr., 1989

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PAUL H. ROBINSON, JR.

Interviewed by: Willis Armstrong

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Q: This is a interview with Ambassador Paul Robinson, who was ambassador in Canada from 1981 until 1985. Paul, what got you interested in being ambassador to Canada in the first place?

ROBINSON: Well, it wasn't quite that, Bill. Before the election of 1980, in October, I was asked by Dan Terra, who later became Ambassador for Cultural Affairs—really an ambassador-at-large—would I take a position in a Reagan Administration if then-Governor Reagan was elected. I said that I would be interested in a major position. I would consider a major position or want to be considered for that or nothing at all. I was asked to put down a list, which was a very short list in my case, which included Canada and Secretary of the Navy. And, of course, I was greatly honored to represent the President in Canada.

Q: When did your name go to the Senate, for example, and then how did the procedure go with the Senate? Was it all comfortable?

ROBINSON: It was seventeen-to-nothing committee vote and the voice vote on the floor of the Senate. I was posted at Canada on the 15th of July 1981. And I was there until September 9, 1985.

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Q: How did you feel about the way you were treated by the senators? I guess there was then a Republican majority in the Senate, wasn't there?

ROBINSON: Yes, there was. I was very fairly treated. And even Claiborne Pell, whose politics are certainly different than mine—

Q: Or mine.

ROBINSON: Yes, he is a very nice man. He was very helpful.

Senator Percy from Illinois was the Chairman of Foreign Relations Committee, and he had been extremely difficult, even though we were both Republicans before I got to the Senate, because he had foolishly made his own selection without checking with the White House. And when it became apparent that I was the nominee and hit the papers, he exploded. But he seemed to think, of course, that he was running foreign affairs for the United States. He hadn't read his Constitution, I'm afraid.

Q: Some senators haven't.

ROBINSON: But he was, in fact, helpful in the end. But I knew that he had been working behind the scenes against me.

Q: That's fascinating.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: When you first encountered the State Department, how did you feel about the career people and the desk, and how were you handled in the bureau?

ROBINSON: Well, I was handled very well. In fact, I came to State for some briefings pending my hearings at the Senate with some preconceived ideas, which were largely wrong. I thought that the State Department people would be largely useless and wouldn't

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really know how to conduct foreign affairs. They may well have thought the same thing of me.

But what happened was that I was impressed, very much so, by the people I met. I thought they were dedicated. I thought they were able. I never had any problems in my subsequent four years and two months in Canada with State Department people. They were, I think, largely of the other party, but they nonetheless were good Americans. I was proud to be with them. We worked very well together.

Q: This is, of course, what I heard from them, too.

ROBINSON: Is it really? Is that right? [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] A mutually satisfactory arrangement.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Well, what did they tell you in 1981 were the chief problems with Canada at that time?

ROBINSON: I not only traveled in Canada for pleasure, but I had some business dealings there going back to 1974, in December of '74, when I first went to Ottawa on business.

But there were several. One, of course, was the FIRA, Foreign Investment Review Agency, which is really active in restraint of trade in trying to keep American and other foreign investments out. Subsequently, the Trudeau government, at my urging, appointed Ed Lumley and Clay Ducfera (phonetic). And then Mulroney came in. He abolished it.

The other was a national energy program, which confiscated our assets retroactively; that is to say, those who had invested in Canadian oil and energy shares. And then I wasn't able to accomplish the removal of under Trudeau, but it was also abolished by Mulroney when he was elected.

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The third one, of course, was the acid rain problem, where, of course, we were polluting Canada. But what isn't realized is that Canada was polluting the United States, as well. Half of Canada's air pollution is generated in Canada. And a quarter of our pollution comes from Canada in the New England states.

So it is clearly a serious problem, and I wasn't able to solve that exactly. But one of my last acts was to set up and get approval for a special envoys to deal with this problem. And I did in face of White House opposition. They didn't think the President would go along, but the President did go along. And primarily I would say because he wanted to help Brian Mulroney. He never felt that the acid rain problem was quite as serious or could be approached at that time because we didn't have enough information. Nonetheless, he did appoint these envoys.

