

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

**SEYMOUR CHALFIN**

*Interviewed by: Anthony Kern  
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Chalfin]

*Q: We are here at Seymour and Fran Chalfin's home, a very beautiful home here in St. Augustine, Florida. For those of you who are up north, it's a bright beautiful sunny day here in Florida. That will make everyone envious. Sey, why don't you start by just giving us a short synopsis of when you entered the labor attaché function and your posts to the extent that you can recall the years that you were there.*

CHALFIN: I went into the Foreign Service in the summer of 1957 on a transfer from the Labor Department in a procedure referred to then as lateral entry. In the Labor Department, I worked for the Division of Foreign Labor Conditions (DLS) for a couple of years and then afterwards in the Office of International Labor Affairs. [Ed: The State Department's Biographic Register, 1971, notes that Mr. Chalfin was born in April 1919 in New York State and served in the Army overseas in WWII. After the war he received a Bachelor of Science degree from George Washington University in 1949 and a Master's degree from the University of Illinois in 1950, He may have started with the Department of Labor shortly thereafter.]

*Q: Can you give us a little more information about what you were doing in the Labor Department? Then, when you did come into the Foreign Service, did you receive any kind of labor training before you were assigned overseas?*

CHALFIN: My first job in the Labor Department was in the DFLC, the Division of Foreign Labor Conditions, and I specialized in France. This was appropriate because I did my master's thesis on the French labor movement. I prepared all sorts of statistical reports, and provided information on French labor whenever it was asked. I remained in DFLC, the Division of Foreign Labor Conditions, for about three years. Then, I was transferred to the Office of International Labor Affairs (OILA). I was one of two people who maintained a liaison with AID. This was primarily handling technical assistance groups that came to the United States. It wasn't a very demanding job but it was very helpful to me in getting into the Labor Attaché Corps because I got to know a number of the people in OILA, particularly Jim Taylor.

*Q: Oh yes, he was an old buddy of mine. A dear old gentleman. Everybody loved Jim.*

CHALFIN: He was a very decent man. I got to know Jim very, very well, and he was largely responsible for my entering the Foreign Service.

*Q: I always looked upon Jim as being kind of a godfather of the labor attaché function.*

CHALFIN: He was very devoted.

*Q: Yes, absolutely devoted to it. He was a fine old gentleman. I had great respect for him. At one point and I don't know when this happened, the State Department had a year-long labor training program. They used to send folks up to Cornell, I believe, for several months of training. That was obviously after you entered the Foreign Service.*

CHALFIN: I entered the Foreign Service about the same time as Paul Bergman. I don't know if you ever met him.

*Q: I never met him.*

CHALFIN: ...and Joe McCalcanan, who went to Manila. None of us got the special training. I think the assumption was that if you came from the Department of Labor, you knew labor.

Yes, I was shocked when I heard of his death. I had seen him not too long before. You know the Department of Labor organizes semi-annual affairs both for people still employed in the Labor Department and retirees.

*Q: I always admired that. You know, you left the department and you weren't cast away. They still considered you part of it. I always tremendously admire that kind of spirit and approach. Unfortunately, we don't have that in the State Department. When you walk out the gate, you are forgotten. That's great. I enjoy that.*

CHALFIN: They met at Fort McNair. I think they invited other labor attachés who had graduated from the Department of Labor but I seemed to be the only one who turned up. I met Jim there the last time I attended.

*Q: Did you undergo any kind of special training when you came into the State Department for the labor attaché activities.*

CHALFIN: No. I went through the regular two-week orientation at State and that was it.

At State I received a five-year reserve commission, and I was told that within those five years I could choose to enter the Foreign Service after an exam. I made that decision, finally, at the end of my fourth year.

Upon entering the Foreign Service, or actually before, I was told that there were maybe four or five posts I could choose among. I don't remember all of them but one of them was Colombo in Sri Lanka. The other was Accra in Ghana. I think, without hesitation, I

opted for Accra.

My thinking was that Ghana was the first black African country to get its independence. [Ed: Ghana authorities declared independence on March 6, 1957, and Ghana became a member of the British Commonwealth.] I thought that was moving into a completely new area. The prospect was exciting. Africa, to me at least, seemed very exotic. So, it was Accra. I was in Accra from [August] 1957 to [late] 1959. I was then transferred to Nairobi, Kenya.

Kenya was a regional assignment. I covered Kampala, Uganda, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

I arrived in Kenya in [February] 1960, so it was 1960 to 1964. I was there for two two-year tours.

*Q: You liked it that much?*

CHALFIN: Yes. Nairobi is a wonderful place. At least it was. It was a delightful place. I think it is one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

*Q: I have talked to some of the folks who have come back from Nairobi, I would say within the past two years, and the situation has really deteriorated.*

CHALFIN: So I hear.

Accra was very, very interesting but physically difficult. It was very hot and humid most of the year. When I was told I would be transferred to Nairobi, my first wife actually started crying. I assured her that this was going to be a different post, I was told, and it was. It was completely different. From Nairobi, I went back to Washington for my only Washington tour. I was there from [September] 1964 to [late] 1967, and I was assigned as a country desk officer. I was responsible for what was then Central Africa. It was Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland.

*Q: You were right there at the end of the colonial era in Africa. We'll have to talk about that in a little more detail.*

CHALFIN: I was on the desk when Southern Rhodesia declared its unilateral independence [Ed: November 11, 1965]. That was a pretty difficult time actually. I spent about a year and a half on that desk and then the final year and a half on the Ghana desk. During the time I was on the Ghana desk, Nkrumah was overthrown by a military coup. We had discontinued the labor attaché slot at that time because the movement for a long time was completely dominated by the governing party, the Convention Peoples Party.

When Nkrumah was overthrown, Phil Delaney asked me whether I would...

*Q: Phil Delaney was the head of the labor function in the State Department?*

CHALFIN: Yes, that's right. He called me up one afternoon and asked me whether I would like to go to Accra for about six weeks or two months and make a determination as to whether it would be worthwhile to restore the labor post. I accepted without hesitation. I had been gone from Accra for about seven years, and I knew a lot had changed. I had become quite close to a number of the labor figures, and I wanted to see what had happened to them. Actually, this assignment occurred before I was transferred to the Ghana desk. Once I went to Ghana, I think somebody replaced me on the desk. When I returned, I was assigned to the Ghana desk. I was there in Washington for a total of about three years. Then I began to get the gravy. I was assigned to Paris. I was there for about three years. Then, I was transferred to Ottawa, Canada, and from Ottawa, finally, to Stockholm, Sweden.

*Q: That sounds intriguing. What fascinates me, Sey, is that you were in effect one of the pioneers. You were among the first to join or form what we now have as the Labor Attaché Corps. You were in at the beginning of the Cold War, its most ferocious periods, I think, and also you were there when independence was being declared and formed in Africa. You are a kind of historic figure, not in age but in experience.*

CHALFIN: In Ghana, for example, I arrived there about six months after independence.

