THE CONSTANT DIPLOMAT

ROBERT FORD IN MOSCOW

CHARLES A. RUUD

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Preface

Some background will explain the origins of this book. Ambassador Robert Ford had long intended to write a history of the Soviet Union from the perspective of a diplomat who had spent two decades in Moscow, mainly during the years of Leonid Brezhnev. Other projects occupied him following his retirement from the Department of External Affairs, but he reached an agreement with historian Robert Bothwell in the mid-1980s to publish a collection of his diplomatic dispatches to the department. When Bothwell turned instead to appraising Canadian foreign policy during the Trudeau years with Jack Granatstein (their work is listed in this book's bibliography), Ford wrote in March 1989 to the president of the University of Western Ontario, George Pedersen, to ask if anyone on the faculty might undertake the project. As a man primed to explore opportunities, Ford sensibly approached the head of a university he had attended in the city where he grew up as the son of the editor/publisher of the local newspaper. Among his continuing ties to London, Ontario, he had donated several paintings to its Regional Art Gallery.

When word of Ford's query reached me, a professor of history specializing in Russia, I examined Ford's dispatches and saw a book different from the one he had in mind. Although the observations and recommendations he had dispatched to Ottawa on a regular basis over many years served to further Canadian diplomacy and foreign policy, his overall assessment was that the Soviet Union – even when it appeared its most powerful – was in political, social, and moral decline. This prescient assessment bore on world history. Here was my theme.

A man of sharp and clear-headed judgments, Ford expressed this position from the beginning of his involvement with Russia, though experts elsewhere saw the USSR as a world power with growing capability and the will to spread Communism and its authority far beyond its borders. In Ford's view, on the contrary, only the Soviet military had managed to achieve effective organizational success, and much of that was expended on cowing the Soviet peoples and suppressing client states. He told Ottawa that the Soviet regime would never attain world dominance. He showed how, even at times of seeming advances, the Soviets made decisions that vitiated what they had achieved. Cumulatively, over his twenty years in Moscow, Ford accurately summed up the USSR as a prime historical example of a "failed state." He showed why Soviet leaders could not see, let alone solve, burgeoning domestic problems. On one occasion he cited approvingly the views of Peter Chaadaev, the Russian intellectual of the first half of the nineteenth century, who scandalized government and society by describing Russia as a physical giant but a cultural and spiritual dwarf who had failed to contribute a single new idea to humanity.

Although the Soviets appeared a fearsome force to many, especially during their military buildup of the 1970s, Ford held that the reasons for this buildup were never in support of an effort to impose Communism on the world. Powerful forces constrained them in the use of their armaments. He saw in the behaviour of the leadership poor judgment, rooted in Russian psychology and Marxist ideology, and the distortions and misunderstandings of thinking because of isolation from the rest of the world. The USSR, according to Ford, could not exist without lying and self-deception. The melding of Russian nationalism and Marxist ideology had created a lethal blend that would never win the support of its own people, much less other peoples.

By direct contact with Russians and a close study of Russian and Soviet history, Ford was able to explain Soviet actions that often seemed baffling to the West. To him, the nation behind the "Iron Curtain" was not a "riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma."[1] The fact that history has proved Ford correct is the main point of this book. Because his judgments directly influenced Canadian foreign policy toward the Soviet Union while he was ambassador, Canada, as a member of the Western Alliance, formulated and practised a wise policy toward the USSR even as it pursued two major

objectives: wide recognition of a distinct Canadian national identity and grain sales to the Russians.

But there is also the man behind the insightful dispatches, along with the woman behind the man. Ford first mastered the discipline of history as a student at the University of Western Ontario, and then as a graduate student at Cornell University, who admired the work of Carl Becker and wrote an MA thesis under his supervision. His own gift for words engaged him in poetry from his early years on through his professional ones. Because he learned languages easily, he spoke fluent French on leaving high school, studied German extensively at the same time and Russian at Cornell – after which, while on diplomatic assignment, he added Portugese, a good deal of Serbo-Croatian, and Spanish. He made close friendships with many Russians, including poets and writers. He travelled widely in the USSR and entered deeply into its culture. He was able to demystify the Russians because he knew them so well. His wide experience in Russia was largely because his wife, Maria Thereza Gomes Ford, believed that his affliction with a progressively debilitating illness made it essential that he go outside the embassy to take the pulse of others, rather than taking his own pulse. She was right, and Robert Ford lived long and productively, mainly because of her.