And finally, Bill, a fourth problem between the two was one that I raised, and that was defense. Canada's expenditures towards defense were 1.8% of gross national product. I never questioned for a moment Canada's loyalty to the NATO alliance or to the defense of our continent, but it was clear that they had to do more. I got them to turn the corner, not really demonstratively, but yet up to 2.2% when I left. At that time, we were at 6.5%, going to 7%.

Q: And we went higher.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Up into 1984, '85.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And had, I think, a very important impact on the general international situation.

ROBINSON: NATO had agreed to 3%, you see, so Canada was really far below.

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Q: Well, they always have been below. I had experience with Canada in my day in regard to their defense budget.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Now, one of the things that you have been described as being in Canadian press is the godfather of the Free Trade Agreement.

ROBINSON: Well, that's—

Q: Can you tell us something about how that developed? That was not an immediate problem when you went there because—

ROBINSON: No.

Q: Trudeau was in power. But after Mulroney came in, they took a different look at it.

ROBINSON: Well, that's right. The first working day of 1983, in a bubble I announced that we were going to reinstate the Free Trade Agreement, which you'll remember, of course, failed in 1911 in Sir Wilfrid Laurier's government fell on the question of no truck nor trade with the Yankee.

I said I wanted to leave something that would live beyond all of our service in Canada. So I entered into a program where I had leading people—Tom Bakeele (phonetic), for instance; Jake Warren, a former Canadian ambassador to the United States; the Chamber of Commerce man, Sam Hughes. And then we called on Gerry Regan, then in charge of Trade and External Affairs, and Ed Lumley, who was the liberal minister at that time for trade as well. We knew, of course, Bill, that it wouldn't do any good unless it was initiated by the Canadians. It wouldn't fly at all because we would be accused of gobbling up Canada.

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There was a meeting in May of '83 with Gerry Regan. His staff was opposed to this concept, but I noticed Regan was taking it in. As a result, subsequently, and meeting with Bill Brock and Gerry Regan, we decided to proceed with some kind of a freer trade agreement. They were afraid to say free at that time; they said freer trade agreement on a sectorial basis, product by product or industry by industry. And so that the liberals did, in fact, make a turn towards this. And then, of course, when Brian Mulroney was elected in September of '84, it was full speed ahead on freer trade. Later they had the guts, and we had the guts, to just call it free trade.

Q: The election of Mulroney was in '84, wasn't it?

ROBINSON: I think it was September 4, 1984.

Q: I remember watching the returns.

ROBINSON: That was the biggest landslide election in the history of Canada.

Q: I was in Canada when Diefenbaker won his landslide.

ROBINSON: Really?

Q: Yes, in 1958.

ROBINSON: You know what Diefenbaker said? One of his greatest quotes is he said, "Polls are for dogs." [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] That's a nice line.

ROBINSON: Yes. It is interesting that Diefenbaker, a conservative, is actually far more anti-American than the liberals were at the time that I was there. Trudeau was most helpful to me. I think you could say that what he had done, intended to do, he had already done.

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And I don't know if that was best for Canada or not, but he was—in fact, I have opinions of that. But he was very fair.

It brings a point up too, Bill. I had the honor of serving with four of Canada's eighteen prime ministers: Trudeau, Turner, Mulroney, as prime minister, and Joe Clark as Secretary of State for External Affairs. And I liked them all.

Q: They are all good people, basically.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And very competent people.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And that's one thing you usually encounter with Canadians. They knew their jobs, and they are quite competent.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: You did know Diefenbaker.

ROBINSON: No, I never met—

Q: Or had he passed from the scene?

ROBINSON: Yes, he was dead.

Q: He was dead when you went there. I had forgotten the date of his departure.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: He was prime minister the whole time I served in Canada.

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ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: I was charg# frequently, so I got to know him, you know.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: He was an interesting man. And he really wasn't as anti-American as—

ROBINSON: No. Well, there was the Bomarc Mitchell thing and a few other things.

