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Labor Series

**JOHN GWYNN**

*Interviewed by: James Shea*  
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Gwynn]

*Q: The day is May 16, 1992 and I am conducting an interview with John Gwynn, my long-time friend and colleague, who served as our labor attaché in Mexico, Portugal, Spain, and also as our African labor adviser and started his labor career as the assistant labor attaché in Rome. Thanks, John.*

GWYNN: Glad to be here.

*Q: John, would you like to tell us how you got interested in the labor attaché program and some of your background before you came into the Foreign Service?*

GWYNN: Okay. Certainly, Jim. I entered the Foreign Service back in 1956 right after I got out of college. In fact, I passed the Foreign Service exam while still in college. And my additional posts involved all kinds of different work. I served as a vice consul in Barranquilla, Colombia, and I also served as a vice consul in Guayaquil, Ecuador. I then served as a junior rotational officer in Karachi, Pakistan, where the embassy was located at that time, and I also served as a consular office in London, England. I suppose my real first interest in the labor attaché program and first knowledge of it was when I was serving as a rotational officer the economic section of the embassy at that time in Karachi, Pakistan and I remember how the occasion came about. I made a trip up to northern Pakistan in an embassy carry-all, driving it all the way up to Lahore and up to Rawalpindi and all the way back again. And one of my main responsibilities was reporting on water and power projects; there were a lot of dams in Pakistan. Some had been constructed by the British and there were some current projects that were going on. Well, I visited the site, this was in the early 1960's, of a big dam that was being financed by the U.S. government. It was called the Mangla Dam and I was taken around the site by some of the engineers there and talked to them and when I got back to the embassy I wrote up an airgram on my visit. One of the things that struck me when I was there was their, shall we say their labor relations, or perhaps their lack thereof. I asked them how they recruited people and they told me that they had a line-up of the Pakistanis every morning, the tribesmen from the area, and they would let the people fight it out as to who was hired. They would sort of push and shove, and then the American supervisor would go and pick out three here, two there. And it seemed somewhat bizarre, if not horrifying, for an American construction consortium, big international construction firms, to be

hiring people in this way. I also asked them about the wage scales of the Pakistani laborers and they were absolutely abysmal. In fact, some of the people who worked would bring their wives along and their wives would work. And the only thing the wives would get would be the meal, a free meal. Well, shortly after I wrote my airgram I was called in by the labor attaché who had read my airgram and was somewhat horrified. I believe he then was asked by Ambassador Rountree to look into this. It really wasn't a proper practice for American firms. About that time I was transferred and left but I learned some years later that the labor attaché there, named Winsor Stroup, Bill Stroup, had followed up and that this had gotten to the attention of the Labor Department and others back here in Washington. That really first sparked my interest. A couple of years later I was in London and I looked into the labor attaché program. I learned they had a training program. I went and talked to the labor attaché at the embassy, a fellow by the name of Tom Byrne, who immediately encouraged me in my interest. In fact, he called Washington on my behalf and let me look into some of his files and so on. I became very interested in this program and so I applied for it and was selected and went back to Washington from London and took the year's training program. And that was actually the start of my labor attaché training. I went from there to the places Jim mentioned earlier, first as an assistant labor attaché to Rome, Italy, for two years. After that I was labor attaché in Madrid, Spain for about six and a half years, rather a very long period. I was back in Washington for a couple of years for a labor attaché position and then I went out as labor attaché to Lisbon, Portugal and spent four years there as labor attaché. I came back to the Department and spent two years as the African labor adviser in the African Bureau of the State Department. I went out from there to Mexico City where I spent four years as labor counselor and then I came back to Washington and retired at that point.

*Q: John, do you recall what year you went to Italy?*

GWYNN: Yes, I do, Jim. I went in 1967, September of 1967.

*Q: So then you had close to, or perhaps more than, twenty years in labor positions?*

GWYNN: Yes, yes, exactly. I believe it is something like 20 or 21 years in all as a labor attaché.

*Q: Who did you work for in Italy?*

GWYNN: In Italy my boss, the labor attaché, was Tom Bowie, who is well known in the Foreign Service and spent an incredible period, I think something like 11 years, as labor attaché in Italy.