To pursue what became my historical-biographical subject, I read diplomatic dispatches made available to me in the Historical Section of the Department of External Affairs and the National Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada) plus, on the Soviet side, documents by staff members in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, both in Moscow. I talked to Russians in Moscow who knew Ford there. Andrei Voznesensky and his wife Zoya Boguslavskaya shared their reminiscences, as did Yevgeny Yevtushenko, V. Katanyan, G. Arbatov, and General Mil'shtein. I read the memoir in manuscript by Thereza Ford that is now in Library and Archives Canada.

I had two meetings with Ford at his home LaPoivrière in France, just outside Vichy, the first in May 1990 and the second in late May/early June 1994. At the first meeting, Ford was still in his wheelchair and came to the table for lunch. When I saw him again in 1994, a stroke had left him able to move only three fingers of his left hand, and he could not leave his bed without assistance. The backs of all books were torn off for him so that after reading a page

he could flick it onto the floor. His speech was somewhat slurred and a little slower than the first time I saw him, but I put questions to him and recorded several hours of interviews over four days. These interviews proved to be among the most valuable of my sources.

Ford spent a total of twenty years in Moscow – the longest, sixteen years, as ambassador (1964–80), from the last months of Khrushchev's rule to almost the end of the Brezhnev era. His perspective on the USSR was extraordinarily broad; he approached the subject of the Russians as both a generalist and a specialist. The difference between Ford's approach to assessing the USSR and that of specialized scholars was recognized by William Bundy, the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, who found Ford's assessments of developments in the Soviet Union a necessary antidote to the narrowly focused conventional academic studies. The breadth of Ford's political views was his most outstanding characteristic as an expert on Russia.

Ford himself long campaigned for a different level of political analysis in the Department of External Affairs. He wrote in 1967 to J.H. Taylor, under-secretary of state for external affairs, "I have been disturbed, as I am sure you have, at the extent to which management skills have been supplanting expertise in foreign affairs and original thinking as major qualifications for advancement in the Foreign Service."[2] If Ford's recommendations had been followed, there would be more poets and humanists – all widely read – among the diplomats in Ottawa.

In writing about Ford, I wanted to preserve his "voice," his style of analysis and commentary, and I therefore quote extensively from his dispatches, the essays that supplemented them, and my interviews with him. In reporting to External, Ford kept his formal and informal reports distinct, but they complement one another. The first deal with political issues – "official" documents – and the second were often impressionistic and dealt with Soviet life, the arts, and personal contacts. There are, in addition, sixteen accounts of the travels of Robert and Thereza Ford, mainly around the Soviet Union but also while travelling in and out of the country to and from Europe and the Far East. I have arranged them in chronological order and quoted segments from each of them to give the reader a sample from the writings of a keen-eyed travel writer who enhanced his ability to serve as an effective ambassador by going on the road in a country where the roads were often very bad. The travel accounts appear in three of the appendices at the close of my account.

In lightly editing Ford's dispatches to Ottawa, I have made some changes without drawing them to the reader's attention. Ford in his diplomatic dispatches often abbreviated words, left out articles, and used the word "not" twice to make certain that the reader knew it was there. I have eliminated these idiosyncracies. I have also used a standard form of transliteration from the Russian rather than Ford's older form.

A final note: the typescripts and tapes of my interviews with Robert Ford are on deposit at the Archive and Research Collections Centre, Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.

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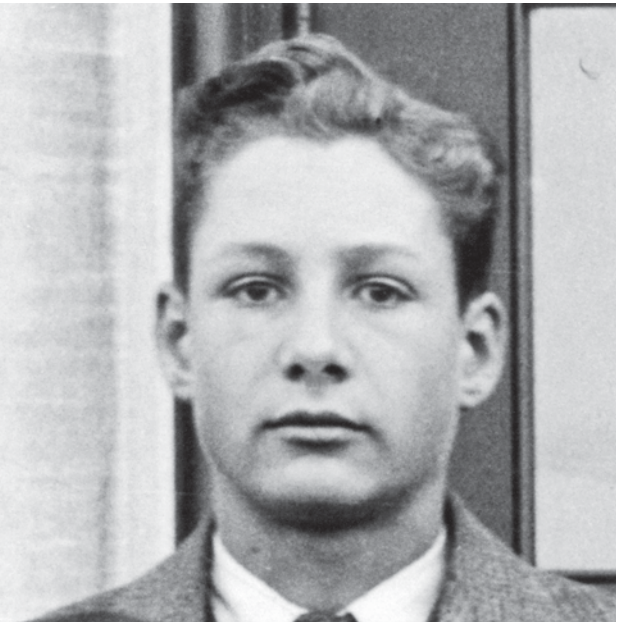
Robert and his sister May. He remembered their ages as ten and twelve but did not recall where the photo was taken (courtesy of South Secondary School, London, Ontario [SSS])