Q: Well, he didn't have the courage or the convictions of his defense minister.

ROBINSON: Oh, really? Yes.

Q: He had the lack of courage of his foreign minister, and that was the issue.

ROBINSON: Who, Pearson?

Q: No. Green, Howard Green.

ROBINSON: Green, yes.

Q: Did you ever meet Howard Green?

ROBINSON: No, I didn't.

Q: He is still around. He was foreign minister, and he just didn't want to have any nuclear weapons at all on Canadian territory. This is why the Diefenbaker government fell.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And, for your information, I was in charge of the Canadian desk at the time they wrote the press release, which knocked over the Diefenbaker government.

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ROBINSON: Really? Is that right?

Q: I wrote it myself. I mean with some drafting help, but you know how those things go.

ROBINSON: Then remember a senior defense official in Canada said to me, "I was the only ambassador that ever came to Canada and brought down a government." [Laughter]

Q: If you want to, you know, argue that if you take this position, then something falls down. Why, there it is.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: That's simply, you know, it's a kind of simplistic view of the matter.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: I mean, the Diefenbaker government was bound to collapse at some point.

ROBINSON: It was bound to go, anyway.

Q: At some point.

ROBINSON: So was Trudeau.

Q: And Turner's government was bound to lose at some point.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Well, are you pleased with the way things developed after you left, in regard to the Free Trade Agreement?

ROBINSON: Well, very much so. Of course, as you know, I didn't negotiate. I think it was very well done. I think the key was Baker as Secretary of Treasury. STR was not—I mean,

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certainly they did the hard foot-slogging work. But Baker was the one that provided the clout that got it through. Wilson, on the Canadian side, I think, was they key man. In fact, Mike Wilson and I met before all of this ended. I said, "Look, what should we do?" We raised over some of the things which I said I would pass on to Washington, which I did do. And I remember publishing was one of them. And I said, "How does this look to you, Mike?"

And he said, "Well, I think we can work it out." He said, "You can press this, and don't press that," and that sort of thing. So I was able to be a good messenger. I reported all that duly to the Special Trade Representative's office. So I played a marginal role in the actual negotiations.

Q: This was after you were—

ROBINSON: Ambassador.

Q: Negotiations took place after you left.

ROBINSON: Yes. Right.

Q: No, I know you played an important role in that. I think the embassy in Ottawa worked hard on it, also.

ROBINSON: They did.

Q: I visited them a couple of times and was impressed with the way they had taken hold of this issue.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And made themselves expert. And Jim Tarrant was on the—

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ROBINSON: I liked Tarrant.

Q: He was a first-class man. He used to work for me when I was assistant secretary.

ROBINSON: A fairly younger fellow.

Q: Yes.

ROBINSON: He's very good.

Q: Very good, indeed.

ROBINSON: Did he leave the Foreign Service? I know he's down in Ottawa now.

Q: I don't know what his next assignment was or whether he left.

ROBINSON: Yes. I liked him.

Q: I liked him very much.

Now the acid rain question, you know, is still, it seems to me, scientifically up in the air. Did you feel that the Canadians were unwilling to accept the possible scientific evidence would go against their political convictions on this matter?

ROBINSON: Yes. I mean, clearly, it was. I mean, they liked to kick us in the shins, you know—the press, particularly. I think it was blown out of proportion, but it nonetheless is one of those realities of public life. I mean, it didn't matter what the facts were. It was a real political issue.

Q: It certainly was.

ROBINSON: And it is.

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Q: And it remains so.

ROBINSON: It remains so. I think it's mitigated somewhat. I do think that President Bush and his administration would do more. I know that President Reagan wasn't convinced that we had found out how SO₂ and NO_x got into the atmosphere and then fell to the earth as acid rain. I think the Bush people are more likely to do something about it.

Q: I read an article recently in the Washington Times by Warren Brooks, who is one of my favorite commentators and analysts. He is a superb analyst. I will try to get you a copy of this. It raises the question as to how much money it takes, really, to have an impact on acid rain, and is it worth it. In the sense that—

ROBINSON: That's incredible.