*Q: John, it's quite obvious you have a Romance language background and could you tell us a little bit about that?*

GWYNN: Yes, well, that even goes back to my youth. I grew up in Mexico City where my father was an American businessman. In fact I lived there from the age of three until the age of 18 and I went to the American School in Mexico City all the way through

kindergarten through high school so I learned Spanish growing up. Half the day in the grade school there was in Spanish and we had many Mexican friends so I grew up being bilingual. I might add that I was in fact also born in Spain, but of an American businessman father. I wasn't a Spanish citizen. My father just happened to be there at that time. I don't remember anything from that time because we left Spain when the Civil War broke out and I was only two and a half years old.

*Q: John, would you like to give us some insights on your relationship of the labor attaché to your other fellow officers and sections in the embassies and also with the ambassadors you served under?*

GWYNN: Well, I think it's a fairly traditional type of arrangement, although there were variations from embassy to embassy. Italy, my first post as labor attaché or assistant labor attaché, was really more of a training period than anything else. And I was only there two years and I was a fairly young, junior middle-ranking officer there. It was an excellent training ground and I had an excellent mentor there. The labor attaché's office had just been put under the political section at that time. It had previously, I believe, been in the economic section but it was physically located in a separate part of the building so it really had a great deal of independence. That was the only time I had been in a labor attaché office that was separated. I mean it was on the fourth floor whereas the political section was located on the second floor, quite a different way away. In Madrid the labor attaché position was an integral part of the political section. At the time I was there the labor attaché position was not part of the country team, which was perhaps something of a drawback. You had to rely on keeping your boss, the political counselor, thoroughly briefed so that he would raise your interests at the country team meeting. Nevertheless I had a great deal to do with some of the other elements of the embassy, particularly with USIS, especially because I was very active in their foreign visitor program during the time I was in Madrid, six and a half years. I think I counted it up one time and sent something like 45 different young Spaniards to the U.S. Interestingly, in Italy I had been full time labor, but in Spain we had a very small political section, and at one time, incredibly, we only had three people in the political section. Probably at least half of my duties were general political work there and in fact [it wanted a large -- -- division] the area was the opposition. That is why I sent all these young people to the United States; I knew a lot of people in the course of my work there. In Portugal I was also an integral part of the political section. I did mostly labor there, a higher ratio of labor to non-labor than I did in Spain; I did do some non-labor functions. We interestingly had a bigger political section in the little country of Portugal when I was there. I think we had five or six officers. We had three officers at one period when I was in Spain, and then it went up to four. Since that time they've increased the number of officers in the political section in Spain, I suppose it may be six, seven, or eight now. In Portugal, we were a very small embassy. I also worked closely with people in USIA and other elements of the embassy. I also worked closely with the military there, because we had a military base there; we have a base in the Azores and I became involved in a number of labor problems we had out there at the behest of the ambassador. I went out there and we had a special labor agreement negotiated with the Portuguese government. I was involved in the negotiations of that, so I had to deal very closely with the military. Then I came back to Washington

and of course I was the AF [Air Force] labor adviser and I dealt with other bureaus and with AID, negotiating agreements and then in Mexico. It was at one of the biggest embassies in the world and by the time I was in Portugal I was a member of the country team. I dealt with all kinds of agencies, including in Mexico with the agencies involved with immigration, with the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Services], with the Consular.... It's amazing the variety of types of work that a labor attaché can end up being involved with.

*Q: John, if we can return to Spain. You were there certainly at a very interesting period. It is true that you were there when Franco died and the democratic government took over.*

GWYNN: That's correct. I was there when I arrived in February of 1970 and I departed in August of 1976, so a full six and a half years. An unusually long period of time and it did cover the time that Franco died, who died in November of 1975. I might add that I was one of the ones tapped to go to his funeral as an aid, as it were, to the person who attended Franco's funeral on our behalf, who was then vice president Nelson Rockefeller. I was actually at the funeral mass and it took place in the Plaza del Viente, a great big square next to the royal palace. Then, we all got into cars and followed the cortege out to the Valle de los Caidos, a great big monument built by Franco in the hills above Madrid, a huge, colossal church carved out of the mountain. Apparently it is also alleged, I don't know; I guess it is probably true that he used to some extent, to a great extent, slave labor in building it in the 1940's and early 1950's. Slave labor in the sense of using prisoners that had been taken in the Spanish Civil War, some of them, many of them, were used in the construction battalions to build that huge mausoleum. So we also were in the ceremony in the mausoleum. So I got to see Franco's funeral.