At Port Bruce circa 1929, Robert Ford and friends on holiday: (*left to right, back row*) Jim Finlayson, Robert Ford, Jim Taylor, Jack Cochrane; (*front row*) Sammy Jones, Ron O'Keel (SSS)



There are no identifying notes or dates on this photo of young Robert Ford (sss)

The Ford family home in London, Ontario, not far from South Secondary School, where Ford graduated (sss)

Ford and Thereza receive the "Freedom of the City" award from Mayor Gordon Stronach of London, Ontario, in 1965 (sss)

Ford, meeting with gallery director Nancy Poole in 1982, when he donated part of his private collection of Russian paintings to the London Regional Art Gallery (sss)

Visiting Ford in France in April 1992 were University of Western Ontario Chancellor and Mrs Claude Penza (sss)

The twelfth-century chateau near Vichy, France, where the Fords retired after leaving the USSR in 1980 (photo by Nora Egener, SSS)

The carriage house at La Poivrière where Ford spent his last years (SSS)

Robert Ford in 1994, confined to bed, at the time of his interviews with the author (sss)

Soviet Sites Visited by Robert Ford

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1

The Ambassador in Training

ROBERT FORD served in the Canadian diplomatic service, including an unusual sixteen-year period as ambassador to the Soviet Union that matched closely the years of power of Leonid Brezhnev (1964–82). Ford assumed the Moscow ambassadorship in 1964 and retired in 1980. Although increasingly disabled physically because of a rare disease, he became an outstanding diplomat in a difficult part of the world.

Ford was born in Ottawa on 8 January 1915 and died at the age of eighty-three on 12 April 1998 at his retirement home in St Sylvestre-Pragolin near Vichy, France, in a carriage house near the chateau where he had lived with his wife Thereza until her death in 1982. Ford moved into the carriage house because it could be remodelled to accommodate the muscular disease that had afflicted him while a university student. During the last years of his life, immobilized and suffering the effects of a stroke, he was cared for by a Portugese family, the Estevés. Ford understood that he would never be able to endure the rigours of the Canadian winter and that as time passed, he would be unable to travel to his native country. The salubrious climate of central France appealed to him. And he determined to spend much of his time reading poetry.

Ford was the third son of Arthur Ford, a newspaperman who became editor of the *London Free Press*. Ford hardly knew his mother, Lavinia Scott Ford, an American, who died at thirty-four of influenza in 1917, just after the birth of his sister, when he was only two. She was descended from General Winfield Scott, a hero of the revolutionary war against England. Her father was an army officer, Captain Winfield Scott. Ford recalled, "Suddenly he was converted to saving

the world, so he became a chaplain in the army and was posted to Minnesota. And after a few years of that, he became so devoted to spreading the gospel, that he left the army and became a circuit rider. And my mother was born in Minnesota." Lavinia Scott had a fine voice and attended the conservatory in Winnipeg, where she met Ford's father. Ford said later that he knew nothing about his American relatives. After his mother died, his father cut off all contact with her family, "for whatever reason I could never figure out." Ford would not say more, but it seems almost certain that he had some idea of the reasons for this family estrangement.