Q: It says the data are very confusing.

ROBINSON: Conflicting. You know, if we spend, say, ten, fifteen, twenty billion, and at the end of the day, find out it doesn't work, then where are we?

Q: Well, then you have just blown your money.

ROBINSON: That's right.

Q: I've talked to a lot of people under the Reagan Administration because, as you know, we were working on that Atlantic Council project on Canada.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: My wife and I. And we talked to quite a number of people about this issue, and we were never really convinced that the scientific evidence was all that convincing.

ROBINSON: That's right. Reagan wasn't, either.

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Q: And I'm sure he wasn't. I think there were a lot of other people who knew more science than he did who were also so convinced.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: But they probably conveyed that thought to him.

ROBINSON: Speaking of the Atlantic Council and off the subject, the University of Illinois is prepared to join with ESU and the Atlantic Council on this lexicon thing. How much with the Soviets, how much money is involved.

Q: Let me pause a minute. [Tape recorded turned off]

We are back on the air. Paul, you've had a lot of experience with Canada, both during your ambassadorship and since. What are your views on the general nature of Canadian-American relationships and what you see coming in the future?

ROBINSON: Well, I think that, of course, the average American doesn't give the time of day to it. They take it for granted, the relationship, as being good. And it is basically good. And, frankly, it will always basically good if we pay attention to Canadian needs and sensibilities and if they, on their part, behave in a similar manner. They also take us for granted, you know, Bill, in questions like defense, for instance.

But, I mean, if you or I have a business in Australia or New Zealand—if you are down under, and you look up, and you say, “Well, I can't see the difference between Americans and Canadians.” We look down, we see Australians and New Zealanders. We say, “Well, there isn't any difference.” Well, of course, there is in both cases. There are no two people in this world closer to each other than the United States and Canada, not only by blood and by language, but by basic outlooks on life. That doesn't mean there aren't differences; there are. We, as Americans, want to make sure that we are aware of these.

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I'm an American of Canadian descent. It sustained me in many a time when the press was all over me at the beginning. At the end, I made really more friends than I thought, than I could in the press and beyond that. After two and a half years, I think I beat them. They were writing good things about me. And I was really wondering whether I was doing my job or not. Because they were actually agreeing with me and saying nice things. And I thought, "Well, I must be doing something wrong."

But they find it easy to criticize us. And, of course, as you know, 80% of the population within a hundred miles of the border, they can't help but be informed on what we are doing or polluted by what our television produces. They asked me once, some of them, "What can we do to limit the influence of American television?"

I said, "I don't know. But let me know so we can do the same thing in the United States."

But they do have—I think you have to treat this—I found that the way to work with Canadians was to treat them straight on and be consistent. It's always better to be consistently wrong than right sometimes and wrong some other time. But it is better to be consistently right, and I think I was. And I think, in fact, President Reagan wrote me a letter, which I have framed in my office in Illinois, saying, "The relationship now between the United States and Canada is greater than at any time since the end of the Second World War." And he said, "You can be proud that it happened on your watch."

Q: I think that's true. I would confirm that in my own experience with Canadian affairs, which began in 1958. So I would say relationships are currently very good.

What do you see as happening in the Free Trade area? Do you think that this agreement is going to survive? You know, all the media in Canada now talk about are how many jobs are lost or many plants are closed. And, of course, rationalization was bound to occur. But they don't emphasize, or as a Canadian told me the other day, "They don't emphasize all the new jobs and all the new investment."

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ROBINSON: No.

Q: How do you see this? And this relates to the media, of course, who are always very difficult in Canada.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: As they were with you.

ROBINSON: Yes. Speaking of the media, I want to say that the U.S. press is malicious. The Canadian press is stupid, because they don't do their homework. And they are, basically, anti-American—the press is. The Canadian people aren't.