*Q: When you doubled your position -- I believe you told me at one time that you came into or were in contact with Felipe Gonzalez who was Spain's prime minister.*

GWYNN: That is correct. It was really a very fascinating time that I was in Madrid. I did get to meet Felipe Gonzalez because he was the labor lawyer. He was also probably at that point one of the principal people, well he was the principal person, in the UGT [General Workers' Union], the Spanish illegal Socialist labor movement. And he was also the head of the party at that time. Since then, ironically, now the UGT Socialist Union, headed by Nicolas Redondo, whom I also knew there in the clandestine epoch, and the government and party headed by Felipe Gonzalez don't get along well at all in many respects. But in those days they were one and the same and you had the same leader for both of them.

*Q: How did the government people look on your activities, your contacts with the opposition?*

GWYNN: Well, not very well. Let me go back to how I got involved with the opposition. When I came there I went and established contact with the official so-called unions. They weren't unions. It was a government labor front. But that was part of my job. There was

no problem there. In fact they welcomed me with open arms. And the first thing they said was "Can you get us in contact with the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]?" And I had been told just before coming over by the AFL-CIO that the last thing they wanted was to have any contact with those fascists. They were fascists of the government labor front and so I said, "Well, I can try, but probably not..." and this that and the other and I managed to have good relations with the official unions but fend them off from the AFL-CIO for six and a half years.

*Q: Do you recall who headed up the official fascist unions in those days?*

GWYNN: Yes, there were several people during my time there. When I first arrived it was headed by a fellow named Enrique Garcia Ramos. He was there for a number of years while I was there and then there may have been one or two people on an interim basis for only a few months and who didn't last very long. The person who was the number two man in the official syndicates when I was there is now a very prominent politician in democratic Spain and his name is Rodolfo Martin Villa. He is with the conservative party and is a deputy in parliament and is one of these stalwarts in the conservative party in Spain today. In those days he was a young person, about 33 years old. That by the way, he was about my age at the time, too. We hit it off quite well. He later became governor of Barcelona and then during my last year or two there. He came back to the syndical organization, which is the government labor organization, and was the head of it and was the person who made the transition. Although I always found him a much more open person than his position really warranted as a deputy minister in the Franco government and the labor front, the syndical organization was also considered a government ministry; the head of it had cabinet rank to show you how intertwined they were. He was a person with sincerely liberal inclinations and I think that is one reason we got along so well for six and a half years. In fact, I remember one time, why this was in the last year or two, I think it was after Franco's death and things were in flux, he met our ambassador, whom I had already introduced him to. He met him at a cocktail party and he asked the ambassador to ask John Gwynn, "What does John Gwynn think of our scheme for transforming the unions here to democratic unions?" And the ambassador was very impressed and I was flattered that he valued my opinion. I was just a lowly first secretary in the embassy, for that purpose.

Let me return to the question of the opposition because that is an interesting point. When I first arrived I knew there were a couple of clandestine unions but... most of the people were exiled in Toulouse, France and I did discover there were one or two people in Spain who supposedly represented them. A fellow from the UGT and the PSOE [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party], who was the same person, and a writer who lived up in Escorial and had been in prison used to drop by the embassy. Now, he dropped by unannounced. He would never call; I learned in Spain that these people did not want to call because they believed their phones were bugged and I believe their phones were bugged. And so I got to know him and he introduced me to some of the other people. Now the other people would not come to the embassy, so I had to go out and meet him at bars at certain predetermined times and so on. And this was how I gradually began to know these people. I also met a number of labor lawyers there and I found out that most

of these labor lawyers were fronts for little political groups, too. The only legitimate way that a person could operate was by being a labor lawyer and they would tell me that even though they were intellectuals and didn't have worker backgrounds, a lot of them; although Felipe Gonzalez did, but some of the others didn't. The government at least at that point, here we are in the 1970's, would leave them alone because they were intellectuals and because they had foreign friends; the Germans were the ones who were most active, the West Germans. And if the lawyers were arrested they could immediately bring down the wrath of, like the German government or the French government. Whereas if a lowly worker was arrested you know you had to have a big campaign and cause a stir; maybe you might cause something of a ripple and maybe not. And so anyway, the labor lawyers had some freedom to operate so they were really acting as fronts for all these labor groups. And it was fascinating, the more I got to know them the more I began to think these are the real people who represent the workers in Spain. Now of course there was a problem, too. There was the biggest group of illegal workers who worked with a Communist group called the Workers' Commission, or Comisiones Obreras. Their leaders were mostly in jail. Now here I had a problem faced by most other labor attachés. You can't go out and seek, at least you couldn't in those days, contacts with the Communists; also, it was against our government's policy. I think had I gone out and openly sought contact with the Communists I probably would have been hauled out of there by my government right away, with the strong endorsement of the AFL-CIO, who would say, "What's that labor attaché doing talking to a Commie?" So you couldn't. It probably would not have been that difficult after awhile, but I stayed away from them because I felt I was obliged to. I did find out what they were up to because I began to find there were all kinds of peoples in intermediate levels, like leftist priests and others who were not Communists, who talked to them. I wouldn't talk to the Communists; I would talk to the people who talked to them so I did find somewhat later on that it was sort of unavoidable. Sometimes I'd be invited to cocktail parties at somebody's house and there's a Communist and they introduced him to me and you can't slap them in the face. You might talk to them but I would never take the initiative. I would pick up some very useful information, but basically I was dealing with the opposition from the Socialist and Christian Democratic groups.

*Q: Now, was Nicolas Redondo, how did you meet him?*

GWYNN: Well, I met him...I didn't meet him until the last year because he was up in the Basque country. I made a couple of trips to the Basque country and met some labor lawyers. I tried to arrange a meeting with him but had never been successful. But then after Franco died he moved down to Madrid, but by that time he had become prominent. Up to that time it was Nicolas Redondo and Felipe Gonzalez; it wasn't until 1974 that both of them pulled off coups within the party and went into the trade union, in which they got rid of old exiles who were living in Toulouse and had not set foot back in Spain, people like Rodolfo Llopis, who was the head of the party in Toulouse. And I've even forgotten the name of the chap who was the head of the trade union in Toulouse, or maybe Llopis may have had both the positions; I think he did. But these people never set foot in Spain. I would have had to go up to France to see them and they probably would have been suspicious of anybody from Spain. And these people were usually suspicious

of people in the American embassy anyway. And it was fairly clear that these people, when I first arrived, these people were totally out of touch with what went on in Spain. There was a new generation led by these labor lawyers who were actually organizing workers in Spain and the people in exile had lost touch. In fact, that was verified in 1974 when Felipe Gonzalez at the political level and Nicolas Redondo at the trade union level went up to their congresses in Spain [?] and threw out the oldsters. Then they brought the de facto headquarters back into Spain, but they still kept offices up in Toulouse, France. So it was at that time that Nicolas Redondo; things eased up a little after Franco died November 1975. He may have come a few months before but things were easing up then when Franco went through a very long agonizing illness of several months. He came down to Spain in the meantime; I had met a friend of his who became an international affairs man who was in Madrid, a fellow named Manuel Simon. And I had had contact with him and I had asked him to set me up with a meeting with Redondo; he introduced me to Redondo. We met in a cafe and had several meetings.

Let me tell you about Felipe Gonzalez and the meeting of other people there. I had become very close friends of the law partner of Felipe Gonzalez' office in Seville and I had tried to make contact with Felipe through him, but Felipe was never there he was always traveling around Europe, and so on and so forth. I finally did meet him at a social function, briefly, and had a little bit of contact with him. But then we had a new ambassador, the first two ambassadors who were there did not want to have any contact with the opposition. Their position was that we were there representing the U.S. to the Franco government and they knew the Franco government did not like our people to have contact with the opposition. In fact, we had frequent complaints, including complaints about myself having contact with these people but then they didn't object because they saw that I began to write some interesting stuff and knew what was going on. This was in the early years in the 1970's but I was even told by different people in authority, from ambassadors on down to political counselors and so on that, "You know, you're having contact with all these people, if you get in any trouble we're not going to bail you out." But they did not tell me to break off the contact. This told me that they were very interested in what I was finding out and they probably liked it, but if the government squawked too harshly they would let me fall to the wolves. Well, that never happened. It never got that far. I found the Spanish government might complain about people but it wouldn't say we'll declare somebody persona non grata or something. They wouldn't go too far, just keep putting the pressures on. But I got to know these Socialists and I was the first person to send Socialists to the U.S. I had to overcome resistance in my embassy. We had a lot of people who had served in Latin America and they thought the word Socialist really meant Communist. They really didn't understand the difference between a Social Democrat and a Communist because in some countries in Latin America the Socialist party was the Communist party. But I sent the first people to the U.S. I introduced Felipe Gonzalez, by that time we had a liberal ambassador who realized that he as an ambassador should have contacts with the opposition and began to do so. And I was the one setting up these different meetings because I knew the opposition people. I knew the Socialists, I knew the Christian Democrats.

*Q: What Ambassador was that, John.*

GWYNN: He was an ambassador named Wells Stabler. He is a career diplomat. I must say the two previous ambassadors were more conservative in orientation and felt that we should not have contact with the opposition and we were there to have contact with the Franco government. Both of them, I won't mention their names, were political ambassadors. It is interesting that the first career ambassador we had immediately saw and understood the complaints of other people about the embassy, that our ambassador never met with the opposition. He discovered much to his chagrin that the British ambassador with whom he became good friends was a...saw Felipe Gonzalez on a regular basis and had him to dinner, so when he found out that the British ambassador did it and he had only been there a couple of months, the new ambassador, Wells Stabler, asked me to arrange a meeting. I might add that it took a while to arrange the meeting. It took about a month and a half. I immediately called my friend, the chap who was the law partner of Felipe Gonzalez in Seville, and said our ambassador would like me to... and he said, "Fine, let me see." He didn't say yes, but he said let me get in touch with Felipe Gonzalez, which he did. Felipe was travelling in Europe some place. He got in touch with him. I didn't hear in about two or three days and the ambassador asked what was going on so I called him again. He said "Be patient. We're working on it." This is what the Socialists in Seville told me. I reported back to the ambassador and the ambassador kept on me on me. The ambassador must have thought I was giving him the runaround, or maybe that I didn't have good contacts. Finally after about a month and a half he came back and said yes and Felipe Gonzalez and three of his people came to the ambassador's residence. I was there and so was the political counselor and we had about a two-hour conversation. After that time, the ambassador met him on a regular basis and I attended all the meetings the ambassador had with him until I left.

*Q: Okay.*

GWYNN: I just wanted to finish on this question of the first meeting of the ambassador with Felipe Gonzalez. Later we found out the reason it took so long, about a month or more, to set up a meeting. It has to do with the image of American ambassadors and the United States, especially to Socialists or to opposition groups. Here was a country where we had supported the Franco regime for forty years; forty years he had been in power, most of the time anyway. Felipe Gonzalez was obviously interested; he came to the meeting but he wanted to cover his left flank. For Socialists to talk to the American ambassador can be like talking to the devil, as it were, if you were viewing things from an ideological point of view. Now, his tenure in power during the last ten years as prime minister of Spain has shown he is a very moderate Socialist. But at that time the party, perhaps still, but certainly at that time had various disparate groups and so... It had an executive committee of 14 people. A couple of them were exiles and most of them were in Spain, different parts of Spain, and the 14 people represented different points of view. Several of the 14 people were much more to the left of Felipe Gonzalez than he was. So he went and checked with each one of these persons and I had to scuttlebutt that a few of them may have objected; he overcame their objections. Also, in this day and age in Spain it was still ...When Franco had died there was still a legacy of the Franco government, it was still a dictatorship, they still bugged telephones and followed people that were