On his father's side, Ford was descended from English stock and was a sixth-generation Canadian. His great-great-grandfather was Joseph Ford, born in England in 1808, who emigrated to Peterborough in 1832, where for a time he operated a ferry that crossed the Otonabee River until it was replaced by a bridge. Joseph Ford was, according to the *Peterborough Review,* a devoted churchman and a member of the Conservative Party. He also steadfastly stood for "temperance" at a time "when it meant something and cost something to be a temperance advocate."[1] Ford recalled, "My father's family on my paternal grandfather's side came to Canada at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He was a lieutenant in Wellington's army and was given about 10,000 acres, which seemed like a huge amount of land, for a little country like England, and it was in Peterborough County, and when he reached it, it turned out to be mostly rock and forest. He ended up being one of the founders of Peterborough … His successors moved to western Ontario and settled in Goderich. My maternal grandmother's side were United Empire Loyalists and they came from Princeton, New Jersey, which was a monarchist stronghold. And they were simply forced to flee with no more than they could carry. They settled in Port Colborne, Ontario, and eventually they spread out around Ontario."[2]

Ford's father, Arthur R., was the son of a United Church minister, the Rev. James E. Ford. After earning a BA from the University of Toronto, he worked for the Stratford *Beacon Herald*, then with the *Ottawa Journal* and a financial paper in New York, followed by the *Winnipeg Telegram* and the *Winnipeg Tribune*. He then reported from the press gallery of Parliament for ten years, sending dispatches to the *Telegram*, the *Toronto News*, and the *Times* of London.[3]

Arthur R. Ford was working in Ottawa at the time of his wife's death and moved to London, Ontario, in the fall of 1920 with his

four children to raise. Robert and his sister May were much younger than their two elder brothers, Gordon and Kenneth, and his father put them into the care of governesses while he concentrated on editing the *Free Press*, the daily newspaper in London. Ford recalled later, "My contact with my father was rather remote." He explained, "We spent as much time as possible with my grandparents in Goderich … They were marvellous and filled that gap in affection." He became "extremely fond" of Goderich and reflected his feelings later in his poetry.[4] Although mainly absent, his father exhorted his children to read: "He had a very large library for that time and he insisted on our reading the classics. And when I refused to read *Nicholas Nickleby* and instead started to read some modern thing, he became very angry. That I remember very clearly."[5]

Arthur R. Ford, as editor of the local daily, quickly became one of London's prominent citizens and engaged in a wide variety of public, political, and philanthropic activities. He headed the Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation and the London branch of the United Nations – only one indication of his intense interest in international affairs. He himself went to the inauguration of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 and reported back to the *Free Press* on the launching of the international body. In the meantime, he rose to leadership positions in the Western Fair Association of London and was a key figure in the fair's recovery from the Second World War. He first appears in the records as an associate member of the fair's board in 1932 as an ex officio representative from the Canadian Club. He was not yet an invited member of a board that generally kept its own counsel and invited into its ranks influential, congenial, and well-off citizens from the community, but within several years Ford had become a full member.

Young Robert grew up in a household where newspaper work, public affairs, community service, Conservative politics, and reading were dominant interests. The family could not have been described as warm, but it gave him a window on a wider world of ideas and politics as realms worthy of limitless attention. Robert Ford's personal austerity, reserve, studiousness, and interest in public affairs developed in a motherless home where there was a busy and absent father who, when present, talked of public affairs and checked on the reading of his children. Robert was also encouraged to develop the artistic legacy of his mother: "I have an honorable mention from the Conservatory of Music for piano playing. I started writing poetry

at a young age. I was fascinated by literature, but it was history that really gripped me."[6]

Once through Tecumseh Primary School, Ford attended South Secondary School in London, Ontario: "I went to South … and studied French and Latin my first year as was required from everybody. Then, you had a choice of a third language, either Greek or German. Both my elder brothers had taken Greek and I refused, to the great irritation of my father. I said it was not absolutely necessary. I couldn't see the point of it. Latin, yes, it is the basis of our language, but German I thought would be useful and I was attracted to the challenge of learning it. And I had four years of German in high school and four years in university, and when I went to take them, the German exams were pie for me."

Ford entered the University of Western Ontario, and at the age of nineteen he learned that he had contracted a rare and incurable muscular disease: "My second year at university I was in the COTC [Canadian Officers' Training Corps], and I realized suddenly that I was having difficulty getting into a line position and lifting a rifle. The doctors gave me a year to live … So I was taken out of university and went to live on the farm of one of my aunts whose husband had been in the war and was badly shell-shocked and could really do nothing more than farm, on the old family farm near Goderich. So I spent a year there, and as soon as I reached the farm the progression of the illness stopped." He later described his illness in this way: "I had an attack of an extremely rare form of muscular atrophy. The name in French is something like *amyotrophie progressive musculaire de l'épine* (type Cugurman Wassermann). All the specialists were absolutely fascinated by me because I was still alive after I had been given a year to live. I was supposed to have died at twenty and nothing happened. It had progressed for a while and then stopped."[7] In fact, the progress of the disease was very slow, and Ford lived with it for the rest of his life. His friend the publisher William Heine described the illness in this way: "The condition unexpectedly stabilized and turned into a form of muscular spinal atrophy, which is not fatal but affects nearly all the muscles."[8]