But an answer to that is that it's estimated by the best judges—and, of course, that doesn't mean that it's right—that trade will be enhanced in the next five years by 15%. Right now, as you know, it is over 150 billion. The biggest trade relationship in the world, twice what our trade is with Japan. Over the next five years, 15% at least increase. And a 1,500,000 jobs, of which 500,000 would be Canadian jobs, new jobs. That won't stop the press. But I think we will see something even better than that.

Back to the press and the letter—as I mentioned, the President's letter. Brian Mulroney's office said, “What kind of a letter do you want the prime minister to send you on your departure?”

Q: That's a delicate question.

ROBINSON: Yes. It was Fred Doucet, the prime minister's chief of staff. And he said, “Do you want us to tell the truth, or do you want something that we can release to the press?”

I said, “Well, have him write the truth,” which was a very kind letter, also framed in my office. But the thing is it was positive, and it would have embarrassed the conservative government had it got into the press. I was told in no uncertain terms that I cannot release

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it to the press. I could frame it, put it in my office in Illinois, but I couldn't let anybody see it otherwise.

And that shows you how delicate the relationship is on the Canadian side, that the opposition would have got a hold of it, socialists and maybe the liberals and said, "Well, there goes the prime minister again playing up to the Americans." I think that is a sensitivity which we Americans have to recognize exists.

Q: How do you think we can get more attention to the reality of Canadian-American relations by Americans? You know, I have felt we were afflicted by apathy and ignorance to an incredible degree.

ROBINSON: I agree. Well, first we could have Louis Real (phonetic) again do a northwest rebellion, and then we would pay attention to it. But that's been over a hundred—

Q: Our new separatist.

ROBINSON: You know the disturbing thing is that Americans would ask me not about Trudeau, but about Margaret Trudeau. I mean, it just struck me—I mean, our view of Canada is that it is very cold up there, and that Margaret Trudeau still lives up there. And then they don't have the slightest idea—we don't have the slightest idea about the separatist thing, which, of course, is a great danger. They ask you a question.

You know, I have suggested to Derek Burney before he became Canadian ambassador, that they buy a section of Time magazine and put it in there, like Saudi Arabians do, and just put it in there. I don't care what it costs. I mean, that at least Americans would recognize what Canada is and what it is doing.

The only other thing I think could be through television. If we can generate the interest, I think the Public Broadcasting System might do more on Canadian subjects. I know my daughter is working with a program called the Editors in Montreal. She is an intern there

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while she is at McGill. And that program appears on some 300 channels in the United States, PBS channels. So not in every case, but oftentimes, I know I appeared on it. And a friend of mine in Topeka saw it. So that sort of thing, I think, would help.

Q: The Canadian Embassy's got a new news bulletin out, a weekly news bulletin.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Which strikes me as quite good.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Which they will send you if you ask for it.

ROBINSON: Yes. I don't think—I get the one from Chicago. I guess that is the same one. Yes.

Q: It's Can News or something like that.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And I thought it was very good.

The media in Canada—we've talked about the print media. How do you feel about CBC and the Canadian television? Did they treat you any worse or any better?

ROBINSON: Well, they tried to, but they couldn't, you see, because I was on television. They can't just quote you when you are on television. In fact, CBC has asked me to be on a panel, which I'll be glad to do, on December 9th in Vancouver, which will be Canada coast-to-coast in Canada with P. R. Burton, a good New York Times man, Malcolm, and a few other people. But, you see, they can't misquote me when I'm on television. They would often throw in these high hard ones, you know. They would dwell on some issues which

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were almost trivial. I think they liked to interview me because they got a straight answer, and they got a story.

I gave over 150 speeches in Canada. I stopped counting at 156. I was on radio and television at least as many times and more times than that. I've traveled 250,000 miles. So there was hardly any—I think I've traveled Canada more in my tenure there than any politician. I was everywhere including—

Q: Probably more than any ambassador. Although our ambassadors have always tried to get around the country quite a lot.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: And I did when I was DCM. We had eleven consulates in those days. And I supervised the consulates, so I had to get around.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Eleven consulates is a lot to supervise.

ROBINSON: It is a lot, absolutely.