*Q: Who were the trade union leaders at that time? What role did they have?*

CHALFIN: The head of the Ghana TUC (Trade Union Congress) was a young man, very bright with a great deal of charm and highly articulate, called John Kofi Tettegah. During the entire period I was there, there was a struggle going on. This was central to the labor picture between the central leadership headed by Tettegah who wanted to bring the Ghana TUC under the complete domination of the Convention Peoples Party, the governing party. There were perhaps a half a dozen other labor leaders who wanted to maintain an independent labor movement. I can't remember all of the men on the other side but one of them was Daniel Foevie who headed the Mine Workers Union, one of the most important unions in Ghana. Then there was another man in Kumasi, which was in central Ghana, the second largest city. He headed a very large union called the Retail Workers Union. This battle was never fully resolved by the time I left but it seemed quite clear at the time that the Convention Peoples Party would exercise a great deal of power, would have its way, and that the Ghana TUC would become associated with the party. It isn't what happened.

*Q: Was the TUC really trying to maintain its independence from the party and what role did it play in the movement towards independence?*

CHALFIN: Not only in Ghana but in a number of these countries, including Kenya, I discovered that the labor movement in all of these countries was a nucleus of the nationalist movement because it was one of the few organized groups within African society in those countries. In the Anglophone countries, the former British colonies, the British had actually encouraged the formation of trade unions. Thus, the TUC played a

very active role in educating African trade union leaders.

*Q: Sey, did the American ambassador to Ghana appreciate or understand the importance of the trade union movement? Did he understand that it was sort of the nucleus for this political independence?*

CHALFIN: I don't think so. Speaking very candidly, the first ambassador we had in Ghana was not a good choice. His background, to some degree, was in administration. He was a Southerner [North Carolina] and a career Foreign Service officer. While he tried very hard, he didn't really feel comfortable within an African country.

His name was Wilson Flake. He had been head of administration at the embassy in Rome under Clare Booth Luce who was married to the publisher of Time magazine.

I think I heard afterward that it was through her influence that he got this assignment. It was his first ambassadorial assignment, and I think it was the only one. I believe he retired shortly afterward.

He didn't interfere with me very much and, actually, most of the time I dealt with the deputy chief of mission who did appreciate the role of labor and was very helpful. He was a man called Peter Rutter. [Ed: Rutter preceded Ambassador Flake to post and acted as Chargé for three months.] My functioning as a labor attaché was neither helped nor hindered by the ambassador. I had a free hand.

*Q: I had a situation somewhat similar to that in Barbados. The ambassador was a very conservative Republican from Nebraska who really had neither appreciation for nor interest in labor. As a matter of fact, he thought they were communists, and that's how he addressed it when he met with me in the office there at the embassy. I finally got around to the point of saying, "Listen, labor is the most anti-Communist organization you'll find anywhere in the world." Once he understood that, he was very pro-labor. You could go out to Labor Day celebrations and visit with the trade unions but I really had to make that anti-Communist pitch to get him on aboard so that he could appreciate some of the difficulties you had.*

CHALFIN: The ambassador was invited, for example, to the TUC (Trades Union Congress) convention, which occurred just once in the two years that I was there.

*Q: What was the political situation in Ghana when you were there?*

CHALFIN: There was a very small British and European colony in Ghana. It was called the Gold Coast originally.

I think there were maybe a total of 3,000 Europeans, and Americans were regarded as Europeans by the Africans. When the independence movement started in Africa, the British decided to use Ghana as an experiment. There was no pressure from the Europeans to maintain control. Ghana was a very prosperous small country. Cocoa was

their main crop. Britain declared in 1950 that the Gold Coast was going to gradually be prepared for independence. This is what happened.

Nkrumah was the chief minister under the colonial government before he actually became prime minister. They entered independence in a very, very prosperous state. The cocoa prices had been high for a number of years, and the British had encouraged them to sock away a lot of the revenue, which they were getting from cocoa. They entered independence with about \$100-million dollars. It was quite a bit of money in those days. So the country was in a good, stable, prosperous state when I got there. It started rapidly going downhill primarily because Nkrumah had all sorts of fantasies about his role as an African leader. Partly due to inexperience, they got a lot of very bad advice from European consultants about establishing new industries, which didn't have much of a base, really. To make a long story short, within about ten years, he had squandered almost all of that money.

*Q: Near the end of your tour there, what was the state of the trade union movement?*

CHALFIN: There was still a struggle going on to determine whether the Ghana TUC would preserve its independence or whether it would become an arm of the governing Convention Peoples Party. It was clear that the latter would occur. There was just too much power on the political side.

*Q: They couldn't stand up under that.*

CHALFIN: Tettegah was an instrument of the Convention Peoples Party. The central leadership of the Trade Union Congress favored close ties with the Convention Peoples Party. The opposition came from perhaps half a dozen general secretaries of the constituent unions but they couldn't do it.

*Q: It seems to be typical of what happened throughout much of independent Africa shortly after the colonial period. Let's go over to Nairobi now. That was your next assignment.*

CHALFIN: I arrived there during the Mau Mau Rebellion and Jomo Kenyatta. I arrived there in the fall of 1960, and there had been a state of emergency in Kenya for a number of years prior to that. [Ed: Wikipedia notes: The Mau Mau Rebellion was effectively crushed by the end of 1956]

*Q: I can understand why your wife was crying.*

CHALFIN: In any case, I think it was either shortly after or shortly before I arrived, the state of emergency was ended. The Lancaster House Conference [Ed: January 1960] had taken place in England shortly before I got to Accra, which stated that the aim for Kenya would be independence. Kenyatta, at that time, was in prison in the Northern Frontier District. He had been a prisoner for quite some time. The Nationalist Movement was headed by a trade unionist, Tom Mboya. He was an extraordinary figure. He was the head

of the Kenya Federation of Labor. He was extremely bright. He had attended—what was the name of the college in Britain that provided one year courses for trade union leaders?—anyway, he was a graduate of that college. He was exceptionally bright and an excellent public speaker, politically savvy. He just had everything. He was an attractive man. He headed the Kenya Federation of Labor. In effect, during the emergency, the Kenya Federation was the only nationalist organization in the country. The National Movement was focused in the Kenya Federation of Labor. He also had very close ties to the AFL-CIO. He was a real favorite of the AFL-CIO. He was very pro-American.