The disease became a drag on Ford's physical being, but it also stimulated his mental and psychological powers. He said later that his postings in Colombia, Yugoslavia, and Egypt (where he served during his forties) "were challenging and often dangerous": "I think that the challenge gave me impetus to write. That's why I wrote the

poem called 'The Wound and the Bow' which is after the thesis of Philoctetes. That is, you have to be wounded to release the internal energy that you have. If you live comfortably, without any challenge, without any need to get out and fight, the tendency is just to sit there and reflect. And to reflect on what?"[9] Unquestionably, Ford saw his illness as a spur to act.

After a year on the farm, Ford returned to his classes and in 1938 earned an honours degree in English and history. His academic performance was stellar. He maintained first-class standing in his final year at Western in two English and four history courses.[10] Ford recalled that he received a fine classical education at Western: "I got my MA at Cornell very quickly, in one year, in fact I was the only one in about ten years who got an MA in one year. And that was because, quite frankly, I had such a good preparation at Western." Planning to focus on the history of France, he had proceeded to Cornell to work under Carl Becker. Ford considered Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* to be "one of the classics" and Becker himself "one of the most eloquent of American historians." He wrote an MA dissertation under Becker's supervision, "Anti-Militarism in France from Sedan to the Dreyfus Case: A Study in the Psychology of an Era," and received his MA degree in history in 1940. Ford was already intrigued by a major Becker thesis that ascribed to unanalyzed "climates of opinion" of the past enormous influence on current human affairs. Later, he applied this idea effectively to his assessments of Soviet political developments.

Before commencing his MA work at Cornell, Ford had spent four months as a reporter for the Montreal *Gazette*, a position for which he qualified because of his fluent French. He had learned the language at his father's urging and spent two summers at the University of Western Ontario's French-language immersion school at Trois-Pistoles, Quebec. As a reporter, Ford learned another lesson that held him in good stead as a diplomat: "I quickly understood that the basic thing was to get the core of the story in the first paragraph and then develop it later on. And this I applied to the writing of [diplomatic] telegrams. People simply did not have time to read a ten-page telegram to find out what the conclusions were."[11]

At Cornell, while working on his MA, Ford met an instructor, Philip Mosely, an expert on the Soviet Union, who told him that he was "wasting his time" with French history and that Russian studies held great promise for a future career. Ford shifted direction, studied

Russian for a year at Cornell, "got hooked," as he put it, and his interests turned to Russia, the Soviet Union, and diplomatic work. He abandoned his doctoral studies, having qualified for the Department of External Affairs by doing well on the qualifying examinations.[12] His father had suggested the career move. He was offered an appointment in 1940. "They said they needed me and that I was the only person outside of [George] Ignatieff,[13] who could not be sent to Russia, of course, who knew Russian. And as far as I could make out, I was the only English Canadian who knew French that I could think of."[14] External was just beginning to recruit future diplomats who knew French and were broadly educated.

Ford found it amusing that this enticement to enter External did not lead him directly to Moscow at all; he was sent to Windsor, Ontario, to head the passport office and issue passports to Canadians who were crossing the border to work in Detroit. But the posting had other advantages. An aunt living in Windsor took him across the river to Detroit. "My first exposure to great music was the Detroit Symphony at that time. I recall one concert with Rubinstein really thrilled me. She took me backstage to introduce me to Rubinstein and she said I spoke Russian. And he said, 'Well, that is not my language, it is Polish. But unfortunately I left Poland because the Russians were there and naturally I had to learn some Russian, and so my Russian was very primitive.' But he was quite amused by this and said to keep it up, but don't forget Poland as well."[15]