Q: They have been consolidated now.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: So you think the CBC tries to give you more of a break than—

ROBINSON: Well, the interviewers were sometimes hostile, but they were relatively fair. They had to be because the people are watching it.

Q: Yes. And if they weren't, the people wouldn't.

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ROBINSON: That's right.

Q: Because, of course, a lot of Canadians watch American television all the time.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: Any other subjects that you think are important? How do you feel about French Canada? Have you been around French Canada?

ROBINSON: Quite a bit. I must say that my attitude changed on that subject. Of course, I detest separatism as much as the Canadians, or good Canadians, do. I was invited by the Levesque government on November 11th, I remember, 1981, Remembrance Day, our Veteran's Day. I laid the wreath in Quebec City. Levesque was, I thought, a despicable man. He refused to wear the king's uniform during the war. He came in the U.S. Army as a cameraman. In his office was no maple leaf flag. He didn't attend the ceremony. There was the Quebec Flag. I called on Ryan, who was also a separatist, but a responsible one, I think, if there is such a thing as a responsible, I don't think there is. But he at least had a maple leaf flag in his office. Levesque had pretenses of being a great friend of Americans and would join NATO when they were independent.

I was asked what I thought of the separatist movement by these separatists. And I said to them, "Whereas that is entirely a Canadian matter (I didn't say Quebec matter; a Canadian matter), the United States favored a strong and united Canada," which, of course, didn't go down very well with them. And six months later, I took the trouble of having it made official U.S. policy. And that's what it was.

Q: It had been said before in an earlier day when I was familiar with it. It was said particularly at the time when the separatists were raging in some various kinds of terrorism and violence.

ROBINSON: Yes. In '71.

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Q: Yes, '71. Late '60s and '71. It was a very tight time, and they had a very hard time up there. I remember going to the NATO meeting in '63 in Ottawa, and there were extraordinary security precautions taken by the Canadians.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: In that time. I know the American delegation was horrified because, as a member of the delegation, I wouldn't stay at the hotel. I didn't want to pay the price at the Chateau Laurier. I went and stayed in a motel over in Eastview in the French part of town.

ROBINSON: Really?

Q: Yes. They had good steaks, anyway. It's a place I knew.

Do you consider separatism still a threat?

ROBINSON: It is always a dormant threat. You know, this last election, the liberals won with ninety-three seats to twenty-nine or something like that, over the separatists. The separatists still got 40% of the vote, which is the exact percentage that they got in 1980 on their referendum.

Q: That's right.

ROBINSON: So it is always there. And I think that the rest of Canada, Anglophone Canada, really must be attuned to this. I don't think separatism will ever occur. Although not a Canadian, I have strong pro-Canadian views. To me, it is treason. I mean, if the governor of Illinois was saying the things the Levesque said, we would hang him. And then we would try him later, I suppose.

Q: You mean you don't have due process in Illinois?

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ROBINSON: No, not for treason. But, you know, the French Canadians—you know this firsthand better than I do—but the sign of the revolution in the '60s and early '70s really freed the French Canadians from the Roman Catholic Church to the point now really where they have almost gone too far, where they don't pay any attention to the teachings of the church. But what they did was they came in the marketplace, and today French Canadians are far more entrepreneurial than your average Anglo-Canadian in Ontario. They are sitting back waiting for the government to do things. And the French Canadians are the ones, in many cases, I would rather do business with because they are—

Q: They are out and at it.

ROBINSON: They are out and at it, that's right. And I tell you they have—bilingualism, of course, is absurd, as far as the United States is concerned. But with two founding societies, even though it is a terrible problem involved with it—in many cases, a needless duplication—it is, nonetheless, working. I think in the long run, it will do a lot to mitigate any separatist feelings. That, with their entrepreneurial spirit, I think, will eventually kill the concept of separatism.

And French Canadians are now regarded—I mean, in the privacy of our drawing rooms or living rooms—as, you know, as being first, Canadians; second, North Americans; and only third, French. Because they don't like the French any more than the French like them. And the only time they say they are French is when some Anglophobe gets on them for being French. Then they really become French. Otherwise, they are as good a Canadian as anybody.