*Q: Did he deal with Pat O’Farrill at that time?*

CHALFIN: It was later. Towards the end of my tour it was formed. By that time Mboya had moved into the political sphere. He had left the Kenya Federation of Labor. Actually, once Kenyatta was freed, Mboya just stepped aside as a political leader but he remained as general secretary of the Kenya Federation of Labor. It was sensible on his part. Kenyatta was unbeatable as a political leader. He had the age. Actually, he began the Nationalist Movement in Kenya, the movement for independence. There was no question of competition there. Independence was declared in [December 12] 1963, and I’d been there about three years by that time. [Ed: Prior to independence the U.S. diplomatic mission in Nairobi was a Consulate General nominally under the Embassy in London. The Bureau of African Affairs was established in 1958.]

The U.S. Mission to the independence ceremonies included Walter Reuther. Naturally, I was his escort officer. He came there with his wife, Mary, and I spent a lot of time with them.

*Q: He was an outstanding figure in American labor, wasn’t he?*

CHALFIN: He was really outstanding. By that time, the labor picture had changed, and Mboya was, I think, Minister of Finance. He had one of the top posts. The Kenya Federation of Labor was headed by one of his protégées. I forget his name but he was a rather peculiar type, very talkative. You know subsequently that Mboya was assassinated in 1966.

The belief was that he was assassinated by Kikuyus. The Kikuyus were the largest tribe in Kenya, and they were the core. In fact, they dominated the movement for independence. Kenyatta was a Kikuyu. Mboya was a member of the Luo tribe, which was the second largest tribe. The Luo tribe was located on the shores of Lake Victoria in northern Kenya. Unlike Ghana where tribalism was present but it wasn’t all that important, Kenya was rife with tribalism. I suspect Mboya was regarded as possibly a rival to Kenyatta but more than that, if Mboya came into power, maybe the Kikuyu would be replaced by the Luo as the dominant tribe. I think that’s why he was assassinated.

*Q: Tribal rivalry continues today. It’s so very prevalent.*

CHALFIN: Yes, it is. Ironically, the man who actually succeeded Kenyatta was a member of a minority tribe, arap Moi who is still in power. : I knew him quite well.

*Q: Really! In what capacity did you know arap-Moi?*

CHALFIN: It was hard to really distinguish between labor and politics. I did some political reporting there, too. Arap-Moi was a prominent member of the opposition party, the United Party, the UP. That subsequently was, I think, either absorbed or just broken up by the Kenya African National Union, which was Kenyatta's party, and the Kenya African Peoples Union, which was the opposition. Arap-Moi was in KOPU but he subsequently became active in KANU and then took over premier.

*Q: That was almost 35 years later.*

CHALFIN: Things have gone downhill ever since. Arap-Moi did not attract a great deal of respect. He struck me as a clown, basically, but apparently he was not.

*Q: As Labor officer was your reception in the embassy in Nairobi by the other embassy officers and the ambassadors any different from that which you experienced in Accra?*

CHALFIN: It was much different. We didn't have an embassy when I arrived there. It was a consulate general. It became an embassy after independence. The consul general was a man called [Charles] Dudley Withers who was... I think he was the first, but Peter Rutter was really the first but Withers was the second experienced Foreign Service Officer that I associated with. Both were excellent men with a lot of experience. Dudley had been doing reporting in just about every sphere in Kenya, and he fully appreciated the importance of labor. It was hard to ignore it. Mboya was one of his friends. He was quite happy to see me, and he gave me every support I needed. [Ed: Withers was assigned as Consul General from August 1957 to December 1960.]

*Q: That's nice when you are in an environment like that. You knew a lot of the prominent trade unionists in Kenya and the political leaders as well, Kenyatta, Mboya, and arap-Moi. That's quite a historical perspective you have.*

CHALFIN: Yes. As I said before, I was surprised when arap-Moi became prime minister because he didn't seem to have much substance when I was there. He was a rabble rouser.

*Q: You mentioned Mboya having relationships with the AFL-CIO. Do you recall who in the AFL-CIO had the closest contact? Was Ernie Lee then the head of their international department?*

CHALFIN: I think it was Ernie Lee. No, it was still Jay Lovestone. He was still in the driver's seat.

*Q: Did you know Herb Weiner?*

CHALFIN: Yes, I did.

*Q: I've talked to Herb over the years and, apparently, he knew Lovestone very well. I've sort of urged him to get an oral history of Lovestone but I think Lovestone was very reluctant to do anything like that. That's unfortunate.*

CHALFIN: I never met Lovestone until I was assigned to Ottawa. Then, an appointment was made for me to see Lovestone. I spent about an hour with him. I couldn't really make head or tail of him.

*Q: Really? In what way?*

CHALFIN: He characterized the Canadian TUC as common as \_\_\_\_\_, which was about as far from the truth as you could get. But he didn't like the Canadian team, you see, because it sometimes took different positions in the international labor sphere from the AFL-CIO, and they were often critical. So, the Canadian movement was not one of his favorites.

*Q: As I recall it, Lovestone was an American communist as one point. And, he saw the light and, like any born-again Christian or trade unionist or whatever, he was a fierce anti-Communist from that point on.*

CHALFIN: He became more Catholic than the pope. So, when this became clear to me—I had heard about him, I had heard about his views—when he made this statement to me, I sort of didn't pay much attention after that. Everything was clouded by his biases.

*Q: Today we talk about the end of the Soviet Empire, and I don't think people really appreciate fully the kind of critical role that the labor attachés played in the Cold War. It's a piece of history that I hope that we pick up in our oral history of the labor attaché program.*

CHALFIN: It occurs to me now since we are talking about that, that I first made the acquaintance of Irving Brown in Ghana. I got to know him very well, far better than anyone else I knew in the AFL-CIO because, for some reason, he made Africa his own. He made frequent visits.

He went to both to Ghana and to Kenya. I remember there was one very funny episode. The Ghanaians organized the Pan-African Labor Congress, the very first one in Accra. Irving came there with Maida Springer. Have you heard of Maida Springer? She was, I think, of Panamanian origin but an American citizen, a very attractive woman. She came from Chicago, I think, and I believe her husband was active in the Transport Workers Union, but I'm not sure. Anyway, when I met her, she was with the AFL-CIO's international office, and more or less, not officially, regarded as their specialist on African affairs. She was a woman in her mid- to late-forties. So, Irving came with her, and they attended this congress. [Ed: For further on Ms. Springer see Yevette Richards'

book, Maida Springer: Pan Africanist and International Labor Leader, published in 2000.]

It was the Ghana TUC's (Trades Union Congress) first attempt to organize a big event, and the organization was not too good. There were a number of representatives from Francophone Africa, and they didn't speak English.

*Q: But Irving spoke French.*

CHALFIN: Yes, and he volunteered to act as interpreter. It was simultaneous interpretation. A number of those Francophone Africans were bitterly anti-American. Some of them were communists. He had to interpret a number of these statements.

*Q: Oh, that must have pained him.*

CHALFIN: Yes, he was wincing, he was smiling, and it was really funny.