suspicious.... So he had to go around and talk to these people. I imagine probably personally in different parts of Spain, or he would have them come to Madrid to see him to really discuss on a one on one basis and to get each one's approval. It wasn't until he had the approval of all 14 people of the executive committee, which took him a month or so before, until he could say yes to the ambassador's proposal. It didn't perhaps work that way with the British ambassador or other people with whom he felt he could make decisions, but they made a distinction between European ambassadors and the ambassador of the big devil that had supported Franco for so long, the United States of America. I would also add that when he came he brought three people with him. The three people who came with him are prominent politicians now...one is called Enrique Monique Hertzog, another is called Franco Bustello, and the third one is called Maurice Gagnes Barnuello and each one represented a different wing of the party. Bustello was one of the more extreme leftists in the party. They came with him to the ambassador's residence. So there was some method in his madness, in taking a month and half. He was not really being discourteous. Our ambassador understood that once he met with him that his patience had paid off. He had said a couple of times to me, "Well, if he's not willing to meet with me I don't know why I should bother." And I said, "Patience, Mr. Ambassador." And it paid dividends in that respect.

*Q: Thank you, John. Now in contacts with the other union groups in Spain. I'm talking about the Catholic group which I believe is known as the old solenite. Do you recall people like José Maria Zufiaur and Manuel Zaguirre. Could you tell us something about that?*

GWYNN: Okay. Yes. I had a lot of contact with the USO [Unión Sindical Obrera], in some respects my contacts with USO were better than my contacts with the UGT and the PSO, the Socialists. I shouldn't say better but what happened was that the USO people were represented in Madrid by two labor lawyers who had their office quite near the embassy and who seemed to be more accessible to me so I probably had more contacts, more lunches with them. If I wanted to see them I could call them on short notice and we would meet in some bar someplace. The two lawyers by the way were named and are both prominent politicians today. Again, they were in their early 30's, as I was then, and one was called Enrique Baron Crespo. Today he is the president of the European Parliament. In other words, he is a representative of the Socialist party in the European Parliament and for the last couple of years he has been the president and lives in Strasbourg. It shows you his importance. For several years at the beginning of Felipe Gonzalez's regime and in the early eighties he was minister of transport in the government. The second one is a fellow named Agapito Ramos, Agapito Ramos Cuenca, and today he is the number two person, I forget what his title is, in what they called the Community of Madrid, in other words the region of Madrid. He is the second person in charge and for a number of years was the labor minister of the Community of Madrid. But in those days those two chaps were labor lawyers in their official capacity but they were also among the top leaders in the USO, which is the Unión Sindical Obrera. That was a group of Christian Democratic orientation. It was also illegal, clandestine, and it had sort of gotten away from its Christian roots in some respects. It was very close to the French CFDT with whom they had a lot of contact. And they were also the biggest rivals

of the UGT and the Socialist trade union there, and of course both the USO and the UGT were the rivals of the Comisiones Obreras, the Communist trade union. Now you mentioned José Maria Zufiaur, who then for several years became the head, the secretary general, of the USO. And who then some years ago the USO merged with the UGT back now, once Spain became democratic and José Maria Zufiaur [same name as Jim mentioned above and whom John was discussing] is one of the top leaders of the UGT perhaps maybe the second most, arguably the second most important after Nicolas Redondo in the UGT today. When I met Zufiaur he didn't live in Madrid. Bear in mind it was not tremendously difficult to have contact with people in Madrid. It was very difficult to have contact with people spread around the country, especially the way the government would listen in on phone conversations. I remember when I was going up in 1974 on a trip to Navarra and to the Basque country and Bilbao. I had lunch with Ricardo Pinto and Ramos and Enrique Baron earlier and I had said, "I'm going up to the Basque country. I know you have some strength up there. Would it be possible for me to meet some of your people there?" And they said, "Yes, okay." And then they called me back and evidently it was done in a somewhat clandestine cloak and dagger way, not at my request, but at theirs. They came, they said "Alright, be in this hotel in Bilbao," or, "What hotel are you staying in?" I told them the hotel they said, "We will have someone what morning. What days will you be there?" and I said we will have somebody there the morning of such and such. In other words I was not to call the person in Bilbao and he was not to call me but they would let him know through correspondence or courier to meet me at such and such a time and place. So there I was in my hotel in Bilbao at such and such a time, I think it was six in the evening or something, I can't remember precisely, and sitting there in the little bar. It must have been the evening and sure enough somebody comes in and asks for Mr. Gwynn; we introduced ourselves and it was José Maria Zufiaur. I didn't realize they were going to have me meet the secretary general, I thought I was going to meet someone... I was very impressed with the person and had contact with him and in subsequent years he came down every now and then and I had sporadic contact with him, too, but the USO was a very important organization. I was pleased to see that it did eventually merge with the UGT; well I should say that there was an element of it that didn't merge. A chap you may mention, Manuel Segirra, didn't, but the main group did merge. I never did have much contact with Segirra; my contact was with the others that did merge with the UGT.

*Q: John, at that time before Franco passed away, was there some ferment on the trade union scene? Was there any strike action or any manifestations of discontent?*

GWYNN: There was a lot of ferment there. There were some strike actions, not too much. The government reacted rather harshly to strike actions, but there were some strike actions around different places. In fact there were even a couple of attempts at general strikes. They were sort of failures in Madrid, more successful in some of the outlying places. And usually, I have to admit, the strikes that were successful were usually the Comisiones Obreras, the Communist ones. Now in recent years I believe the UGT has really overtaken the Comisiones Obreras. Why were the Comisiones Obreras so successful? Well, I have to take my hat off to the Communists. They know how to operate in some respects. In the 1960's (I was there in the 1970's) the syndical

organization, the government labor front, had opened up somewhat and had said they were going to have a somewhat more open minded minister, a fellow named Solis Ruiz, whom I got to know later on when he was no longer minister. He was an old Falangist, but he had some ideas of open direction. The syndical organization was under constant attack at the ILO [International Labor Organization], trade unions, and the ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions], so he said he was going to show that they had democratic elections. So he had democratic elections for shop stewards and other low-level positions, equivalent positions; they had long been appointed. The Communists were a small force then and they called for participation in the elections; the socialists, the UGT, Christian Democrats, and USO called for a boycott. Well, guess what happened? You had the elections of the official civic controlled by the fascists at the top and a whole bunch of communists came in at the lower levels and began taking over the official organization from the bottom. Now, the government realized its mistake and began to jail a lot of people and one thing and another but a number of them still hung on there. And then, even when the people were jailed, others would come in. They did maintain a somewhat electoral system and somewhat moderately free system at the base and they kept getting these people in there. You would have these Communists; if they got taken out of a ward and the government didn't know who they were -- that they were Communists -- they were in some respects model trade unionists for the government. They wouldn't cause any problems. They would go to work and work for education groups within the syndical organization and they would implant all these ideas surreptitiously and that's how the Comisiones Obreras got a start. And the UGT Socialists, Christian Democrats and others made the mistake of boycotting. Their position was a purist one. We can't participate in elections at the factory level of a fascist organization. I mean they lost out; they're not in now. They've made up the grounds since democracy came in and the Communists have lost ground considerably but it took a long time to do that.

*Q: One other aspect took time, John. What was the position of the Catholic Church, especially young priests who were very interested in the social and economic outlook for workers?*

GWYNN: Actually, it was very interesting. You had two sorts of groups in the Catholic Church, sort of splits. A number of the activists, these social sense labor activists, turned out to be Jesuits. This is perhaps no surprise. It happened in other countries, too. They are perhaps the best educated. There's something about the way they're trained. Now some of these people became involved with the Comisiones Obreras. In fact in a case that happened while I was there, ten people were arrested. Ten top leaders of the Comisiones Obreras and one of them was a priest. He was not a Communist party member. He subsequently became one after he was let loose some five years later. Although they got the top leadership other Communists emerged.

*End of interview*