Q: Yes, I couldn't agree more. I was horrified when I went to Canada in 1958. I was horrified by the anti-French tone of most Anglophobes over there.

ROBINSON: I know it. There were second-class citizens.

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Q: *It was very, very repulsive.*

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: *You know, in the Reno Club, there were no French Canadians.*

ROBINSON: No, that's right.

Q: *And I used to take French Canadians for lunch now and then just for the hell of it, you know.*

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: *And, incidentally, I am trying to get the Reno Club and the Cosmos Club to have correspondence.*

ROBINSON: That would be good. I remember the Reno Club.

Q: *I used to be a member.*

ROBINSON: Well, I can help on that side.

Q: *Well, they want it. Ambassador Robinson and I will talk about it then. They want it.*

Well, let's see. Is there any other subject?

ROBINSON: I was just thinking. You know, Bill, there have been more ambassadors shot since the Second World War than generals. Now I don't know whether it's killed—

Q: *Four of them were friends—five of them were friends of mine.*

ROBINSON: Really?

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Q: Yes.

ROBINSON: Yes. I don't whether it is accurate to say shot or killed. But, in any event, shot would be correct. I am probably the last ambassador to walk around freely in Canada. I had, as you know, my driver, and we had an armored car and all of that. Against regulation, I carried a—in the back seat in the briefcase, there was always a snub-nose thirty-eight. The problem was never Canadians, but these terrorists—Iranians. Armenians were our biggest threat because they wanted to get back to us for trying and jailing an Armenian in Los Angeles for shooting a Turk.

One of the funny things was we had an informer in Nicaragua who had prior been a Marine or something in one of our excursions down there. He found out that the Tupamaro European communists were meeting at some point in the United States to engineer the kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador to Canada. So I was alerted to all this. And there was a two-week period—John Rousebeck my DCM, said, “Boy, if they do get you, they are in for something.” But anyway . . . [Laughter]

It didn't work. I was almost, you know, disappointed, because when you are on a two-week alert, and they are looking at everything real carefully and there doesn't come, it is somewhat of a letdown.

One time I was walking in Ottawa. I came out of a government building, and a young man came up to me quite rapidly. And I thought, “Oh, my God.” Well, I noticed he had a clean tee shirt on. It is funny how much you remember. It wasn't a dirty tee shirt, so I thought maybe he might be one of us, rather than an attempted assassin. And he said, “Ambassador Robinson,” like that.

And I said, “Yes,” looking and watching his hands.

He stuck out his hand and said, “God bless America.” [Laughter]

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And I had other people come up to me on the street and say, "God bless you, Mr. Ambassador. What you are doing for our country is . . ." That, as opposed to what some of the people were saying initially in the press. That we were telling them what to do. Reagan was a bomb-slinging cowboy, and I was his clone, and all of this. Given time, we can all rise above that and get the point over. But we have to be consistent.

Q: You have to remember also that the Canadians, in the end, do believe in fair play. Their standards are all right.

ROBINSON: Even more than we do.

Q: Even more so, yes.

ROBINSON: At the retroactive backing provision of the National Energy Program, I said, "I send my people, and I've got one ace card." Because, of course, I ruled out any reciprocity. I said, "And that ace card is Canadian sense of fair play, and I will play that card." And I did play that card. And believe me, it worked wonders.

Q: Yes. I think perhaps it is worth recording that one of the best advice I got when I went to Canada was by somebody who had been in the Canadian desk a long time. And he said, "You know, you can kick them in the shins, you can argue with them, you can fight with them, that's all okay." He said, "One thing, never dent their halos."

ROBINSON: Oh, that's right. You don't want to dent their halos. That's right. They are holier than thou.

Q: The moral sense is very strong there, and it goes back a long ways. No, I am familiar with the way the media treated you, and the fact that by the time you left, you were fully respected across the board, not only by the media, but everybody else.

ROBINSON: I appreciate that, Bill.