Windsor, Ford said, was his only preparation for his diplomatic career. External never provided any preparation at all, not even much later when Ford was sent to Russia. And when in the early 1960s he went to Egypt and was also credited to Sudan, he found he had to prepare himself for the post. "I was going to be accredited to the Sudan – the first Canadian ambassador. Every time an ambassador departed, he is given a country book, which gives the basic facts and our interest in the country and what the ambassador's relationship should be. When I went to Egypt, I said, 'I've got the Egypt book but I haven't received any country book about the Sudan.' The answer came back: 'You are the only Canadian who ever mentioned the Sudan, so you write your own country book.'" He also learned, when External appointed him ambassador to Moscow in 1964, that he had a great deal of leeway in fulfilling the duties: "It was much the same thing. They said, 'Forget about a country book. You know

what our aims are. You will get instructions from time to time. But also tell us what you think we should be doing.'"[16]

His posting after Windsor was an extended four-year stint in Brazil (1940–44), where he learned fluent Portugese and "acceptable" Spanish. He remarked that he had already studied Russian, had eight years of German, "and of course I was sent to Brazil, which is the kind of bureaucratic logic that takes place everywhere in the world." While deep in the Brazilian interior, Ford learned that he had been appointed to the wartime embassy in Kuibishev, the temporary capital of the USSR, but his ambassador refused him permission to accept the appointment. Brazil, meanwhile, likely eased the way for the reserved Ford to propose marriage later to a Brazilian: "I was overwhelmed by its exuberance and the gaiety of Rio, and in fact the whole country." He especially admired the "open-heartedness" of the Brazilians, "who are very different from the Spanish Americans – who are very introverted in many ways. The latter are a murderous kind of people … but the Brazilians were very different. I was constantly in love. Needless to say, at a young age. And that helped me to learn the language."[17]

Finally, after completing his assignment in Brazil, Ford thought that he was on his way to Russia: "After coming from Brazil and getting ready to go to Moscow, I thought it was to be my next posting in 1945. I just had one day with my elder brother, who had just been demobilized. He was a lieutenant commander in the navy and second officer on the destroyer *Iroquois*. He said to me, 'You think that you will be the first one to Russia, but I was there several times before you.' I said, 'Oh, yes, you must have been a member of the convoy group that escorted supply ships to Murmansk.' 'Yes,' he said, 'that's true, and I will never go back to Russia. We had to contend with the sea and with the German submarines coming out of the Norwegian fjords. We found the Russians, and because we had many wounded we asked if they were able to take care of them. And they said that they would. But they would not let us land at Murmansk, which is a considerable port, because, they said, it was forbidden to foreigners. And so they put us ashore at a little place called Bulyano, where the Canadians, some of them quite badly wounded, were treated practically like German spies. They were given a minimum of treatment and no welcome whatsoever. And I will never go back to that place again.'"[18]

Ford was delayed in getting to the restored Soviet capital because of cipher clerk Igor Gouzenko defected from the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa with documents revealing the existence of a Soviet spy ring in Canada to steal atomic secrets. External, fearing retaliation against Canadian diplomatic personnel, instead sent Ford to London in January 1946 to attend the first General Assembly of the United Nations, and he "stayed on in the Canadian High Commission while waiting to see whether relations with the Soviet Union would be severed."[19] In London, Ford found his old friend and political mentor Paul Martin (senior) from Windsor, who immediately put him to work. "He said that I should be assigned to his committee, which is not what I would have preferred. It was the social affairs and health affairs committee. However, as a good trooper, I did my best. Paul Martin spent half his time on the telephone … mending his political fences back in Canada. I remember him saying to me one day, 'I have to give a speech in a cinema in Glasgow next Sunday. Write me a speech.' I said, 'A speech in a cinema? On a Sunday?' He said, 'Yes, the cinema houses are closed on Sundays, but they have educational programs there.' I said 'What should I write about?' 'Anything.'"[20]

The enforced delay in Ford's posting had one great compensation: "At the opening reception in the House of Lords given by Clement Attlee to the delegates to the General Assembly, I overheard an attractive member of the Brazilian delegation making amusing remarks about the Canadians. I could not resist the temptation of turning and saying in Portuguese that the latter was not a secret language. This led inevitably to marriage."[21] They were married within months in New York and went together to Moscow in December 1946. Maria Thereza Gomes Ford resigned from the Brazilian diplomatic service and became a Canadian citizen. Ford and his wife were to spend all but a few years of their married life in Moscow. As their Moscow friend Zoya Boguslavskaya, the writer, later pointed out, Russia was the only "country they had in common."[22]

His first assignment to Moscow began in December 1946 as second secretary but ended about a year later in 1947 because relations remained poor. Ford recalled that "the councillor had been withdrawn. I had been promoted to first secretary … there were only two of us left: myself and the military attaché. And suddenly I became, at a very junior age, chargé d'affaires. I was really too junior to occupy the post. So after a year I was brought back to London."[23] Ford was

back in Moscow from 1951 to 1954 as chargé d'affaires. Then followed his ambassadorships to Colombia, 1957–58; Yugoslavia, 1959–61 (where he learned "passable" Serbo-Croatian); Egypt, 1961–63; and Moscow, 1964–80. After leaving Russia, he was special adviser on East-West relations to the Government of Canada, 1980–85, and was a member of the Independent Commission on Security and Disarmament, established by Olof Palme, the prime minister of Sweden. The work on the Palme Commission was Ford's last official contact with Soviet representatives.

Illness was a constant in Ford's career; he could never escape from it. In July 1962, when Ford was ambassador to Cairo, Norman Robertson[24] of the Department of External Affairs proposed his return to Ottawa as an assistant under-secretary, but Ford was unwilling: "I explained to him at that time how very difficult it would be for me because of the condition of my legs." Ford's illness and his growing expertise were to keep him in Moscow when the normal ambassadorial rotation would have moved him elsewhere. After he had been in Moscow for a couple of years, there were again attempts by Ford's supervisors at External to find another posting for him, one being a return to Ottawa in "an area of responsibility which would draw on your knowledge, experience, and perspective." Ford fended off such efforts, typically responding, as in 1965, that it would be "physically too hard for me and I could not serve the Department as fully and usefully as in Moscow." Sometime, he reflected, he might want to consider leaving Moscow just to get out of a frustrating milieu. He considered the Rome post in 1968, but "Marcel Cadieux and I decided against Rome," though he would have liked London if that post opened up, as seemed possible.[25] He wrote External in 1970 that he could not see himself "in a non-political or semi-political post or one so far removed from the mainstream that my long experience in European affairs could not be fully exploited." He said, "My ambition has always been to go to Paris as the first English-Canadian ambassador to France." But Ford was in no hurry to move: "I should stress that I am in no way desperate, although at times dealing with the Byzantine mentality of these people drives one halfway up the wall." He had already decided that his physical disability ruled out a return to Canada. As he regretfully wrote, "Ottawa has always attracted me, but I simply cannot cope unaided with the difficulties of the Ottawa winters." At the same time, he kept in mind that Moscow did not require a

demanding social schedule: "I know my limitations and must conform to them."

The subject of a move came up again in early 1971. Ford had by then concluded, perhaps because of his advancing illness, that "even in the improbable event that I was chosen for London, I could make a less useful contribution to the Department there than in Moscow. I can see that there is a very heavy ceremonial and social component in the London job which would weigh heavily on me."[26] External informed him in February that there was "no disposition whatever to move you before you want to go" or "to send you anywhere you feel would be unsuitable."[27] He now felt that Paris would be a burden, "should it ever become available." He preferred to stay in Moscow, "and if ever a change becomes imperative," he told External, "I could always let you know and work out some solution which might not necessarily mean the most important posts."[28]

He could never set aside his physical disability and the restrictions that it imposed. In Moscow, Ford's illness again became active. He recalled, "It started again, which was curious. I used a cane, and it was getting a little worse because of age as well."[29] In 1973 he wrote to his friend the playwright Lillian Hellman that there had been "several rumors … about a transfer for me but I continue to be here and am happy enough." The Fords had just "acquired an apartment in Paris to get out of here from time to time."[30] Ford had received a letter from External pointing out that he had been in Moscow ten years and should consider a return to Ottawa: "The next place where you will be needed most is right here in the Under-Secretarial row with an area of responsibility which would draw on your knowledge, experience and perspective." A.E. Ritchie, an under-secretary, said the new Pearson Building for the Department (opening in 1973) would erase physical problems for Ford, who replied, "I went through an agonizing time in 1965 when Marcel wished me to come back to the Under-Secretary row. We both came to the conclusion that it would "be physically too hard and frustrating for me." He pointed out that both the Swedish ambassador Gunnar Jarring and the Italian ambassador Frederico Sensi had also been in Moscow since 1964. He concluded, "I am flattered that, in spite of my handicap, you invited me to join with you, but believe me I know it would not work.[31] He turned down a UNESCO posting in 1976 and wrote to External, "The timing would be wrong for me … Some six months ago I started a new treatment developed by Soviet medical specialists