*Q: Right. Irving was active in North Africa, and I knew him later in his life when he took over the international affairs office. There are stories about him and the king of Morocco. They were personal friends.*

CHALFIN: There's kind of a humorous story. Irving had this jet black hair. When some of the folks met him later on in life, there was just a little gray around the temples. They would ask, "Does he dye his hair?" One of the folks said, "Yeah, he dyes the fringes gray." He was extraordinary.

When I returned, after Nkrumah's ouster, the labor movement in Ghana in 1966 was in shambles. One of my functions was to encourage the reestablishment of the labor movement. The nucleus was there. It was headed by a very bright, clever young man whose name I can't remember, and they needed money. I kept sending messages hoping for AFL-CIO donations. The newly formed Ghana TUC wanted to have an organizational convention. They needed money. I kept firing messages and there was no reply. Finally, I got a message, saying, "Irving Brown is going to Lagos."

*Q: Oh, a great coup.*

CHALFIN: Yes, he was afraid to come to Ghana because, during Nkrumah's period, he was not welcome. He wasn't entirely sure what the atmosphere was in Ghana at this particular point.

*Q: He had a reason to be concerned.*

CHALFIN: Also at that point, the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions ) had a representative there. We associated very, very closely. He traveled around the country with me, and he was happy to have whatever input I could provide. Anyhow, when Irving got to Lagos, he wanted to see me. He called me and said, "Come and join me in Lagos," which I did. I was quite upset over the lack of response. I said to him,

“Irving, I can’t understand why the AFL-CIO doesn’t provide money.” I said, “This is the situation in Ghana, which we could have spent a million dollars to come to pass, and it was handed to us on a platter.” He said, “I know. There have been problems.” Then he said, “Do you think it is okay for me to come to Ghana?” I said, “You are perfectly safe.” So, he came to Ghana and met with the new leader of the Ghana TUC and was impressed with him, and they did provide them with financial assistance.

*Q: That’s an intriguing story and another insight of Irving Brown. I’m sure we can use that to sort of flesh out the real character of Irving Brown. It’s very helpful.*

CHALFIN: He was also a fervent anti-Communist. He was mellower in applying this philosophy to Africa. He realized that many of these African communists didn’t really understand. For them, it was part of their revolt against colonialism. He tended to be a lot more patient, a lot more understanding of Marxist influence in Africa.

*Q: Yes. I was always impressed by Irving. He was a very sensitive and very intelligent individual. He made a tremendous contribution .*

CHALFIN: He was very, very good. I also saw him frequently in Kenya. He was a very close associate of Mboya. They really liked each other. I spoke to him a year after Mboya was assassinated. It hit him very hard. Very, very hard.

*Q: Now that you mention that, Irving was the one who started up the African-American Labor Center.*

CHALFIN: That’s right.

*Q: It just occurred to me because I always think of Pat O’Farrill but it was Irving Brown.*

CHALFIN: I am trying to remember when the African-American Labor Center was started [Ed: 1964]. When I came back from Kenya, he left word at my hotel to call him. I did, and he offered me a position with the AALC. He said, “If you could get four or five years leave from the State Department,” he said, “I’d like to hire you.” I don’t know in what position. I don’t think it was to head the AALC but to head their African program. I said that I’d look into it. It meant living in New York City, and neither my wife nor I were eager about that. Anyhow, when I talked to Phil Delaney, he said that the Department wouldn’t give me five years of leave. By that time, I had integrated.

*Q: Your career would really have been thrown off track, had you taken that.*

CHALFIN: So that didn’t pan out.

*Q: Sey, can you give us a little more background on your regional assignment when you were in Nairobi, some of the countries and some of the situations you encountered? That would be the period of 1960 to 1964.*

CHALFIN: That's right. I was labor attaché with the American embassy in Nairobi. I had regional labor responsibility for Kampala, Uganda, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Both posts had part-time labor reporting officers. One of them was Hank Cohen.

*Q: Oh, really! Hank is another legendary figure, right.*

CHALFIN: He was the labor reporting officer in Kampala, Uganda. He was an (FSO rank) 07, and I think Kampala was his first post [Ed: Cohen arrived in Kampala in February 1962 and has been interviewed by ADST]. At that time, I was very impressed with him. He used to write copious reports on labor developments in Kampala. I used to go there maybe two or three times a year, both to Kampala and Dar es Salaam, to talk to the part-time labor reporting officers. Also, I met people in the labor movement. I talked to the ambassador. The ambassador was (William Redman) Red Duggan. He was the first ambassador to Dar Es Salaam. [Ed: The State Department website notes that the Embassy in Dar es Salaam was established in December 9, 1961 and that Duggan was Chargé. It lists William Leonhart as the first ambassador, presenting his credentials in October 1962.] I knew him very well because he was the Ghana desk officer when I entered the Foreign Service.

Duggan called me one time. There was an East Africa-wide railroad strike in the making, and he was very worried about it. He asked me to come down and spend a few days checking it out and reporting on it, which I did. Actually, I think it never broke out. I don't know how it was resolved but it just never broke out. That was the only instance that occurred during my four years there where an ambassador was facing a labor crisis and wanted the labor attaché on site.

*Q: Did you ever encounter any misunderstandings as to who you worked for among your Foreign Service colleagues? The problem continued as late as your tenure in the labor attaché activities.*

CHALFIN: There was one but not in that sense. You just reminded me of an amusing episode though. Yes, the question came up but it never hit me as a serious impediment. The story I am thinking of occurred during my second tour in Nairobi. No, it was the first tour because we were still a consulate general. I remember the consul general, a man called (Richard) Freund, who was extremely bright but a nervous Nellie and very unsure of himself for no reason but he was. [Ed: Freund served as Consul General Nairobi from December 1960 until December 1963] In any case, he called me in one day and he showed me a telegram and it said that Tom Byrne had been appointed as deputy chief of mission in the embassy at Dar es Salaam. Do you know Byrne?

*Q: Yes, I know Tom. He lives nearby here.*

CHALFIN: Yes, I just discovered that. Tom had succeeded me as labor attaché in Accra. This had been his only Foreign Service assignment. Freund said to me with a laugh, sort of scornfully, "How do you explain it, Sey?" I said, "I explain it by politics. Tom's wife is the daughter of a political officer of the AFL-CIO." Then he said to me, "Well, if you

behave like a good little labor attaché, maybe you'll get a slot like that, too." The assignment for Tom—I don't know if he's ever talked to you about it—was a disaster.

He served under Bill Leonhart. I don't know whether he'd want me to tell you this...

*Q: Yes, please...*

CHALFIN: but it was very difficult for him. Leonhart was a career ambassador, extremely demanding and a very effective ambassador. He wasn't very happy with Tom. In practice, the political section chief, I think, remained as a second in command. Tom was assigned to labor reporting largely.

*Q: Didn't Tom go on to get an ambassadorship in Finland?*

CHALFIN: No, it was in Oslo [Ed: Byrne was assigned as Ambassador to Norway from October 1973 to April 1976]. Then, he went from Oslo to Prague [Ed: Byrne served in Prague from June 1976 to November 1978]. From Stockholm, Fran and I visited Oslo and went to see Tom. His ambassadorial presence was very impressive.

*Q: What were some of the other countries that you traveled around in and visited when you were in Nairobi as regional labor attaché.*

CHALFIN: Well, I covered Uganda and Tanzania. Towards the end of my tour, Jesse McKnight, who was the chief of the East Africa Office in the State Department, phoned me or sent me a telegram or a letter, asking me if I was interested—because I was due for a Washington assignment—in being the Central African desk officer. I told him that I'd be delighted. On the basis of that and during my last month or so in Nairobi, I visited the capitals of Blantyre (Malawi), Salisbury (Rhodesia), and Lusaka (Zambia). I was there for a couple of weeks, and I met all the political leaders there. I didn't meet the president of Malawi.

*Q: There had to have been a great sense of great hope and expectation.*

CHALFIN: There was but I didn't share it. After about six months in Accra, I began to feel quite pessimistic about the outlook for Africa. I began to see that the African governments, or at least the African government in Ghana, were not prepared to run a country. I became aware of tribalism and the conflicts that were occurring within the national movement. It was a somewhat disenchanting experience. I had much greater hopes for Kenya and, for a while, they were doing very well. I was sort of skeptical by the time I got to Central Africa.

*Q: That same kind of concern, I think, exists today with respect to the developments in South Africa. They are going to be holding their all-race elections, I think, the end of April of this year [1994], and there is that similar kind of concern about whether the Black leaders are sufficiently prepared to lead South Africa into a new realm of independence.*

CHALFIN: One of the big conflicts there--and it was present in Kenya--is a matter of land redistribution. You have heard of the White Highlands in Kenya.

*Q: No. Explain that.*

CHALFIN: Well, there was an area about a 100 miles north of Nairobi. It included the Rift Valley and the area around Mt. Kenya all the way north to the Northern Frontier District. It was absolutely sensationally beautiful country. The climate is excellent. It's 5,000 or 6,000 feet high. During the entire colonial period in Kenya, the British had parceled out land to Europeans, mostly to British veterans of the First World War. Large-scale agriculture was completely dominated by the Whites who relied very heavily on cheap African labor.

We are talking about the transition from colonial to African government. The goal for Africans in Kenya, certainly, was land. That's all independence meant to them. The British foresaw this and they dealt with it very intelligently. They bought land from the existing European farmers. They weren't forced to but they were offered what was regarded as a fair market price for their land. There were maybe 3,500 mostly British European farmers. It was a paradise. Those people lived in a virtual paradise. A number of them did sell their land, and many of them went to South Africa or to Australia. The land was then redistributed to the Africans. I don't know if this is going to be exactly the same problem in South Africa. I don't know how they are going to deal with it.

*Q: Let's next take up your experience in the fleshpots of Europe. Let's see, you left Africa and wound up in Paris.*

CHALFIN: No, I wound up with three years in Washington from 1964 to 1967. [Ed: The February 1966 State Department telephone book lists Mr. Chalfin as Officer-in-Charge of Zambia and Malawi affairs in the Office of Eastern and Southern African Affairs (AF/E). The AF/E Director was Thomas McElhiney; one of the two Deputy Directors was Edward Mulcahy who has been interviewed by ADST. The bureau Assistant Secretary was G. Mennen Williams. One of the AF Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretaries was William Trimble who has been interviewed by ADST.

*Q: Then you got your reward in Paris.*

CHALFIN: I arrived there in the fall of [November] 1967, and I stayed there until the late fall of 1970. I was the Labor officer with the U.S. Mission to OECD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

*Q: That was a nice tour. Did you run into Irving Brown in Paris? That was his home base.*

CHALFIN: Yes, quite often. In fact, he invited Fran and myself to dinner one time. No, no, that came later. This is when we were in Stockholm. We weren't married yet. In any

case, I ran into Brown quite often.

*Q: When you were there at the OECD, though, there was a very strong communist French labor movement.*

CHALFIN: The CGT (General Confederation of Labor - Confédération Générale du Travail) were still dominant. Irv Levy, by the way, was labor attaché in the Embassy.

*Q: He's another historic figure in labor activity.*

CHALFIN: There was still the CGT, and there was a Force Ouvrière (Workers Force), which was the mostly white-collar workers union, which was anti-Communist. Then, the CFTC, the French Confederation of Christian Labor was somewhere in between.

*Q: I understand the Force Ouvrière was created with the assistance of the AFL-CIO as a counter force to the CGT.*

CHALFIN: You are absolutely right. My responsibility was limited to the OECD. I had no labor reporting responsibilities in France.

*Q: Let me get your retrospective view. We are looking today at what is called the European Union, a consolidation of at least twelve European nations into what they hope to be a common market without borders and trade restrictions. When you were there, where was that idea?*

CHALFIN: It was still developing.

*Q: At what stage was it? Who was pushing it? Who was promoting this kind of European community approach?*

CHALFIN: I forget the man's name but there was one particular Frenchman, you know, who was regarded as the creator of the idea, and I don't recall his name yet. I think there was one organization that was in existence. There was a European organization that would meet once every year. Delegates were from the various legislatures but I can't remember what it was called. We are talking now about 30 years ago, and I don't think the European market or the European organization had really established institutions yet. I don't think so.

*Q: Sey, what were your functions then at the OECD?*

CHALFIN: The OECD consisted of committees in various spheres. These committees met quarterly, four times a year, and they consisted of representatives from the member organizations. I was responsible at the outset for two committees, the Labor and Manpower Committee and the Education Committee and, subsequently, the Consumer Affairs Committee. My function was, as was the function of other FSOs with the mission, to attend meetings of the committees I was responsible for, to report on developments in

between meetings, to brief American representatives to those committee meetings, and to report on the committee meetings. It was essentially that.

*Q: You were on the labor committees, you said.*

CHALFIN: I was on the Labor Manpower Committee.

*Q: What were the issues then on the Labor Manpower Committee?*

CHALFIN: Well, the Labor Manpower Committee was dominated by a Swede. He was almost legendary, Gosta Rehn. Rehn together with another man [Ed: Rudolf Meidner] who was still with the LO, the Swedish Central Labor Party when I was there, were regarded as the authors of the Swedish manpower policy. Swedish manpower policy dominated thinking in how to deal with labor policy and industrial policy.

*Q: That's right. They were on the cutting edge of "progressive" labor management relations.*

CHALFIN: That's right. Very often meetings would sort of center on these questions. The representatives to the Labor Manpower Committee were from the Labor Department. The representatives on education were from HEW, largely. The Consumer Affairs representative was the consumer affairs advisor for President Nixon, the first one he had.

*Q: Who was that?*

CHALFIN: Virginia H. Knauer, she was from Philadelphia, and she and her husband had been prominent Pennsylvania Republicans who had contributed a lot of money over the years. This job was a reward. She was very good, by the way. She was okay. So, she attended Consumer Affairs committee meetings. I remember one time she with another man—I think it was the second or third time—both approached me and said they'd heard a lot about naughty Paris nightclubs.

*Q: I only dream about those events, Sey.*

CHALFIN: They wanted me to take them around one night. And, I did.

*Q: You knew all the fleshpots.*

CHALFIN: Exactly. Well, they were quite well known to anybody living in Paris. There were striptease joints, a lot of dirty jokes, and that sort of thing. The following day, (Joseph A.) Greenwald, who was the U.S. ambassador to OECD called me in and I don't know how it came to his attention. I suppose I must have told somebody else. "I understand," he says, "that you took Mrs. So and So and her deputy to some pretty hot nightclubs."

I said, "Well, yes." He said, "Was it your idea?" I said, "No, it was hers."

*Q: One of the questions I have concerning OECD in terms of labor policy, was there any discussion at that time when you were there, Sey, about the social contract, a sense of obligation of the business community to the working people and to the trade union movement? That seems to have been a major issue leading up to the formation of the European Union.*

CHALFIN: Not to my recollection. Actually, what remains from those years is the memory of Swedish manpower policy, how to train labor for the kind of jobs that would be available. They had an enormous manpower education program. To a large extent, it simply absorbed just about everybody who would otherwise have been unemployed.

*Q: Okay, we've just completed a delightful lunch that Fran prepared for us, lox, bagels, and the world's best brownies. When we were last talking to Sey, he left us in the fleshpots of Paris. Do you want to pick up on your experiences at the OECD?*

CHALFIN: It's hard to think of any more dramatic moments. The assignment to OECD was a fairly conventional one. It was merely a matter of attending meetings and writing reports on them. I enjoyed living in Paris. That was the upside to the whole business.

I was supposed to remain in Paris for five years but at the end of the third year, I heard from Dan Gutte, who was the European labor advisor at that time. He asked me whether I would like to leave early and serve in Ottawa. This was very attractive to me because not long before my wife and I had broken up, and she was living in Washington with our two boys. To be in Ottawa would make it much easier for me to visit the family. So, I accepted.

So, I left Paris in October of 1969 and, after home leave, I arrived in Ottawa in January of 1970.

*Q: You mentioned earlier about Jay Lovestone's view of the Canadian labor movement. You didn't find any of these sinister influences up there, did you?*

CHALFIN: No, none whatsoever. I guess for any American serving at the embassy it was a bit of a problem because there were so many, there were multiple contacts between government departments and ministries and between private organizations. I began to ponder the best way to make some contribution reporting labor developments.

*Q: Right. There was that interchange with the trade union movements.*

CHALFIN: It existed between the ministries of labor, for example. After being there a while, I realized that probably the key issue before Canadian labor was its relationship to the AFL-CIO. At that time a number of the large industrial unions--the steel workers, the auto workers--were affiliated with their American counterparts.

*Q: That's where they got the international designation.*

CHALFIN: That's right. There was also the garment workers. There were some strong opinions within Canadian labor about pulling out and becoming more independent. This was a key problem and always has been for Canadians, not for the French Canadians but for the Anglo Canadians. It is a question of identity. This continued to be a difficult issue during all the time I was there. There was a group of unions, primarily the white-collar and government unions that favored a pullout on the part of the Canadian affiliates. But there was also a lot of resistance on the part of the affiliates. They had certain advantages. By the time I left, this was starting to happen. I think the auto workers had pulled out. I believe also the steel workers had pulled out. I'm not entirely sure.

*Q: When did you leave there?*

CHALFIN: I left there in 1974.

*Q: You are right. The auto workers pulled out.*

CHALFIN: I'm not sure about the steel workers but one union actually was given its walking papers by its national center. I think they took positions, which the international union found difficult to swallow.

*Q: I've always wondered about the utility of having a labor attaché in Canada because there was such a tremendous interchange between organizations, government, private sector, and news. It's really a questionable use of our labor attaché positions.*

CHALFIN: This is also a problem that political and economic officers have. It's just that sort of thing.

*Q: Right. Did you have a chance to travel at all?*

CHALFIN: Yes. I must have traveled throughout Canada, at least once. I went to the west coast twice. I attended the Canadian Labor Congress convention not too long before I left Ottawa. I visited every corner of Canada. The other thing is, in the relatively rural areas--for example, in Regina in Saskatchewan--I'd get in touch with the local trade union center. I'd tell them who I was, and they just couldn't understand what my function was. They found my presence strange.

*Q: Sey, did you get any sense of desire to separate from the rest of Canada when you went out, for example, the western provinces?*

CHALFIN: No, but Quebec was a different story. I arrived there not too long after the Quebec labor minister had been assassinated at La Porte. The issue of Quebec was a major consideration in the embassy. On my first field trip, I went to Montreal and Quebec City in Quebec. We had, by the way, a consul general in Quebec City who was a first-rate labor reporter. He was excellent. I made a point in Montreal of getting in touch with the French-speaking trade unionists. They were at first a little wary but what won them over

was the fact that I was talking to them in French. I remember one of them said to me, “You are first American I have ever met who speaks French.”

*Q: Isn't that amazing.*

CHALFIN: Yes. I was also taken aback by the intensity of the Separatist Movement. I just simply wasn't prepared for it. Within the embassy there was a rather curious debate going on between the DCM and the chief of the political section. The DCM was an old Canadian specialist, Rufus Smith. In fact, he was known within the Department for being, perhaps, overly sympathetic to the Canadian point of view. I don't think he was. The chief of the political section was a man called Toumanoff. He was a first generation American of Russian parentage. He felt that the Separatist Movement was very serious, that it was going to occur, and that it might provide grounds for Russian penetration.

*Q: That was a deep political analysis, right?*

CHALFIN: Yes. They used to argue both sides at staff conferences. I was taken aback by how serious and strong these feelings were. When I reported this, Smith didn't particularly like it, while Toumanoff fell all over me.

*Q: That was typical cross-fire in the embassy, right?*

CHALFIN: There's no doubt about it, Quebec is or at least was the most interesting part of Canada.

*Q: When did you finish your tour?*

CHALFIN: I left in the fall of 1974. I was supposed to spend several months in Washington learning Swedish, but the ambassador was restless about my absence. He kept firing messages to the Department. In one of them, he said, “The best place to learn Swedish is in Stockholm.”

*Q: So you took off for the fleshpots of Stockholm.*

CHALFIN: Right, but there was no reason why I couldn't have stayed away longer. There was no crisis of any kind. He just didn't like the idea of not having a labor attaché. To him labor was very important.

*Q: Sweden was a highly organized, unionized nation, wasn't it?*

CHALFIN: Yes. Ninety-seven percent of the salaried, wage-earning labor force was organized.

*Q: That's absolutely startling. What was the relationship between the trade union movement and the government?*

CHALFIN: It was very close. Actually, the Social Democratic Party, in its earliest stages, was formed by the labor movement. It was a product of the labor movement. When I was there, Palme was the prime minister, a very powerful prime minister. The labor movement was very, very devoted to the Social Democratic administration. There was very little conflict between them.

*Q: Were there any members of the labor movement active in the government itself? Did they receive appointments to ministries or was that identity kept separate?*

CHALFIN: On the whole, it was separate.

*Q: Sey, you were there during what years?*

CHALFIN: It was 1974 to 1977.

*Q: Okay, those were crucial periods during the Cold War. Did we try to influence the Swedes in any way?*

CHALFIN: We tried but didn't make much progress. I was about to say that a segment of the Swedish population, particularly those who supported the Social Democratic Party, were wary of the United States. They seemed mildly hostile. This was certainly true in the labor movement. I was treated with complete courtesy but there was a wariness there, and I was often criticized about Vietnam, for example. When I was duty officer at the embassy during the weekends, invariably there would be some protest group outside the embassy grounds wanting to present us with a petition. It was that sort of thing.

There was no problem getting information. In other words, I had no problem getting appointments or anything like that. I had a sense of unfriendliness but I gradually overcame it. I remember the number two man in the LO. I forget his name, but he was particularly unfriendly. I remember we were chatting about the United States and about Sweden, and I said, "You know, the U.S. is a completely different society with a different history. If I were a Swede, I'd vote Social Democratic." It was that sort of thing.

*Q: I encountered a Swede when I was in the Caribbean. I was in Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam, and I was sitting in the bar of the Hotel Krasnapolsky, of all names, and the fellow sitting next to me happened to be a Swede, and we started talking. Eventually, I told him I was the labor attaché with the American Embassy, and he launched into one of these really nasty criticisms of our role in Vietnam.*

CHALFIN: Vietnam was really a stone in their throat.

*Q: A lot of people really don't appreciate that there was a strong negative reaction to our role in Vietnam among countries, which we considered to be "friendly," democratic nations. That was a problem we tried to overcome as well.*

CHALFIN: I think it was the only country in which I faced the problem of whether to

take a hard line and present the U.S. point of view without nuance, or else speak frankly in terms of the way I felt. I finally reached the conclusion that I was more effective as an American, as a representative of the embassy, in talking to Swedes than telling them how I felt, essentially, presenting a liberal point of view. This certainly didn't hurt our position. There was one incident that I remember quite vividly. This occurred, I think, in 1976. Do you remember the conflict in the United States between the Teamsters and the United Farm Workers?

*Q: Yes, right, they were organizing California.*

CHALFIN: Well, the LO, not surprisingly, was ardently pro-farm worker. This had an international impact because the Teamsters sent out a man. I remember now, I think the Swedish LO had officially taken a position on boycotting California grapes. So, they sent out this guy as a representative of the Teamsters. He was a lawyer, actually. I don't know if they hired him for the purpose but that was the impression I got. I started getting telegrams about how to deal with this man. I was told that he does represent the Teamsters. The Teamsters is a bona fide labor organization, and I should show him whatever courtesy I could.

When he did arrive, he was pretty aware of the situation. I think my discomfort amused him. In any case, he insisted upon having a meeting with the LO. I knew the AFL-CIO was opposed to his visit, too. So, I got in touch with their international representative, and he is a man who had been Swedish labor attaché in Washington for four years. He was pretty canny. I told him about this guy, and he was aware that he was here. I said, "He insists upon having an appointment with you." I said, "You understand my position here." He said, "Oh yes, I do." I said, "What I am saying to you is, I am passing a message from this Teamster representative to the effect that he wants an appointment with you. Use your own judgment." He said, "Okay, I'll see him."

*Q: It was very helpful. I think you mentioned that there were all these protests at the American embassy during that time period. That seemed to be a kind of phenomena typical of the Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. They all had this very "liberal" tendency or view concerning our role in Vietnam.*

CHALFIN: I think the Swedes were the most militant of the three.

*Q: What was the relationship between the AFL-CIO and the LO?*

CHALFIN: I think it was arms' length.

*Q: Arms' length, right. Even the charm of Irving Brown couldn't weaken...*

CHALFIN: I never saw Brown.

*Q: You never saw Brown?*

CHALFIN: Wait a minute. Did he come once? No, he never came to Stockholm.

*Q: Were there any other visits by AFL-CIO up there?*

CHALFIN: Not that I recall. They didn't seem to have much interest really. Meany was in the driver's seat at the time. If a guy like Lovestone felt the way he did about Canada, you can imagine how mean he felt about the Swedes.

*Q: They were beyond salvation.*

CHALFIN: Right. Exactly. There were some really amazing people in the AFL-CIO in the International Affairs Office.

*Q: All of them were very charming and always on the right side of the issues, although many Americans and many aspects of our government didn't really appreciate that. They didn't quite understand that they were really the most vigilante anti-Communists in the entire country.*

CHALFIN: Oh God, yes. It's strange because they always tended to see the organized labor, the AFL-CIO as being Pinko, Leftist but they never quite saw the anti-communism that they really represent.

*Q: You spent a couple of years there in Stockholm?*

CHALFIN: Yes, three years. It was a pleasant three years. I regard myself as a left-wing Democrat. I found the environment sympathetic to my liking. Not every body admires the Swedes. They are quite reserved. I like them a great deal and found them a compassionate society. I ran into no particular problems. The only time that things got a little uneasy is when I was given instructions to visit the Ministry of Labor and the LO with regard to certain ILO issues. Invariably, they'd be on the opposite side of the fence.

*Q: Right, like Cuba, like South Africa.*

CHALFIN: Yes. I was safe when you were talking about Canada. I was representing our government on the Apartheid Committee at the ILO. The whole world was against us. Anytime we took votes in the ILO, it always turned out 356 to 1. I was there at the Apartheid Committee and the Palestinians had observer status and they were in the back of the room. We were just getting under way when they launched into an immense diatribe against Israel. It kept going on and on. I raised the point of order and tried to cut off this nonsense that was going on. They persisted, and I persisted and, finally, as this was going on, a note came across from the employers bench on the other side of the room. I opened it up, and it said, "Beware. PLO sitting behind you." As you know, you never go out of your assigned areas. The workers don't go into the government area and vice versa, so he was right behind me. Finally, the French trade unionist who was representing the workers' bench spoke up and said, "Mr. Kern is right, this is the Apartheid Committee and let's get back to the basics. It was only through his intervention

that this rather emotional situation was actually diffused. Our French friends became our savior.

*Q: Okay, let me ask you some general questions now, Sey, about your relationship within the embassy. How you were perceived by your fellow Foreign Service Officers? Did they see you as a Foreign Service Officer, a trade unionist, or a representative of the Labor Department?*

CHALFIN: At times I sensed a little bit of confusion as to what my position was. I remember telling people several times that, like you, I report to the State Department. You see what caused confusion is that the agricultural attachés were in a different position. They reported to the Agriculture Department. They thought I was in the same relationship with regard to Labor. It wasn't a problem. It was generally understood and appreciated that I was responsible for a certain sphere of reporting. Another aspect of your question is about where the labor attaché slot was placed within embassies. I was at times in the political section, at times in the economic section.

In Stockholm, I was in the political section but I had a separate office, not on the same floor. I think that was simply accidental. The political section was on the top floor, the third or fourth floor, and I was on the second floor. The second floor was entirely occupied by the defense attaché's office, except for my office. I welcomed it actually. It gave me a sense of greater independence. One time the ambassador asked me to deliver a talk to the next staff meeting about the Swedish labor movement. I did, and there was a lot of interest. Afterward, the ambassador said to me, "So and So, the defense attaché, said to me that we are lucky to have someone on the staff who is so familiar with organized labor in Sweden because organized labor is so important."

*Q: It is something for the Defense Attaché to recognize it and to speak up.*

CHALFIN: That area of confusion, I think, continues today. I was frequently asked, "Well, do you work for the Labor Department?" In my case, I came from the Labor Department but that wasn't generally known.

*Q: What kind of assistance, if any, did you get from AID in terms of your overall Labor Attaché experience?*

CHALFIN: AID was an important element in my African experience, Ghana and Kenya. I think they cooperated in several instances by providing money for labor leaders to visit the United States. Other than that, there wasn't much of an exchange.

*Q: Did USIS have any kind of a labor program when you were active?*

CHALFIN: No, they didn't.

*Q: I know they used to write some of their grants.*

CHALFIN: That's right. USIS did pay for the leader grants [Ed: reference is to the USIA International Visitor Program], I think. When they made up the year's list of leader grants, they generally had a labor leader, and they would consult with me.

*Q: Were you ever asked, Sey, about explaining the relationship of the American labor movement to the government and to the business community? Was that ever brought up by any of your contacts?*

CHALFIN: I was asked only once, I think, in my entire career and this happened in Stockholm. The second largest national center was a white collar union, the TCO. The president of the TCO was a very intellectual sort of man; he was an ex-teacher, I think. He invited me to deliver a talk on American labor and labor's relationship to the government and on labor policy. I think that's the only time it ever happened.

*Q: Overall, you enjoyed your labor assignments?*

CHALFIN: Oh, I did very much.

*Q: I think we all had a chance to see a part of society that the other folks in the embassies just never got to see and work with.*

CHALFIN: Actually, when I finished my second desk job in the department, I was approached by Personnel about going out as a political officer to The Hague. I really sweated about this. Finally, I decided that I was happy doing labor reporting and had no desire to become an ambassador or DCM one day. I went back and told the guy, and he was quite surprised.

*Q: Oh yes, everyone should aspire to be an elite political officer, right?*

*Q: Give me your sense of relationship between the labor attaché corps or service and the AFL-CIO when you were active as a labor attaché.*

CHALFIN: I had a lot to do with Brown. He was the one in the AFL-CIO I dealt with mostly. That was only in Africa. Once I left Africa, that was the end of that.

*Q: Were you ever accused of or suspected of being a CIA agent?*

CHALFIN: Just once in Ottawa.

*Q: In Ottawa!*

CHALFIN: Yes. There was a reporter for the *Financial Times*, a financial newspaper, who visited the embassy on several occasions. I also met him socially at some parties. In fact, I started going out with a former girl friend of his. She told me that he suspected and was telling others that I was in the CIA because he could see no particular reason why the U.S. should have a labor attaché in Ottawa.

*Q: A very logical deduction, wasn't it? I think all of us at one time or another have gotten tagged with being a CIA agent. I met with some trade unionists who would start turning radios on all around us. At that time, well, I have this watch here, which is very bulky. It's one of those early self-winding watches. They were convinced that I had a recorder in there, and I would take it off and I'd say, "Here, put it in the drawer. Do whatever you want."*

CHALFIN: This was in India, was it?

*Q: This was in one of the islands. One of the far left newsletters--I think it was in Trinidad-- greeted my arrival with big banner headlines that "the great destabilizer is here." It was amazing the sense that some people had. These were naturally left wing unions that came out with that kind of accusation. That was one of the problems I think we all had to handle one way or another. Let's see, we talked a little bit about AID providing some leadership grants to you and USIS as well. Did you have to make any appointments? We did talk about appointments for American trade unionists as visitors.*

CHALFIN: I just remembered. I had while in Nairobi a delegation from the United Auto Workers. There were three men. I think all three of them were local union leaders. One was white and the other two were Black. They were in Nairobi about a week, and I arranged a program for them to visit different parts of the country. I enjoyed it enormously. They also met various Kenyan labor leaders.

They were in the country at the time that Kennedy was assassinated. The day afterward, we had a schedule and I spoke to them. I said, "Do you want to just cancel it? I don't know how the Africans would feel about our continuing to move around after something like this had happened." They said, "Well, why not? What are we going to do?" Actually, there wasn't all that awareness on the part of the Africans. Nobody raises eyes and says, "Why aren't your people sitting home mourning the president?" We just went ahead with our program.

*Q: Did you find those visits by the American trade unionists to be helpful?*

CHALFIN: I am trying to remember if there were any others. I think that was the only one I ever experienced. I didn't find it particularly helpful. I was glad they came, and I was glad to take them around, and they were particularly interested in the team approach to the assembly line, which I think Saab had adopted. We visited the Saab plant outside of Stockholm. They did a report on it subsequently.

*Q: We are getting more of this idea of cooperative work efforts in the workplace. Some trade unionists are very skeptical of it at this point. Nevertheless, many companies are doing that and beginning to talk about worker empowerment. Maybe there has been some spinoff from the early Swedish efforts in kind of cutting edge labor management relations.*

CHALFIN: It was a good experience for all of us and thoroughly enjoyable. We saw

aspects of countries that other folks in the embassies couldn't see.

*Q: Sey, I want to thank you on behalf of everyone for the oral history of the labor attaché program and for agreeing to this interview. I enjoyed meeting you and your wife, Fran.*

CHALFIN: The same here. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you.

*End of interview*