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Q: I have been told this by a great many Canadians with whom I maintain contact.

ROBINSON: In dealing with them, Bill, just to finish on that point, I think the open, direct approach is the best with the Canadians. I never went in with a false position, which I was prepared to negotiate.

Q: No hidden balls.

ROBINSON: No hidden balls. I mean, I just told them what I thought. And we sat down, and we tried to work it out, and we were always able to do it. But I didn't have any cushions. I suppose I always have a fallback position. By playing that ace card, you know, they didn't have to agree with me. But at least they understood I was telling it like I saw it, and it really worked.

Q: I always thought that, you know, you might as well be straightforward with them. You know, in the end, you get down to what are the issues, anyhow. Because they are very able people. They would analyze problems very successfully. They were good negotiators.

ROBINSON: They were great in both world wars. My ship was with units of the Royal Canadian Navy, destroyer units, Tribal-class. They were damn good at Korea.

Q: Oh, their military, their professional military are first-class. They don't have any tools to do anything with, but—

ROBINSON: No. But you know, one time Trudeau, Shultz, and I were at lunch at External Affairs, and Trudeau looked at Shultz, and then he looked at me, and he says, "I don't think I've got enough money for Paul's ships." That was the first batch of patrol frigates, which, of course were authorized and now are building. And now there is a second batch, six each.

Q: They are building them?

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ROBINSON: They are building them.

Q: What they had was far more.

ROBINSON: They had twenty destroyers, sixteen of which were beyond, were superannuated. Not really a naval term, they were beyond—

Q: Beyond recovery.

ROBINSON: The other four of the new Tribal-class were mid-life. They are now fifteen, sixteen years old. Normally, the life is twenty, twenty-two years as a destroyer. So, of course, if they get rid of the sixteen and replace it by twelve, they are still not where they were ten years ago.

Q: Yes. In quality, they are improved.

ROBINSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Because the newer stuff will have more technology.

ROBINSON: I played a role. The British Founder-class would have been selected had they not pulled our appropriation rug from under their submarine program. But what they need are surface capacity. They need destroyer types, frigates. They didn't need subs, but the reason they wanted subs was because they wanted to patrol under the icecap to assure their sovereignty.

By the way, I don't think anybody can argue that those waters and lands in the north are Canadian. And, finally, we got off our high horse on the rule-of-the-seas business and said that you can't walk across the Gulf of Sidra, you know, in Libya, but you can walk across the Bering Straights in Canadian frozen territories.

Q: Do you think rationality has overcome the wall in our view?

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ROBINSON: Yes, I think so. That's right. That's the sole issue that I agreed with the Canadians on where we were—but, of course, I couldn't quite say it publicly. What I did was merely point out the two sides, and let it go. That came at the very end of my tenure in Canada. I pooh-poohed a lot of it.

Q: That was kicked off the by the polar sea—

ROBINSON: That's right.

Q: That went through the last summer you were there.

ROBINSON: It did.

Q: Yes.

ROBINSON: We knew about it, and the Canadians knew about it.

Q: Well, we had negotiated the whole thing—

ROBINSON: I know.

Q: Through External.

ROBINSON: Sure. But, you see, the press got hold of it. I played it down as if it wasn't anything. In fact, it really wasn't anything, except here again we get the perception, and the perception was something that we Americans don't respect our territory. And, of course, I did. And as it turned out, we agreed.

Q: Well, now we have negotiated a modus vivendi on icebreakers.

ROBINSON: Yes.

Q: That will take care of all these problems in the future, it seems to me.

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ROBINSON: It will.

Q: But it was a great uproar. A lot of people got very excited about it in Canada. And nobody ever heard of it down here, you know. We got one line in the Washington Post.

ROBINSON: Well, it really didn't get that.

*Q: Yes. Well, I think we have boxed the compass pretty well. You have appointments.
[Tape recorder turned off]*

We are most grateful to you for this opportunity for an interview. Thank you, Paul Robinson, for being so frank and straightforward, but that is your normal style.

ROBINSON: Thank you, Bill.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview