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

SOLOMON BARKIN

Interviewed by: Morris Weisz
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Barkin.]

Q: Today is the ninth day of October, Columbus Day, 1995. This is Morris Weisz speaking for the Association for Diplomatic Studies oral history program called Labor Diplomacy Oral History Program. I am sitting in the pleasant home on the outskirts of Amherst with University of Massachusetts Professor Emeritus Sol Barkin. Sol Barkin is an old friend and we have crossed paths many times over the last half century in various capacities that each of us has had.

I want to take advantage of this opportunity to talk to Sol about the various assignments he had, chiefly in the trade union movement, but also with the international trade unions, and in his capacity in various government and non-government assignments abroad when he would represent the union or himself as an international civil servant during a period of time when he was serving with the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) in Paris. The breadth of experience of Professor Barkin is one that enables him to approach the subjects of interest to the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project that are rather unique I believe. In any event, they will be an important contribution to the collection that we are making of the views of people who certainly did not spend any major portion of their lives as government employees but who had an observation point, or a number of observation points, of our work that enables them to give a critique of what was being done and perhaps even a suggestion or two about what should be done in this field. Professor Barkin—

BARKIN: Thank you Morrie.

Q: Begin with your early life.

BARKIN: Life begins when you are born and I was born December 2nd, 1907 in New York City. I am the son of two immigrants. The important fact is that they came to the United States in 1906 at the end of the revolution in Russia, and they had participated in the intellectual ferment of the time.

Q: Were they married at the time that they came?

BARKIN: Yes. History records, of course, that following the conclusion of that episode there was widespread prosecution both of Jews and the liberal or radical thinkers of the time. It was in that circumstance that they turned to the United States.

Q: Were they members of any organized group or just a feeling that they—

BARKIN: I'm not sure. One interesting fact about my background is that my father who comes from a small town outside of Vitebsk, which has been made famous by the paintings of the great Jewish artist, the name slips me at the moment—

ELAINE BARKIN: Chagall.

Q: Marc Chagall, I know him well. I know his paintings. And this is the function performed many times in our interviews where the person being interviewed has a wife who has a good memory. Thank you, Elaine, you are part of our transcript.

BARKIN: The best I've ever been able to learn is that my father, like many, was a young lad in a small town outside of the city of Vitebsk, which was a large city. He had undergone an apprenticeship in carpentry, furniture production in Moscow, which was a rare privilege. He had spent some time in Moscow and came out a finished craftsman.

My mother is the daughter of a practicing rabbi, who had devoted his life to teaching rather than being a practicing officiator of a congregation, as we would normally think of in the United States. He devoted himself completely to learning. He wrote many books. As a matter of fact, as a youngster one of my incentives for learning Yiddish was that I would then be able to read his writings. When I was 11 or 12, I began a correspondence with him and—

Q: He was still living in Europe?

BARKIN: Yes. We had about four letters exchanged, and then the war broke that relationship.

Q: Did you save the letters?

BARKIN: No. My mother was brought up in a family where her father was devoted to learning, studying, writing, and her mother ran what we would call a grocery store or a general store. My mother was therefore, from a youth, raised as a clerk in that kind of a store, and that gave her a practical slant on life, which I've recognized constantly in more later years as I grew up and became more familiar with her performance. My home was the center of constant (tape is bad here)— relatives and— who came and we were always a home of great discussion on all kinds of political problems and— the Russian and the Jewish life in—

Q: Proceed Sol. We seem to have been disconnected for a minute but go ahead.

BARKIN: I have just identified the atmosphere of my home.

Q: Can I ask you one question about that? You keep saying there was a discussion of political things, I want to get an idea when you got into trade union. Did you mean political and trade union or just political?

BARKIN: Just political. I might add that my father, when he came to this country, immediately got a job as a carpenter. In those days Jews were not admitted to the carpenters union, and very few Jews could engage in new construction work. Whatever work they found of that kind, carpentry work, really was of secondary nature, repair

work, refashioning old structures, and that's what he engaged in from the very beginning.

Q: That is as early as 1906 when he arrived?

BARKIN: It was 1906 when he came.

Q: He immediately began practicing his trade. The reason I ask you this—

BARKIN: He was not a trade unionist here.

Q: I understand that but at that time or shortly thereafter Kitty Barbesh whom you know, her father came from Europe. The name he had was Hubbabank which you know is the Yiddish word for carpenter. He became a carpenter and at one point formed a Jewish carpenters local in the carpenters union which is interesting; the direct opposite of your father's experience.

BARKIN: Now sometime in the early years of which I had no knowledge, he became associated with a Jewish contractor and remained with him for most of his years. This man we would ordinarily call an outside man, he got the jobs, he took the risks and my father—

Q: No, this man took the financial risk and your father took the physical risks?

BARKIN: That's right. My father became in effect the superintendent of construction. It's too broad a title because the staff he hired were never more than five or six people, but he was in charge and he spent his years at that occupation. When I grew a little and was in my teens, I became of assistance to him because he would have to examine all of the plans and drawings and calculate all the figures about material, which was needed, and tools which were needed. By the time I was in the seventh and eighth grade, I was sitting at the table with him at night helping him calculate the tons and numbers of each piece that had to be bought, and so I became a theoretical operator. He made sure that I would never learn how to be a carpenter.

Q: He had greater ambitions for his son.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: When did you become interested in trade unionism? Much later?

BARKIN: Much later. As a matter of fact, my interests or identification with unions came very much later. The source of my interest has to be traced to a different area. As you know many of the Jewish radicals in Russia belonged to an organization called the Bund.

Q: I have to interrupt, the Bund is a sort of radical organization that believed in solving the problems of Jews where they were rather than going to Palestine.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: That was the line of demarcation between that group and the ones who were leaving.

BARKIN: As you suggest, they were preoccupied with current problems, and they were closely associated with the modernizing trends and culture in the Jewish community in Europe. They were the people who read Yiddish rather than Hebrew, and from among them came the Yiddish writers, the Yiddish poets, dramatists, and theatricians. They were the background of the Jewish culture group, the European culture groups, in this country.

Q: Now coming here, was this activity, I'm trying to seek it out to find out what influences you with the Bund organization here or the workman's circle?

BARKIN: No, no. They of course shortly joined the workman's circle and joined the branch which covered the detects (Keps?) community. As a youth, I went with them to celebrations, parties, and meetings convened by this branch of the workman's circle.

Q: You can see from our list of people that we have a number of interviews with that type of background. I think this is as good a place as any to say that the Jewish communities were divided not so much geographically in the United States but geographically in terms of where they came from.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: So they had a branch as you said of the Keps people. These were called— What were they called?

BARKIN: Branches.

Q: They called them branches in the workman's circle, but the groups associated with a particular city were called— I think there was a name that they—

BARKIN: That's right. Fraternities. Now as to one further fact, the Jewish community has been divided between those who were devoted to the religious observances and associations and those who were secular. The radical Jewish community, the youth in Russia at the time at the beginning of the century, were increasingly secular Jews. Obviously having been raised in communities and homes in which the orthodox observances were common and established, they were thoroughly familiar with it, but there was at that time an increasing interest in the secular communities in which they lived.

Many Jewish young men and women became leaders in the general Russian, Polish, and Romanian radical movements of this time. They came to this country, and they were non-observant Jews. Some of them were radical enough to defy the religious observances. Others like my father and mother were brought up in a thoroughly religious home; of course, my mother's father was a rabbi. They all were observant, but by the

time they came to this country they had been indoctrinated with a much more secular vision. To them Jewish practice was the common religious practice and observances of life and rules and morality were inherited within the culture of the religious community. They came to this country and associated themselves with the workman's circle, their countrymen, which consisted of members from the same regional area.

Q: We call that lanslite, people who came from the same area.

BARKIN: That's right. The dominant view and outlook was that of a radical Russian Jewish person.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters? Were you the eldest?

BARKIN: I just had one sister.

Q: You were born shortly after they arrived?

BARKIN: That's right. We always lived in a Jewish community wherever we lived. We originally lived in Brooklyn in— I think it was called the Bushwick area, but then because of some health problems that I presented to my parents, we moved to Manhattan so we would be close to the Mount Sinai Hospital on 102nd Street and Madison Avenue.

Q: Where did you live at that time?

BARKIN: 103rd.

Q: I lived at 109th.

BARKIN: When I became about seven or eight probably, as was customary I was sent to a religious instruction school.

Q: In spite of the fact that your parents were secular?

BARKIN: Yes. But in the meantime the workman's circle created a Yiddish school system, and as soon as that opened, I was transferred to a workman's circle school. I remained there from about 1921 to about—

Q: You were seven years old in 1913.

BARKIN: Yes. By 1921— It was before that. I must have been about seven or eight or nine. I think it was toward the end of the war, 1918— I remained there. I graduated from their Yiddish elementary school and then their—

Q: This was not a full-time school?

BARKIN: No, it is a weekend school conducted in Yiddish, wrote in Yiddish, spoke in

Yiddish, read Yiddish literature, and—

Q: Was that on 103rd Street?

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: My wife Yetta went there. The public school you went to—

BARKIN: 103rd Street, PS 171.

Q: Oh really? That's another thing you have in common with my wife Yetta. By the way, where was that brief period of religious training? At a local synagogue?

BARKIN: I have no recollection. I went to the elementary school, graduated from there, and I was the first class of this workman's circle. When I graduated from that I was in the first class of their high school. When I graduated from high school, by that time I was in college, and they enrolled me immediately as a teacher. I was a junior in college.

Q: This was City College?

BARKIN: Yes, uptown because there was no downtown yet. I began and I taught two courses in Yiddish. One was the history of utopian thought, and by that time there were two books that came out in English which provided the text. The second was the history of trade unionism.

Q: Oh, you taught that?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: On the basis of—

BARKIN: On the basis of what I read.

Q: And the studies you had had in the workman's circle?

BARKIN: Yes, but the text I used, I always remember it, was by a man by the name of Max Beer who's written a number of small books on the history of socialist and trade union movements in the world. I am a self-taught—f course the culture in which I was brought up, both at home and particularly in the school, was pro-socialist and pro-trade unions. It was a very live and stimulating experience.

Q: What was the coordination, if any, between that teaching, and that learning, and what you took at City College?

BARKIN: None.

Q: You never took economics at City College?

BARKIN: Oh yes, I was a major in economics. I was really a major in history.

Q: That's what I want to get to Sol.

BARKIN: I was really a major in economics and history. My difficulty with economics at the college is that I had had in my Yiddish schooling a pretty good grounding in Marxism. The chief teacher whom we had was a very bright man. We had several teachers, but the principal teacher was a very bright man. One of the distinguishing facts about him is that he wrote a textbook in Yiddish on anthropology, a comparison of various cultures. As a youngster I had already—

Q: That means you had a Jewish instructor in economics at City College as early as 1920 something?

BARKIN: Not a Jewish.

Q: You said he wrote in Yiddish?

BARKIN: That's in the Yiddish school.

Q: But at City College you did not have that type of—

BARKIN: No.

Q: Right.

BARKIN: As a matter of fact I majored in economics and history but because of my grounding in Marxism at the Yiddish school, I knew everything, and the student body at City College in those days was very radical in its broad orientation and the teacher of elementary economics was the president of the school. Robinson was his name.

Q: How well I remember him. He taught economics in those days?

BARKIN: Yes. He was a very funny guy. He was dressed with tails, and he would deliver his lectures to a mass of 300 to 400 students. We who were rebels at heart would get together before the class and assign each other the questions we would raise. During the session we were trying to get him into trouble, we would ask him questions. So we had a constant battle in class with him, even with 400 students there.

Q: What was his reaction to yours? Later on he was not as communicative with his students.

BARKIN: No. The other characteristic of the period is that we had at the time military science protests. I was required to take two years of military science.

Q: It was compulsory in those days?

BARKIN: It was compulsory then.

Q: It was not compulsory when I went there or when Colin Powell went there.

BARKIN: That's right. During the winter we would train in the alleys, in the building. In the spring we would train outside. I had a captain in my first year by the name of Crawford. As you can understand, his name was imprinted along behind, and I was the tallest man in the squad. I was always protesting something or other and the result was at the end of the term he failed me. In my career at City College I found when I graduated I was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa, but I was the only Phi Beta Kappa—

Q: Who had failed a course.

BARKIN: And I had to take this course over again, so the next time I took it I behaved.

Q: This would be the time when Felix Cohen was there is that right?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: Because he was involved in these protests. Did you take any courses with Morris Raphael Cohen? Morris Raphael Cohen, the famous philosopher, was the father of this protester in the school, and there were quite a bit of problems.

BARKIN: Of course Morris Raphael Cohen was a prominent philosopher, and so you would go to hear his lectures, but I never took a course completely with him. My orientation toward trade unionism comes primarily from the Yiddish school training and studies, which they developed. Of course one thing that I have to mention is that I was the youngest member of this class at the Yiddish school, from the beginning to the end. I was tall and—

Q: You are still tall but a little less tall.

BARKIN: Yes, comparatively.

Q: Six feet?

BARKIN: Yes. I was always towering over these fellow students and trying to keep up, presumably, with them, but I was engaged in all of these kinds of things. In retrospect I have always had a feeling that this isolated me somewhat from the group as a whole. Now the students in this class were extraordinarily gifted.

Q: You're talking about the Yiddish school?

BARKIN: The Yiddish school. Now at City College I took a great many history courses because I was too much disturbed by the contrast in my own views and those taught in the economics courses. Two things developed which were very interesting. First, by the time I took history courses, by the time I was a junior, I had gotten acquainted with a historian from the University of California, not personally but through his writings, who was a non-determinist. Here, I had been brought up as a Marxist with a determinism, and he opened my mind to the fact that history is not really a simple logical progression. I became increasingly influenced by—

Q: Critical of Marxism which is—

BARKIN: I began reading a great deal in those years, particularly the British socialist writings.

Q: The Webbs?

BARKIN: Well of course the Webbs but the man who impressed me most, all of whose writings I've read, is (George Douglas Howard) G.D.H. Cole. G.D.H. Cole was an English philosopher, economist, and social thinker who inspired back in 1915 the English guild socialist movement. I was very much amused. This was a whole period of great intellectual ferment in myself as I look back. I was thoroughly conversant with the British socialist, English socialist writings. Besides people like (George Bernard) Shaw and (Sidney) Webb and Cole, there were a lot of other people who greatly influenced me particularly in the political science field because that is where the thinking was occurring.

Now there was another influence in my life at that time. One of my teachers in the Yiddish school was a Jewish historian. He wrote his Ph.D. thesis in Germany on the Polish socialist movement, on Polish history, and he established at his home a little study group of people, training them, encouraging them, to do historical work. That attracted me greatly. I was still at college and we used to meet very regularly at his home. He lived in the amalgamated homes in the upper Bronx.

Q: Mosholu Parkways.

BARKIN: That's right, so I used the Mosholu Parkway. I had my first assignment—

Q: What was his name, do you remember?

BARKIN: Jacob Shatzky. My first assignment, following the German traditional methods of raising Ph.D. 's; he assigned me Moses Montefiore. He was a great Jewish English philanthropist who did a great deal of traveling through the Near East, splitting his philanthropic assistance; he was a very prominent man in Jewish life and in economic life in England; he was the third Moses Montefiore.

Q: Financed a whole lot of hospitals in New York.

BARKIN: That's right. I was assigned the two volumes of memoirs that he wrote. He lived somewhere from about 1820 to about 1860-70, in that stretch of period. My responsibility in this project was to find out all of his mistakes, where he made claims which were not justified and where he made statements which were wrong. It was an exercise in editing two volumes in English and then I undertook—

Q: Was that published?

BARKIN: No.

Q: That was not your first published work?

BARKIN: No. My first published work was in Yiddish. I wrote a report on Jewish political emancipation in England, 1932 to 1957. When the Jews were first recognized and committed to take the oath, not a Christian oath, they could join the House of Parliament. I wrote this story of the struggle of all the events.

Q: It took from 1924 general emancipation you might say, until '32 before the Jews were given the rights—

BARKIN: '54.

Q: 1854. Because in 1824 was when the parliamentary—

(Transcribers note: These dates need to be checked. First they are talking about the 1900's then the 1800's)

BARKIN: No. '32 was when parliament was radicalized.

Q: Was it '32?

BARKIN: Yes. By the time I graduated from college, I had this supplementary training as a German historian because that was the way in which he had been raised as a historian.

Q: This is interesting in terms of what I hoped we'll later go into, and that is there are so many people with this City College experience under Robinson, including myself, and at the same time influenced by a totally contrary experience outside of the college. Somebody, and it won't be either of us, should study the impact this had on our later life which was just one of being so obstreperous because we had to fight all during this period.

BARKIN: You see, at the present time when the agitation is being revised about making English the official language, the people who represent this narrow parochial view fail to realize their anxiety to dominate the society and impose their own culture form, the great contributions which these successive waves of immigrants and cultures brought to the United States and enriched our American culture. Of course it is well known the Jews had

been prominent members of the American literary world, music world, painting, philosophy, every field, in politics too—

Q: But to what degree was that because they retained their early language in addition to studying English which at least in my case—

BARKIN: Well you see, it's true. You often hear this now in discussions on the second language, English as a second language. People object to it—when you're raised in two different cultures in which the influence of each is exerted through different channels—In my own case, my home is Yiddish training, and our circle of friends inherited a culture of values which were almost unknown in the Anglo-Saxon community. The constant effort to reconcile these, to integrate these, to create and adapt oneself to the clashes and reinforcements from meek is a constant creative process with which a person like myself, I can tell you, is constantly aware of and of course it is true to a major— (end side)

I would just like to make one mention of the culmination of these various influences that occurred in my senior year in college, when I was president of the history club and delivered my annual address. It was devoted to the subject of Marxist historical materialism of which I had become a very ardent critic.

Q: By then yes. That's interesting. You were saying as we closed out the other thing about the function of creativity. So, let's start you on your trade union career and how it began.

BARKIN: As is quite apparent, unlike your own, I had no direct experience or contacts with trade unions until I came to the Textile Union in '37. In the meantime I went to Columbia and got my masters degree in economics, which was '28 to '29. During the summer of '29, I became a director of a swimming pool for the summer in one of the public schools in Harlem on 140th Street and Lennox Avenue. That was my first real contact with the problem of black people. Interestingly enough, the head of the physical grounds was a black man from Chicago, and he explained to me the competition and attitudes of black people to one another depending on the degree of coloration of their skin. That same summer while I was working in the swimming pool, directing it, I was also learning what a shepherd's crook is; when somebody is having trouble in the pool you hand a shepherd's crook to them to grab hold, and that's what qualified me as the director of the pool. In any event, that first year—

Q: What made you go there, is it because of its proximity to City College, 140th? You just got the job?

BARKIN: I just got the job, that's all.

Q: This was before the depression really hit.

BARKIN: That's right. That's a funny story. While directing the swimming pool I had gotten into the habit of reading The New York Times, a non sequitur. Along about the second week of The New York Times in 1929, there was a notice that a commission on

old age security had been appointed by the government of the state of New York. It was to be manned by nine people, three appointed by the governor, three by the speaker of the house, and three by the president of the senate. I had just taken a course in social legislation so obviously I was a know-it-all. I wrote to the chairman of the commission who was a Republican from Westchester County, and told him I'd very much like to do the work for the commission. He wrote me back that they had already appointed the director, but he sent me in the letter the name and the address of this man. The man happens to be Luther Gulick.

Q: Oh my lord!

BARKIN: And his office was 261 Broadway. He was president of the Institute of Public Administration, which had been founded by Charles Beard. I went down there on July 23rd and told him that I was interested. He informed me that he would be interested, he'll give me an assignment, and he's going away for a vacation. There were five other people whom he had engaged in the same way.

Again to make a long story short, the summer ended and he came back. I handed him my piece of work, and the other guys did, but I was the only one who was left, the others disappeared. I became the sole member of the staff except for him, but he had a lot of other work, and so in effect it meant that I became the ex-officio director of research for the state legislative commission on old age security in 1929.

Q: Whom did you take the course under? Was it Brissenden in Columbia who gave the course on social legislation?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: A wonderful man.

BARKIN: Yes. I remained three-and-three-quarter years. Of course, the most interesting thing was that I didn't even have to ask him how much he was going to pay me because in those days a contract was simple, only a rate of pay and you had nothing else.

Q: No social security like you were fighting for.

BARKIN: I soon learned that I was getting $100 a day.

Q: A day!!!?

BARKIN: Yes. How do you figure that out? Well, he had a whole staff of experts. He conducted all kinds of research going into state governments. He had an expert on police and finance. How do you pay these guys? I'm just another member of the staff, and so I was engaged and remained with him until June 1933.

Q: That's quite an income!

BARKIN: There is one footnote, the last year we ran out of money, and the legislature didn't appropriate so I worked for nothing the last year. There was one compensation for that. After we wrote the report on old age security, I had a copy. It was a huge volume of which I personally wrote about three quarters of the volume. We undertook at the end in 1930 (of course the stock market in the meantime had crashed) a study called The Older Worker in Industry. That lasted the other two-and-a-half years, or two-and-three-quarters, or something like that.

Q: Until '37?

BARKIN: No, '33. It was called The Older Worker in Industry, and he agreed that that could serve as my dissertation. Luther Gulick, in addition to his directorship, was professor in government at Columbia University's graduate school, of which I was a student. Something happened and I was suddenly informed that I had gotten a university fellowship or scholarship which was $1,900 at that time. For the last year, instead of getting $100 a day, I got $1,900 for the year and I attended graduate school for my second year. I finished in June 1933.

A major part of the book was built on a survey of the ages and labor turnover in New York state manufacturing industries. All I can tell you is, to give you a sense of the magnitude of the study, there were over 300,000 punch cards. I went to the president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (We didn't have money for that. You would have had to have at least $100,000) and I persuaded him to do it for nothing. It was my greatest achievement of salesmanship in my whole life.

Q: Was this the Dublin guy who was so well known?

BARKIN: No. I went to the president of the Metropolitan, and then he assigned it to Dublin; that's how I got acquainted with Dublin.

Q: Dublin was the father of Mary Dublin Kaiserly, Leon Kaiserly's wife.

BARKIN: That's right. I still had no familiarity with unions. In June 1933 I got the sad news that one member of the dissertation committee objected to awarding acceptance of my dissertation because I handed them a printed copy of the report.

Q: Rather than a draft to comment on?

BARKIN: Yes. It was Burnes, , and—

Q: Eveline Burnes?

BARKIN: Yes. It was her first year there. In any event, I never completed the essay that she wanted me to write on the theory of minimum wages so I never got a degree.

Q: Although everybody refers to you as Doctor Barkin?

BARKIN: Yes. I've never received the degree. I had all my course work. That's a fact. That was 1933. At that time I became unemployed, obviously. It was the time of the New Deal and everybody was going to Washington, so I went to Washington. I took a room at the YMCA and spent about a week in Washington moving from one department to another. Nobody wanted a brilliant guy, obviously.

Q: As a matter of curiosity did you apply with David Sapas at the NLLB?

BARKIN: No, there was no NLLB yet.

Q: It didn't exist until '35, you're right.

BARKIN: No, there was not even the preliminary committee. I had one final place to go and that was Leo Walman, who had been chairman of my dissertation committee.

Q: He was with the NRA?

BARKIN: He was chairman of the Labor Advisory Board, the NRA. I went down to Leo Walman and said, "Leo, I've been going around, I haven't found anything." I just thought I'd pay my respect to him. After a little schmooze you know, he said, "You see that empty chair there? That's yours." That's how I became an employee of the federal government and remained there until the end of February, 1937.

There were two firings. Once was when the NRA was declared unconstitutional in '35, and then they established an extension committee in '36. Everybody was fired except for five people, and I was one of the five. The president appointed a commission on industrial analysis in the Department of Commerce, and so I became head of the labor section of the division on industrial analysis of the United States Department of Commerce.

Q: Let me ask you a question. You mentioned Walman, it has very little to do with international, but it became a subject of last week's conference. Somebody had some foreign experience that he referred to a person at the NLRB 60th anniversary. It has some reference to the German plan of co-determination and he said under that plan (I think he was inaccurate) a minority union has certain rights. That was his statement. He said, "What's wrong with the idea of giving instead of exclusive rights to representation to the union that gets a majority, what about a union that gets 49 percent of the vote, shouldn't they be entitled to some form of representation?" I responded by saying that that was Walman's idea at the NRA of—

BARKIN: The automobile industry.

Q: Right. And I thought that the decision had been made that it was better to have a majority union with a duty and responsibility of representing the entire work force rather

than breaking up the unions so that they fight with one another. The thing that is relevant to our international work is it illustrates the difficulty in translating one country's perceived advantage, Germany being the example, to another country without any knowledge of the context in which that is done. What was Walman's position on that?

BARKIN: I can't tell you specifically, but the fact of the matter is that the German system is not that. It has a collective bargaining part and the works council. The works council has no right to declare a strike. The strike has to be declared by the union.

Q: Right. Anyhow that's a different system but the point I wanted to get in here was what was the rationale of Walman's position in the automobile thing. You don't know. OK, you worked for him but on this thing you don't know.

BARKIN: He was such an outcast by that time—

Q: He was a good professor though wasn't he?

BARKIN: Sure. He became too acquiescent and he wanted peace.

Q: You worked there until '37 when you went to the Textile Workers?

BARKIN: February '37. Now that was interesting. This is the first time I'll let it go on record. Toward the end of my stay in Washington, of course I was beginning to look for a job. I had become a friend of the economist for the Mine Workers named—

Q: Brubaker?

BARKIN: No, this was before—

Q: Oh, Harold Ruttenberg. Before Ruttenberg?

BARKIN: Yes. It's in this book.

Q: We just stopped for a minute to look up a name that you were unable to find but it does remind me that one of the things I want to get on to our record which is very important and that is the name of the book written by a former student of yours which has come out within the last year or so which reviews your career. For any student working on material please give the title and publisher.

BARKIN: Do you want me to do it now?

Q: Yes. You're recording right now.

BARKIN: The name of the book is Activist Unionism. The subtitle is The Institutional Economics of Solomon Barkin. The author is Donald R. Stabile, published by M.E. Sharpe and it appeared in November 1993. It is a distillation, a cohesive organization of

my writings and thinking. It has two forwards, one by Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, to represent an academic introduction, and the other by a man by the name of Sol Stetin, who was the last president of the Textile Workers Union to present an appraisal of this undertaking from the point of view of a union officer.

The chapters run: The two worlds of Solomon Barkin; the second chapter, A system of trade union economics; the third chapter, Workers, jobs and unions; the fourth chapter, Responsibilities of industry; the fifth chapter, How unions serve their members; sixth chapter, Coordinated government policy; seventh chapter, The decline of the labor movement; and the last chapter, Conclusion, full productive and freely chosen employment, which I may note is the title of the ILO resolution of 1961-63 on full employment. The book also contains a full bibliography of my writings which extends from pages 243 to page 272.

Q: Thanks. Now any student who is reading this interview when it's done will be able to go for details on any of the subjects he wants. Thanks very much.

BARKIN: I have subsequently, and I'm currently still engaged in trying to find an author who would assemble in the same fashion all my sociological writings. Stabile is an economist and concentrates obviously on the economic writings. I have written rather extensively in the sociological field on the theory of unionism— In the United States we speak about job consciousness as being a basis of unionism; I call that in question. I think that one of the causes of the present dilemma of unionism is what I call narrow concept—

Q: The Pearlman concept.

BARKIN: Yes, of unionism and prefer to have an orientation of a broad activism scaling a vast number of issues and representation for workers in the local community and in the national policy making.

Q: Broader than just the job.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Jack Barbesh in his interview refers to this as the broad social vision of—

BARKIN: You see there have been so many industrial changes and changes in the philosophy of management that management on the one hand contends that it can't live with the precise job controls with which unionism has been associated. By the way, it was management that instituted the job control concept back in the '20s. They established the concept of governing, managing by rules, establishing guides. When unions came along they fastened on to this management practice of establishing controls and rules as the backbone of the collective bargaining process at the job level.

That is being modified in American collective bargaining because management offers many, many concessions from time to time in order to gain more liberty. For example,

they don't want this multiplication of job titles and the restrictions of jobs. They want a more broadly prepared, trained, understanding, and cooperative worker. Now that requires a completely different type of analysis, and I'm urging that kind. I recently delivered a speech in which I developed this idea in more specificity. This speech was delivered in May 1995 at a conference conducted by the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining and Higher Education at the professional school of public affairs at Brook University. The title of that speech is *Union Activism, a Response to Regression*. It's a new world and I offered my suggestions.

We're getting back again to the flow of my coming into the trade union movement which I now will proceed to. When the NRA job concluded, I was looking for another employment. I was mentioning before that the one outstanding economist for trade unions who was never an employee but a consultant, there are two, Leo Walman was one and this man whose name slips me is the second. He was the economic advisor to John L. Lewis. We became close friends. As a matter of fact he—

Q: You don't mean Jet Louwk?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: See it did come to me. But he was not with the Steel Workers.

BARKIN: No.

Q: I thought you said the Steel Workers.

BARKIN: It was the United Mine Workers.

Q: W. Jet Louwk, an engineer by the way.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Not a lawyer or an economist.

BARKIN: One who was very helpful to John L. Lewis.

Q: Yes.

BARKIN: He recommended me to the Structural Steel Workers Union.

Q: You mean the Iron Workers Union?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: Really? Was that your first union?

BARKIN: Yes, in St. Louis. I was hired then at the same rate of pay that I got in the government, and I was to move out to St. Louis. I must confess that it didn't work out that way. I closed my employment in Washington and returned to New York to bid my parents adieu as I went to the midwest. I thought I had an opportunity to see Sydney Hillman so I went down just to say hello and good-bye. I went in to see Sydney Hillman and his secretary, who had been in Washington frequently, asked me whether I had received Sydney Hillman's letter. I said, "No, I hadn't received it." To make a long story short, she called Sydney in his office and he invited me into his office. The result of it is that he hired me to be his economist to parallel Leo Walman who had been his economist previously. That is how I got into the trade union movement.

Q: Sydney Hillman at that time was the head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers but also very active in the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations).

BARKIN: He was a member of the labor advisory board of the NRA; that's where we became acquainted. He and I used to have battles. This is always funny, and I can't explain it to this day because of course he was defining the problems always in terms of his industry and his needs and negotiated codes in those terms, whereas I was identified with some of the large big industries, construction, printing, trucking. It's a little impudent but that's the way of stating it clearly. My background to this industrial problem was in negotiating individual codes under the NRA, the labor provisions of them. By this time I was the associate director of the staff of the board and I handled some of the big industries like construction, printing, trucking. These industries—

Q: Far different from the clothing obviously.

BARKIN: Yes. These were industries in which there were strong unions and they had a lot of internal union problems, management problems, because after all in each one of these industries there are many subdivisions. In any event I handled them and apparently effectively so that the unions were very, very happy with what I was doing. I also got acquainted with the presidents of the unions, particularly a man by the name of George Berry who was the president of the Pressman's Union, and Charlie Howard the president of the Typographical Union.

Q: Were both of them CIO unions?

BARKIN: They were always craft unions.

Q: I thought the second of those unions under Howard was CIO?

BARKIN: No. He was sympathetic to the CIO, but he was a craft union. The trucking union, Tobin himself didn't come down but I had another man who was in close contact—

Q: This was the Teamsters Union?

BARKIN: Yes, the Teamsters.

Q: Kaplan?

BARKIN: No.

Q: He was the research man for the Teamsters.

BARKIN: This man was a field man from Philadelphia. In any event, this was a very fruitful experience because not only did I negotiate these problems, I had a very wonderful experience in fact. Allow me to take one which is probably the most dramatic I had. The employers in the construction industry wanted a 48 hour week while all other industries were scheduled for a 40 hour week. The issue finally came up to President Roosevelt. During this whole process of course I was intimately involved, sometimes actually the spokesman in the battle before President Roosevelt on resisting. Of course, it was not my oratory or my logic, it was the power of the unions that I had as leverage. To make a long story short, one little trick I played in the negotiations which I look back with very fondly was to play with the reporter of The New York Times and place a story with him that if we didn't get what we wanted, a repeal of the demand for a 48 hour week, we would call them into a national strike. It was a very pretentious kind of remark but in any event it worked.

Q: This was to your friend, Abe Raskin?

BARKIN: No, this was Louie Stark.

Q: Louie Stark, his predecessor. It was a long time ago but he was an excellent reporter.

BARKIN: Yes. So Louie played with us on this thing. I have no way of telling where he was, how much by way of construction, the nebulous construction which this had. In any event the president persuaded everybody to keep the 40 hour week, and I had my great experience in national negotiations.

Q: That enabled you to know enough people so that it is logical for you to enter one of the unions and the Textile Workers was the one I gather?

BARKIN: What?

Q: I said that experience gave you knowledge of all these other people and that was your introduction I assume to the Textile Workers?

BARKIN: No. It was Sydney Hillman. It was completely a personal relationship. I fought with Sydney all through the years. I still don't understand how he came to enjoy my troublesome behavior but in any event it paid off.

Q: In the CIO he was going to be responsible for the textile organization.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Yes, I remember.

BARKIN: He was chairman of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee. So when I went to him and I recited, we talked and he offered me that job.

Q: He offered you which job?

BARKIN: The research director's job of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee.

Q: Not yet a union.

BARKIN: No, not yet a union. I left the Structural Steel Workers in the lurch and remained in New York on the staff of the Textile Workers and this was my direct experience—

Q: The president at that time, not yet, was going to be Reevy.

BARKIN: And he became it in 1939. I'm talking about 1937 now.

Q: So in effect you were reporting to who, to Hillman?

BARKIN: Hillman, nobody else. That's a very interesting part of my little experience, or big experience. Hillman became ill by June 1937. He had been overworking himself because he not only was head of the Textile Workers Union but helped in settling some of the union problems in the auto industry, the retail industry, and a lot of other places.

Q: And his political activity in the American Labor Party in New York.

BARKIN: That's right, and he also helped the non-partisan league that he formed. I became his alter ego in the national office of the Textile Workers Union; there was nobody else. My office was alongside his, and if he had a bright idea he would call me in and I'd be carrying it out. He became ill about June or July of that very first year after he became chairman of the Textile Workers; so from about June '37 to May '39 I was the research director acting as the alter ego for a sick chairman who was in hospital, resting at his home. I ran the union, everything, for that period.

The most dramatic thing that I did in the spring of '38 was to arrange for a strike for the Bigelow Sanford Carpet Company, which had two plants, one in Amsterdam, New York and the other in Connecticut. The Amsterdam plant was organized by our union; the plant in Connecticut had an independent union. The company wanted, like the other companies at that time, a ten percent wage cut. Life has always its own drama. The first plant that the company addressed was the one in Amsterdam which had our union. They called me up and told me what had happened. I immediately called the president of the Connecticut

union and told him what's going to happen that afternoon. He didn't believe me. Then the company calls him up and tells him about the wage cut; so they were in an uproar.

I invited both local unions to my office in New York, and the result was a six-week strike that created a great tunnel. I was in New York all the time so all this had to be coordinated over the telephone. One interesting feature of it is we had a strike but we didn't have a strike fund so we began canvassing unions to help us, and we raised money all over the country for the strikers. The interesting thing about it is that when the strike was ended, we had a surplus in the treasury.

Q: Which you of course returned to everybody.

BARKIN: In any event, the reason that I was able to act this way—

Q: Sydney Hillman was in the hospital or sick or something.

BARKIN: That's right. Nobody ever told me what to do because obviously there was nobody. But the union went on and one of the big reasons was that there were regional directors for the union and most of them were Amalgamated people.

Q: From the Amalgamated Clothing Workers which Hillman brought in like John L. Lewis did for the Steel Workers.

BARKIN: That's right. They didn't need my help to tell them what to do. The world was moving along and I was running the union, both the finances and the operations. Running a strike in two different states is very complicated because you had two different directors.

Q: And two different police officials and two different everything.

BARKIN: Finally the— (end tape 1)

[Transcriber's Note: It appears that the section that follows (the next 10-11 pages) should have been on a third tape. It seems that the interviewer did not start a new tape for the third tape but inadvertently turned tape 2 over again when side B was completed and therefore taped over approximately 2/3rds of side A, tape 2.]

Q: Was it a manpower policy or an employment policy that you were talking about, training and all of that? You said "I have mapped out a policy," on what?

BARKIN: It's both. I practically spelled it out in the ILO resolution. You've got to have a policy, or a program, or instruments which integrate economic measures and social measures to get full employment and to help people to cushion the process of adjustment. Unfortunately, you need a coordinated diversified service system to do that and ideas that stimulate the creation of innovations of all kinds and help stimulate innovations which mean growth. Innovations which mean growth essentially means increasing the appetite

of people which means in economic policy which feeds purchasing power.

Q: Does it involve investment incentives in the form of government money expenditures?

BARKIN: Yes, some types you need. For example we have to have an area where somebody has a bright idea, you have to encourage bright ideas both in product, design, contents—

Q: And application.

BARKIN: Application or effort. Now, wherever you try that ambition in the real world you are going to miss out; something doesn't deliver.

Q: And under those circumstances do you have to invest government funds to encourage it?

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Well then I have to ask you, how do you explain to the worker who is unemployed for this period of time why you should give money for the development of employer assistance and not give him something?

BARKIN: There is no answer to the question except to say you have to build up a list of public service to support that kind.

Q: I see, to take care of them in the interim.

BARKIN: To take care of the ship. Now that—

Q: No, I'm not looking there Sol, I'm looking at your list of trips from the United States to foreign countries. Are you going to give that to me as an addendum to your—

BARKIN: If you want it.

Q: Yes, because suppose I were doing some research in the field and you say I wrote this at this time, I'd like to have a copy of it. Do you have a copy or shall I make one?

BARKIN: The written stuff is here.

Q: It's in the book. I see, it's in the Stabile book.

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: I get it. I get the general picture of the overall employment training policy.

BARKIN: Now for example one of my major interests during these years has been area

redevelopment. I fought for it. I saw president Eisenhower veto one. I helped Senator Douglas and then President Kennedy to sign it. Did I show you, I have a letter from Kennedy. By the way, getting back to that European Trade Union—

Q: Sol is referring to the fact that the trade union advisory committee to the OECD gave him a beautiful plaque which I've just seen thanking him for his efforts during the five years he was there.

BARKIN: Shall I read it in here?

Q: No. Do you have a copy of the thing? One of these days we'll get a copy. Give me an idea, since we are reaching the end of this taping, what other travel you had but especially one thing I haven't gotten from you and don't tell me you have no reactions to the types of individuals who do well from your observations as you travel in the field. What is the advantage and disadvantage of trade union people being appointed to these jobs? Should we encourage them? I also want to get into the question of what should a labor policy in the international field be for the government of the United States? They're cutting down on these things with less amount available of funds. Should we do less of the labor work or more of it, or should we sharply focus it in a certain point? I want to get some advice from you.

BARKIN: Actually to be a labor advisor is a hard job, just like working in the trade union movement is an excruciating job. The trade union movement is a heartless institution. Not that there aren't people who are very human, but basically it's a political arena. I enjoyed a very privileged position. Stetin in his forward to this Stabile book says that we never interfered with him. He almost wanted to say I think, we don't know even whether we would have trusted what he did; he was too independent for us.

Q: Who was too independent?

BARKIN: I was. I was permitted to fly, given very generous staff, and exercised complete freedom. I think that's fair to say, complete freedom in responding to the world in which I was living, talking, writing. I had two occasions when members of the board, two different people, were ready to hang me.

Q: Members of the executive board of the union?

BARKIN: That's right, they were ready to hang me. In one case we interceded—One man in particular of the Hosiery Workers wanted me fired because I would interfere too much.

Q: You mean an official or a staffer?

BARKIN: A staffer.

Q: You mean Larry Rogan?

BARKIN: Yes. I wasn't completely aware of this until I saw his oral recitation. I was isolated from the coterie of people who came with him from the Hosiery Workers.

Q: Who came with Reevy?

BARKIN: Yes. Everybody turned to me for help, so much so that it became accustomed; for example a business agent, some place in the north particularly, would say when he was having problems, "We're going to call Barkin in." He'd say, "I can settle it now."

Q: Let me question you on this. You say they'd let you do what you wanted but if you went to some organization or wrote an article about this more or less protectionist policy that you were advocating, why did they let you get away with it?

BARKIN: I can't tell you. I don't know the answer to it but they trusted me, Reevy did. It's extraordinary.

Q: It didn't make trouble for him?

BARKIN: No.

Q: Here's Sol Barkin going around advertising a policy that costs jobs to our people.

BARKIN: In retrospect it was extraordinary. Reevy never upbraided me about anything that I'd done. When I had trouble with these two staff people, one of them at a board meeting, I wrote this textbook on time study for the textile industry and a boss had a meeting with this business agent—

Q: He quoted your—

BARKIN: That's right. And he bawled me out at the meeting and my answer was "why the hell didn't you read it beforehand? I'll furnish you with a copy."

Q: Let me go to further things and this feeling I have that I want to get as much out of you in terms of what government people do. How did you evaluate, or were you able to, the work of people from the Textile Workers Union and the government? I gave you a few names, Bishop helped us, Sherback. Jerry Bishop, he did some work. Was it good to have them, bad to have them? Does it depend on the personality or should we carefully select them so that they'll fit into certain types of work?

BARKIN: The names you mentioned were the engineering staff—

Q: The particular thing that we had to do in the Marshal Plan.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Does that mean the Textile Workers had a separate engineering staff?

BARKIN: Sure, I had five people.

Q: Jerry Bishop was one of them?

BARKIN: That's right. The interesting thing is Jerry is a millionaire. Shapiro—

Q: I don't remember him.

BARKIN: He didn't go to Europe; Shapiro was a later man. Sherback, Finkle. Now I hired these people, Jerry is slightly different. He is an emotional— You know he's in bad health.

Q: I heard he is and I'm sorry to hear that. My evaluation of him is that he was very good. I think yours also.

BARKIN: Yes. Very devoted. He didn't fully understand what it was all about, but he was dedicated. Now I hired these people based on their quality. I'd tell them I don't give a god damn how little you know about unions, I'll help you see through those things.

Q: Did they come from unions generally?

BARKIN: They were all engineers without any salt-meat, if that's the word.

Q: So Sherback did not have a trade union background?

BARKIN: No.

Q: He was the one frankly who gave us in the productivity program more problems and yet he was always quoting his trade union credentials.

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: You gave him the credentials.

BARKIN: Now take the Shapiro guy, he's a graduate from a textile college in Lowell. He comes from a poor family. He was with me for several years, and he stayed on after I left. He then took a job with a company that he was serving and became the manager of the company.

Q: Some people might say that's a sellout. Do you say it's a sell out or it's a good deal for the union?

BARKIN: Too many people in the union do it at every level. I would never do it. I don't undertake to instill that kind of extreme dedication. Now the interesting thing is he ran

this company and retired. He invited me to his retirement party and introduced me, with very nice words, to his wonderful wife. I became befriended with my staff, very personally, with Jerry, Shapiro. Shapiro's son is getting married at the end of November, and he is the director of the NBC program on news. He's marrying a Korean girl who is also somebody in the entertainment business. His wife, until she retired, was a high official in the New York state health insurance programs; a very bright woman. She is still now a consultant.

Q: What you're telling me is that your personal relations with the people are friendly but you don't try to direct them into their professional lives and the attitudes they take?

BARKIN: No. But you see, one of the techniques I used is that the engineering staff particularly, that when we handle a case, after all they are in the field far from me, they have to write up the case to the conclusion and then I review it.

Q: What do you think should be done about selecting trade unionists for government labor attaché jobs? Is it a good idea, a bad idea? What sort of training should they have?

BARKIN: I find that very difficult, particularly when you define trade unionism in terms of job consciousness, which is an easy equivalent to management because you are starting off with two conflicting objective levels. They may have removed the term class struggle from the textbooks, but it's on a daily basis. The ruthlessness of our American society and the self-centeredness doesn't permit uprooting the concept of class struggle. Now the American academia is even worse. They are of no use to us in this era of conflicting pressures. You can go through this whole social science group, they're useless.

Let me put it this way, I don't feel I'm competent now, not having been in the field for several years, to fully understand the influence of what's called middle America, the entrepreneur, the self-centeredness of the entrepreneur, their deafness to a type of plea. This is a world which my upbringing doesn't fit into. Just like I say I came into a world with a background which fitted the era. My progress is lucky but primarily because I fitted my whole sense of values.

Q: Fitted into the context of the times.

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Let me ask you this then, maybe you don't want to answer it, what should the Foreign Service do in order to bring people with that type of appreciation into its life? We certainly don't want just the pin-stripped—

BARKIN: Routine. When you realize that human relations programs orientation dominates the field, you understand how completely routed it is in the American scene and insensitive to the world at large, to the values even of a pope. He has to come out from Rome to tell us that there are poor people for whom you have to—

Q: Well Sol, this is a very pessimistic way to end our conversation.

BARKIN: You see I told you before when I went to New Zealand, I was there at the beginning of the '80s, I could project with confidence that we were moving in a pattern with which I was in harmony. Rockefeller was governor of the state of New York. He observed the values which we—

Q: Was he governor in '81?

BARKIN: Yes. In this world I could believe that we were getting more and more accommodation. You see the great GATT now is that there is nobody at the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations), the new leader and the old leader, have a collectivistic orientation; they don't understand unionism. You don't understand unity of the group, that the individuals depend on the group and not on their murderous individual gluttonous appetites.

Q: Well Sol, all I can tell you is one other person told me that there isn't a sense of unselfishness in the American trade union movement.

BARKIN: Sure. A man like Donohue ostracizes me from contact with the offices there—

Q: Ostracizes you?

BARKIN: Sure. Oswald won't answer. His underlings don't even say hello to me when we meet at a conference. It's of no great shakes to me. I can live in the retreats of Amherst at my stage in life and it won't inconvenience me, but it hurts me.

Q: It's sad if you can't take advantage of a person's experience of the depth that you have.

BARKIN: And he deliberately orders them to avoid me. The new man, I presume he's going to be elected.

Q: I don't know. Sweeny?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: Donohue says he still has hope.

BARKIN: Yes, well I was talking with a young man who was on the staff of the State, County and Municipal Workers last week, and he apparently had a little dreykop there and he says it's pretty well assured. How many weeks do we have to wait?

Q: Two.

BARKIN: But this guy is an Irishman, Sweeny. You have to have it from the roots to

think of collective power and collective responsibility. I sit here and sometimes I have enough drive. I have to work on trying to tie in together the original pluralism of a laborman's orientation together with the concept of countervailing powers and to spell this out into an integrated concern.

Q: Are you writing anything now, currently?

BARKIN: Not at the moment but that's right in my mind.

Q: Good. I hope you continue on with it. I think I've probably taken too much of your time already but let me thank you very much. It will take me a little time to pack up but meanwhile please look at this. This is the release which we asked you to sign which says that after we've transcribed it and you've reviewed it, this will be available, subject to your amendment, to students and the public. Thank you very much Sol. I'm grateful for the delightful lunch and the pleasure of seeing you.

[Transcriber's note: This is the end of the section that should have been on a third tape. What follows is where tape two picks up, approximately 2/3rds or 3/4ths through side A, tape 2]

BARKIN: — of England, the archbishops, the bishops, generals. One of the most important generals was at another table. The elite of England was sitting right there. I haven't thought about it all these years.

Q: Simpsons? That's a famous one.

BARKIN: No.

Q: OK, you'll think of it and put it in.

BARKIN: I had the run of the world so to speak. Sometimes I think of these experiences and it makes you— Well in any event I finally wrote a report. I wrote it in the American offices of the American embassy. What was very funny is that I left my report on the top of my table one night and—

Q: And it was classified secret.

BARKIN: I got a bawling out.

Q: Sol, that was the real trouble we had with American visitors. I got a terrific citation because Bill Wurtz was visiting India and he left one of my secret documents on the desk. But they didn't put you to jail.

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: What was the general outline of your recommendations?

BARKIN: My general outline is that they had to cut the industry down severely and relate more, not to international trade but to domestic trade, and accent the development of new equipment and depend on the sale of new equipment.

Q: Let me tell you in order to get your response, and this is quite important because it happens in so many different countries, especially in Europe but also it happened in India, where the Americans come in and say your equipment is antiquated and in order to be competitive you have to get new equipment. The trade unions and the management normally would agree especially in the Marshall Plan where we were supplying the new equipment. Intellectuals, radicals, the sort of people that you and I have been a little disappointed in, will respond by saying "This is an effort by American industrialists to come in here and sell their products and make a profit on it." I told you about this one British guy who feels that the whole purpose of the labor activity and the productivity program in Great Britain was a political one of avoiding socialism. Another one might say that it is a capitalist effort to sell products. What was the rationale of your recommendation and how do you respond to what I've told you?

BARKIN: The unions basically are in a paradoxical situation. If you want to raise wages and living standards they must come from new methods, machinery, processes and management approaches; that means displacement. If you raise wages, management competitively must increase productivity if it is to remain, just like now the international competition. The problem here is the rate at which the new competitive forces impact upon the established system. The American attitude, particularly of academia, is to come in and demand, like these guys in monetary policy, complete change overnight. They've learned a little but not much that there may be a revolution the next day so the whole process, the whole problem, is of under-cushioning the process of change; giving, inspiring a confidence that the society will provide the cushions and the transit process so you aren't going to be injured by it.

Q: In the long run workers suffer so you have to take care of that if you want to build the—

BARKIN: There is no way of making change, which is the opening door to improvement, without injuring some people and all you can do is help them cushion it. Now you and I have moved around. Let me talk about myself. I've had all kinds of jobs, very few that I was really trained for, but I had to match them. When I became research director of the Textile Workers, who would have helped told me that my major series of problems were in time study. What the hell did I know about time study, or and go on, and on, and on. You're constantly, that's the nature of this process of improvement.

Q: What was the upshot of your recommendations there? Generally greeted in friendly fashion but did they do anything about it and what was the Marshall Plan's part of what was done if anything?

BARKIN: Take the project that I was on, for the most part they didn't follow my program

literally but in the nature of events it happened. Several years after ‘48 the government introduced systems of subsidizing the industry to accelerate replacement. I forgot precisely what the technique was, but it subsidized the replacement for equipment.

Q: In effect there is something like the trade adjustment assistance.

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: But did they subsidize the workers to take care of them during that period between —

BARKIN: No, but this was in England. Of course there are places where there is _____.

Q: The Netherlands is a wonderful example.

BARKIN: Yes, but the process is primarily focused on the substitution, on accelerating the managerial initiatives, managerial performance, and industrial performance. Now the British experience was very interesting because I became acquainted with the trade union leaders and they were used to developing techniques for adjusting the number of machines handled by any worker in terms of past formulas. I had in the meantime developed a scheme of my own as a substitute for time study which the workers could themselves use as a gauge as to whether things were going well. Now I never could sell it in our country, but I sold it to them.

Q: That’s interesting.

BARKIN: And I wrote that up in several articles in the *Cornell Journal of Labor Relations.*

Q: Let me ask you whether the failure to sell it in the United States and the success in selling it in Great Britain was related in any way to the political power of the unions in Great Britain and the political weakness of the unions in the United States?

BARKIN: Part of this was in this country they couldn’t imagine, particularly in the textile mills, doing anything like that nor were they prepared for it. In England, the whole union leadership was very technically oriented because they had a piece rate system which had to be constantly modified for new styles, new equipment, etc. so they knew the machinery and the jobs very, very intimately. This is one case where the pluses are on the British textile people. What we would call shop stewards, they had age and were very smart and well informed and that is why they were receptive. They could understand it. My shop stewards and my business agents particularly were unprepared for anything as sophisticated as I was. One of the problems I had in my serving the union is the lack of sophistication of the officers in the technology and the economics of the industry and the facility at bargaining which I had to furnish them because of my knowledge. How did I gain my knowledge?

Q: Back in the Textile Workers operating—

BARKIN: I took correspondence courses in textiles with the Independent International Correspondence School in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Q: That's very interesting.

BARKIN: That's how I became—

Q: A time study expert?

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: That's interesting because the theory always is that the shop floor operator can tell you these things like in the current situation in the automobile industry where Saturn workers sit down with the management people.

BARKIN: In some cases, but in most cases it isn't true.

Q: So you found that in Great Britain there was a higher level of—

BARKIN: In textiles.

Q: —in textiles a higher level of technical capability than we had in the United States?

BARKIN: That's right. One of the things I tried during my years with the union was to have the AFL-CIO or CIO bring together people performing my job. There were about five or six in varying degrees, and I wanted to bring them together so we could exchange. I got nowhere.

Q: Did you get to know Ted Fletcher later?

BARKIN: Yes, I got to know Ted Fletcher. We became good friends. I got to know him when I was in England in '48. He was then with the trade union movement. We became good friends. (end side one, tape two)

Q: These people were not your equal for what reason?

BARKIN: It's very funny. Take the men whom I became personally acquainted with, Gomberg and a man in the Auto Workers, Gomberg was in—

Q: Jim Stern in the Auto Workers?

BARKIN: No. Gomberg was an engineer. He was a funny guy. He went to plants. He could perform any engineering function but he didn't, and the jobs that he had to deal with, the work that he had to deal with, may have been part of the reason that we couldn't

bridge our differences. You see I was looking constantly for a technique which permitted the worker himself to participate in the decision making process, to define the patterns. That's what I did in Textiles. I wrote a book called Work Duties in the Textile Industry. For every basic machine I wrote a complete enumeration of all the duties of the equipment then extant. Gomberg dealt with a completely different situation. He dealt with simple machinery, sewing machines, and that's done on a piece rate system. Now he never was challenged to find an approach which would simplify it enough that you didn't have to have an engineer there; I did. That was my quest, and that's the formulas that I sold to the British to develop standard values which could be interposed in different situations.

Q: Did you have any experience with the Machinist Union outlook on that?

BARKIN: No.

Q: Is this fellow who had the feeling that you should avoid any of that stuff at all because it was just—

BARKIN: Yes. The trade union movement is not prepared to live in this world, to find out precisely what its function is. So you get the people at MIT say you're very restricted, you define the job the iron clad way.

Q: We want to open it up.

BARKIN: That's right. We want to make generalized workers, not a turk made laid operator and this kind. We don't want so many titles and we want to be able to make changes fast and furious. The union says we can't trust you, we have to die it down to the last bit and no one other than I think myself is trying to think of a way. Not being a real engineer, I probably am overlooking all kinds of possibilities particularly in this era of electronic controls. I couldn't handle that.

Q: But the real engineer who tried to do that would be accused by the rank and file of saying you are going to improve their production but we are going to lose by it because they are going to need fewer people.

BARKIN: Of course, and the union movement hasn't dealt with it. In the early '60s there was a chap who was the head of the New York City Central Labor Union.

Q: From the electrical trades and his name was Plunkit? No. I know the guy, he was from the YBEW.

BARKIN: That's right, but you have a nimbleness of mind and a technical background of the understanding let's say of electronics; how do you twist a little wire here, that you never saw. These people—I'll give you another illustration—You recall we talked about the caution, the MIT and human relations.

Q: Cocan.

BARKIN: Yes, Cocan. I think I began telling you, I appeared before a business meeting of the IRA in the hotel and objected to the inclusion of human relations. I said "You have no right to it. There is an organization already existing for that among the engineers." They were going to shut me out. Fortunately before the meeting I spoke to Rudy Oswald and told him that I might have trouble. I had him talk to the chairperson preparing her, it was a woman then, not to stop me; somebody wanted to. So they let me go through, and of course I got a lot of applause. but there was no power there. A half year to a year later I became persona non grata in the AFL-CIO office in Washington.

Q: They heard what you said. They got a report on what your attitude was.

BARKIN: I don't know how or why, but Rudy never has spoken to me or answered my letters, and other people on the staff there avoid me. When I told one of those men (we happened to be together at a table at an INRR meeting in Boston) the story, and he said he'll try to find out; he never reported to me. Then at meetings of the National Planning Association of which I am a member of the board only because they don't have guts enough to fire me, Donahue and his whole entourage was there, about five people, and they wouldn't even say hello to me.

Q: Really? Including Donahue? Because politically he is a little bit more astute?

BARKIN: But I'm just telling you.

Q: Let's go on to your next international work.

BARKIN: All right. In the '50s I was called on by the EPA(**Environmental Protection Agency**) to visit a number of different occasions.

Q: Excuse me Sol, I have to interrupt you. On each of these things that we are going to talk about I would like to put in at that point your assessment, evaluation if any, of the American people working on that in that area. Now for the British one, was there anybody in the Marshall Plan who was working with you?

BARKIN: No.

Q: Nobody? You just went there on your own? You did not even report to anybody?

BARKIN: No, no, no, that is not the way to put it. In 1953 the State Department appointed me under a special persons program—

Q: IVP, International Visitors Program?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: Hold off a minute. Can we step back to that '48 experience in Great Britain with your textile study, did you have any relations with the aid agency there or with the American Embassy?

BARKIN: Oh yes, with the American Embassy.

Q: Who was the labor attaché?

BARKIN: I don't recall, but I did visit one of the cabinet ministers with the plan. It was a Labor Party man, and he gave me the brush off. He said you have good ideas but it's impractical, or something to that effect.

Q: I was wondering whether the labor attaché set the stage for you or gave you a positive or negative view?

BARKIN: No, I had no connection.

Q: You said you wrote the report at the State Department, you worked there.

BARKIN: Yes, I worked in the embassy.

Q: — without any reference to them?

BARKIN: No. When I was with the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) later on, whenever I went to a country I always visited the labor attaché.

Q: But on this '48 thing there was a guy, Atkinson, does the name sound familiar? Weiner? No? OK, go ahead.

BARKIN: I was a specialist for the special persons program in 1953 and visited New Zealand, Australia, Japan. Those were the center, but I also visited Thailand and India in the course of that trip.

Q: This was not '73, this was '53?

BARKIN: '53.

Q: I didn't realize that. And there you were lecturing or working?

BARKIN: Yes, talking.

Q: Only lecturing. What sorts of groups? Academics, trade unions?

BARKIN: Trade unions.

Q: Only trade unions?

BARKIN: Trade unions. I met the trade union leadership in each one of these countries, primarily Japan. I dropped in on the Philippines, but my real purpose was New Zealand and Australia.

Q: To talk to them about American labor problems?

BARKIN: To talk to them about everything in the world.

Q: It was an information exchange.

BARKIN: The funny thing was in New Zealand, I shall always remember this, they wanted me to know about Jack London.

Q: That's interesting.

BARKIN: So many western Pacific coast people went to New Zealand in that first decade of the century.

Q: I'm going to interrupt for one second. Again with each place you mentioned I want to know who the Americans were. Was it information people or labor attachés?

BARKIN: No, labor attachés.

Q: You don't remember the names for each of them? Any of them particularly?

BARKIN: Weiner was the one in New Zealand at the time.

Q: Australia, he was in Australia.

BARKIN: Australia, yes.

Q: He succeeded me in India too. Any particularly good ones or bad?

BARKIN: There was somebody in the Philippines at the time—

Q: Tony Lubcheck?

BARKIN: No, somebody else. I stayed in his home. I stopped in Thailand and the labor attaché was very helpful to me. I don't think I had any real function, I was just passing through. It was very funny because I arrived in Thailand and I left my health certificate.

Q: Oh, they had to get you out of that.

BARKIN: And he helped me through it.

Q: What I'd like then, well I'll ask at the end, some general assessment about how effective they were or how much more effective they could have been or something like that but that's at the end to sum it up.

BARKIN: Now in 1957 I was part of the United States delegation to the textile conference in Milan.

Q: Sol I hate to bring it up but you forgot that in 1955 you came to that conference in Rome which was so important.

BARKIN: Where?

Q: In Rome, you came to the productivity, don't you remember?

BARKIN: It's not listed here.

Q: It may not be listed but I know that you were there. That's when you came to Rome for an international productivity conference being run—

BARKIN: Oh, but I think I have it for a different—

Q: It was '55. Gomberg came also. Caslow was there and I was there. Go ahead if you've forgotten it. You've had so many experiences.

BARKIN: In 1956 I was part of the American delegation to the EPA on human relation conference in Rome.

Q: Was that '56? I thought it was '55 but anyhow that is the human relations one that I remember where you and Gomberg and I got into arguments with them about the difference in function between the human relation field and the labor relations field.

BARKIN: Yes. Then in 1957 I was at the EPA textile conference in Milan and in 1961 the EPA conference on international labor standards. I don't know where that was held.

Q: Geneva?

BARKIN: I don't know. I was a member of the American delegation in '61 to the international ILO (International Labour Organization**)** conference. That was an extraordinarily rich experience because I was on one of the committees, and it was arranged with Morse; Morse asked for me. I'm not completely sure why he did it, but in any event they needed somebody to get up there and to answer the Soviets.

Q: This was shortly after they came back to the ILO?

BARKIN: Yes. He asked and Arthur Goldberg agreed to it. It was a whole month and I

had a wonderful time. I became the chairman of the workers delegation for the Committee on International Employment which was very interesting. We had separate meetings of the workers delegate, and I was the chairman so I conducted it. I represented the workers delegation in the negotiations with the employers and the government so I wrote that. That's when I became familiar with the Swedish active manpower policy. I rewrote that, the draft that the government—

Q: By the way at that point was— Oh no, Rehn was already at the OECD.

BARKIN: No.

Q: No? He was in Sweden?

BARKIN: Yes. You see Rehn got himself in all kinds of trouble so they wanted to shift him out.

Q: That's your explanation for why he came to Paris?

BARKIN: That's right. In any event, they drafted the manpower of the full employment policy committee. It was a mixture, an interrelationship between social policy and manpower policy all in one. In 1963 it was reaffirmed, the ILO procedure.

Q: They discussed it in two successive ones.

BARKIN: So by '63 I had written many articles about that, and Dave Morse, he put the whole staff at my disposal. There was an employer vice chairman, like I was labor vice chairman. The employer was from the big British-Dutch retail, the groceries and things like that with branches all over the world, 50 probably. He and I got along marvelously. We agreed on everything and when a government man interfered, he and I would work this thing out. It was a wonderful experience. He invited me to the employers affairs, it was a whole month, and then I had to deliver the main speeches and a lot of other things and answer the Russian stories. It was a real enjoyable entertaining—

The next international experience I had was to be on the textile tariff agreement in '61. In any event—

Q: At some point you remember I said I wanted to develop your thoughts on the trade issue. In general did you, you certainly did there at the tariff thing, represent the interests of the Textile Workers on tariff and trade matters?

BARKIN: Yes.

Q: What was your attitude? What did you think the government did that was right or wrong?

BARKIN: I became very much involved in that and in the Stabile book; he develops that

material very extensively. I began as soon as the war was over. I was beginning to testify on imports making all kinds but the feeling in this country at the time became increasingly free trade so I was trying to find what kind of system we could establish which would bridge that gap. Of course we were in, outright protection was doomed. So I became increasingly articulate in this field. In 1956, I became more direct— I testified in 1956 before a Ways and Means Committee in which I outlined my views, essentially its cushioning in effect. You establish quotas limiting the income.

Q: Limiting the imports.

BARKIN: Limiting the imports and allowing for progressive, small in ratio. Secondly, even before that I developed another theory which appears as a statement in 1955 or 1956 as a minority statement for a report of the National Planning Association and the 20th Century Fund/ In this statement, I said if you are going to liberalize this, you don't break it all down, you have to moderate it in terms of the disparity to which you are trying to correct. In other words, you don't do it in one lump sum, but you ease the process of adjustment so if you are allowing Asian goods to come in, you establish one system, Latin America another system.

Q: Depending on the instant situation in those places.

BARKIN: That's right, so that the impact is cushioned. That was my basic proposal in the tariff problem and I have written articles, etc.

Q: You had a specialist at your union. Oh no, it was the Amalgamated that had a specialist on trade issues.

BARKIN: Yes. Well there is nobody in the trade union movement who knows what the hell he is talking about, of course except I.

Q: Did Tepper have any contribution in this field?

BARKIN: No. The reason basically is, what are you trying to do? It's in all economic issues, are you trying to introduce a major change or are you trying to allow for change to take place with as minimum kind of cushioning? And of course there are all kinds of tricks in this game; there are quotas, there are rates, there are limitations, permissions, etc. You work it out. If you have that kind of attitude, call it realism or anything else.

Q: Are you criticized then for, let's say you gradualized the negative impact on the employees of your union—

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Are you then criticized for giving in? By god we ought to stop all of this!

BARKIN: Sure. Sure. Sure.

Q: How do you sell that to the trade union leadership?

BARKIN: Listen, I once testified in 1960 before a senate committee. The senator in charge was Senator Cotton from New Hampshire. He bawled the hell out of me for developing what I was saying. It was in January or February of 1960. By May, we had this international agreement on textiles which in essence was just a quota system.

Q: And what was his reaction?

BARKIN: He didn't have to have any reaction. By that time I didn't give a god damn about him because the new system went into effect. There were no absolutes in justice. That's how only the pope can talk that way. The big achievement in trade problems was the final agreement in 1960 with Kennedy when we developed a textile agreement limiting quotas with progressive increases.

Q: That wasn't part of the Kennedy round, that went later?

BARKIN: No, it wasn't part of the Kennedy round but it was under Kennedy's administration. The funny thing about it was that he was a senator from Massachusetts so I was always running up with his staff to deal with these problems; of course he did nothing. Then when he became president he had already in the campaign promised the textile industry the necessary protection. When he became president he had to find an answer so somebody on his staff remembered the speech that I had delivered and I came down to his office in the White House and we worked out a modification which went to the State Department, the Commerce Department. The 1961 Cotton Agreement and the 1962 Textile Agreement were adjustments of my proposal.

Q: These adjustments of your proposal went into effect in spite of the objections of the people who felt that we could have gone further.

BARKIN: What do you mean, could have made it more restrictive?

Q: Yes.

BARKIN: Well we did.

Q: I know.

BARKIN: Now this limitation has been abolished by the last tariff agreement. It is not really abolished, it is progressively withdrawn.

Q: Let me ask you again about the participation, if any, of government people in this. Did they oppose you? Did they help you?

BARKIN: Where?

Q: In these negotiations on—

BARKIN: Of course, when Kennedy—

Q: Who were the people in the labor field, if any, who were your opposite numbers?

BARKIN: No.

Q: All economic officers in the State Department effectively influenced so far as you know by labor attachés? No. Labor attachés—

BARKIN: No, this was completely in Kennedy's White House agreement and the State Department—

Q: Facilitated it.

BARKIN: —had a few changes and the Commerce Department agreed to it, and the industry damned it and fought through those who tried to repeal it.

Q: Did the Labor Department have any part in this so far as you know? Phil Arno perhaps?

BARKIN: No. There was only one thing, in 1961 when we were negotiating the first Cotton Agreement, Senator Moynihan and I were both part of the delegation to go to Geneva to negotiate it.

Q: That was before he was Senator?

BARKIN: Oh sure. He's a foul ball.

Q: He was assistant secretary of Labor at the time I think.

BARKIN: I don't know. He is a funny combination.

Q: On social policy his heart is in it.

BARKIN: Yes, but I don't think he's an effective man; that's the impression I had.

Q: OK, now the next international work that you did?

BARKIN: The next international work was going to the OECD.

Q: Now you retired from the Textile Workers when?

BARKIN: In December 1962. From '63 to '68 I was with the OECD.

Q: Now was this appointment, you started telling me I don't know if it was at the table or whether we have it on the tape—

BARKIN: Let me recite it for you. It was a funny appointment because the nomination came from the EPA, the organization which existed for the Marshall Plan.

Q: Oh yes, you mean the successor of the Marshall Plan, the OECD?

BARKIN: The OEEC.

Q: The OEEC went out of existence—

BARKIN: In 1961.

Q: That's right then it became the OECD with Americans as full members.

BARKIN: That's right. The labor division of the OEEC had been established and they were looking for a replacement of the man who was at the head of it, the Dutch man. Now I had through these various conferences, and there were many more which I was to, I remember Belgium, Germany, and other places, and so they knew me. As they characterized me, I said "Why did you think I was the man for the job?" They said, "You are the only man who has a sense of Europe, the only American who has a sense of the European trade union movement." I can understand that because of what I told you; I was brought up on a European orientation.

Q: That's interesting because they had had so many people like Everett who was there for a while, but he was a USAID employee, he was not in the OEEC.

BARKIN: Yes. You see to me, I mean in retrospect, I find myself completely at ease in a European situation and it is not surprising. After all that's the kind of home I came from. That's the story I got. Just like David Morse asked for me, they were the men who nominated me. I didn't know anything about it. Of course it had to go to Arthur Goldberg and Bill Wurtz. As I told you I was originally supposed to be director, then it was at the beginning of '62 that I got word that the FBI was processing me to see what holds there were. In 1961 when I went to the ILO something happened and I can't straighten it out in my mind at the moment, after being notified, I was in Europe for some reason, and I dropped in the Paris office and I learned that they were negotiating with the Swedes and there was a chap in the OECD— no he was in the—

Q: The U.S. mission to the OECD, because we had a U.S. mission?

BARKIN: Yes, who was the man? Well somebody, and I've been trying to get that name back again, I stayed at his home in Paris.

Q: Ben Haskell?

BARKIN: No. I learned that I was to be deputy. I didn't know what the hell the difference between a deputy director and a deputy to the director was, and I don't know now. By that time the things in the United States were sufficiently cut that I couldn't easily change if I wanted to, and it didn't matter to me as I told you because fundamentally—

Q: You were there to do your thing and you didn't care who else was there.

BARKIN: So finally in January 1963 I was in Paris. I had a wonderful five years, it was really wonderful. The problems, I understand now, the first thing, I of course inherited a staff and I added only one man, an American, during the whole period I was there who turned out to be a very bright foul ball. He didn't understand that he was working for a committee; he thought it was a research job for himself.

Q: Was Peter Schwanzie there?

BARKIN: Yes. I had social affairs, the other guy had manpower and—

Q: Was that David Christian, the manpower guy?

BARKIN: No. Then Rehn was there and he kept as I told you—

Q: I've got to spell his name, Gosta Rehn.

BARKIN: He was always telling me that I should have had the job and I know much more than he does. I mean that kind of deceitful—

Q: Was it deceitful?

BARKIN: Yes. You don't trust him. As I told him several times, the differences between us on thinking are minor. Of course he is not a disciplined person. He has gotten in trouble with everybody over his career. He is not a talkative guy. He is not an organizer, and he has none of the qualities for that kind of job. The best thing was that over the five years he left me alone. I couldn't have asked for more latitude.

Q: In other words he saw no conflict between the employment policy objectives that he was following and the trade union relationships and industrial relations policy that you were?

BARKIN: That's right.

Q: Do you see any conflict between the active manpower policy of his and the sort of industrial relations approach of yours?

BARKIN: No. I have written articles on the design for a manpower policy for the United States and I have an article on that subject.

Q: It's quite different from Gosta's isn't it?

BARKIN: No. I build in the government machinery. Now this guy Reich, the current Labor Department guy, he has the single service office of the employment service which is exactly a duplicate of—

Q: Of what's in Europe in many cases.

BARKIN: That's right. We introduced it, we developed it and it's a duplicate of this whole thing. He doesn't know what the hell he's talking about when it comes to training and he has no idea how difficult a problem it is. Of course I wrote him a letter when he began this cooperation crap and I said it's failed in Europe except where the unions have taken—

Q: Except where the unions have taken it over.

BARKIN: That's right. Management in Europe suffers it and so think about it before you are going to fail.

Q: And he replied?

BARKIN: No. I mean after all he is a baby in the woods. He gets a happy phrase once in a while.

End of interview

Note: The University of Massachusetts, Amherst has a collection of Professor Barkin materials. See: http://scua.library.umass.edu/barkin-solomon/