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

AMBASSADOR JOHN CONDON

Interviewed by: Morris Weisz
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited in full by Ambassador Condon prior to his passing on November 22, 2011.]

Q: This is Morris Weisz and I am recording an interview with John Condon who has had long experience as a labor officer, even before he joined the Foreign Service formally and served in a number of labor posts ending his career with an ambassadorship to the Fiji Islands. John, are you ready to begin?

CONDON: Yes.

Q: Let me identify the date first. Today is July 14.

CONDON: Nineteen ninety-three.

Q: 1993, yes. And the Condons are house guests of ours. I have taken advantage of their presence to interview John for the labor diplomacy oral history project and hope to interview Mrs. Condon for the spousal project interview. This is the interview of John Condon. Now: Will you give us your background?

CONDON: Where shall I begin? Where I was born?

Q: At birth!

CONDON: At birth! So I was born August 6, 1920 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Both mother and father were immigrants from Greece. Father came at the age of 13 and mother came at the age of 9. There was a considerable difference of age between the two. And mother took my brother and myself and went back to Greece in 1926. We stayed there. I went to school there. I got a law degree from the University of Athens and then we were interned during the war by the Germans.

Q: With your father remaining here in the States?

CONDON: With the father remaining in the States. And then we returned to the States in 1945 with a loan from the State Department. We were able to repay it in due time after I made considerable efforts through correspondence with senators and congressmen to wipe out the loan. But that did not work and then I went to _____.

Q: Why did they lend you money?

CONDON: To repatriate us. To pay repatriation costs. We were about what might call one hundred young men in the same situation in Greece at that time at the end of the war. And all of us were repatriated by the State Department and were charged the costs of repatriation. It was reasonable. Then I went to the University of Chicago, studied sociology, transferred to Columbia, and got my Master's Degree in 1947 in sociology. Then we had to face life and I got my first job. It was with an importer of Greek products. That was my second job. My first job was with the Greek American Chamber of Commerce downtown in New York. It was an interesting job. I was the first secretary of the Chamber but I didn't have any commercial experience or interest, as I found out later on in life, I just couldn't see how anyone could make a living in any other form than salary. That is a very conservative way of

looking at the way of surviving but that is the way I looked at it. Anyway, that job ended, ended because of _____ naturally and then I got a job with a Greek importer, an importer of Greek products.

It was a very prosperous company, well-run, very successful and I was again the equivalent of a vice president of the company but then again my interest was not there and I left the company and I was unemployed.

Q: Your father at this point was in the United States?

CONDON: The father was in the United States.

Q: In business?

CONDON: In business. It was the classic Greek restaurant. It was with my uncle and he was still in Tulsa. He helped both me and my brother in the beginning with the tuition in Chicago but then of course he felt that he had done his duty, which was proper, and we kept ourselves in part-time jobs.

Q: Was your brother an older brother or younger brother?

CONDON: Younger brother. He became a chemist and he was for many years the head of the Department of Chemistry at NYU.

Q: Oh.

CONDON: Yes. Then I got a job with the Unemployment Compensation Office in New York and then I was in my element.

Q: You were a state civil servant?

CONDON: A state civil servant. A state civil servant. It was not a permanent job. But I was appreciated by my superiors and at times when time there was an overflow of applicants they would call on me because they thought I was quick and grasping and I was good with people. I knew how to handle them and I would know how to tell them no and how to tell them to come again and how to tell them to go out and look for a job. That lasted for about a year and then I was unemployed, myself, and looked in the employment office to see what was available, and suddenly I was offered a position which was very secret. I worked, they wouldn't tell me where it was; but it was a position that would take me overseas.

Q: Before we go any further, at this point what were your language facilities? Because I begin to see that might have been an advantage in seeking a job you liked. You knew French?

CONDON: I knew French. Yet not as fluently as I became later, but I knew French.

Q: From school...

CONDON: From school.

Q: You knew Greek from your origins.

CONDON: I knew Greek from my origins and I knew German again from school.

Q: From school. And, as we have noted many times a little bit of English. [Laughter] *So your language facility presumably was one of the factors in your appointment.*

CONDON: Yes, it was. As it turned out it was an employment with the corps of engineers to go to Morocco to build the secret bases that at the time were considered necessary because of the Korean War and the fear that the Soviet Union at that time might consider this an opportunity to invade Europe. At that time the defense of Europe was not terribly well organized and the military power of the Soviet Union was overestimated as we later found out. But the military thought that they [the Soviets] could overrun Europe and they would need bases outside Europe to begin the defense and the eventual reconquest of Europe. So with the cooperation of the French, Morocco was selected as the proper country in which to build such bases. And we _____.

Q: Selected by the US government or by NATO or?

CONDON: By the US Government. It was strictly a US operation. And so we went there to spend what would turn out to be $500 million to build five bases actually, and to accomplish a major engineering feat. We went there in March 1951 and in the beginning of June 1951 airplanes were landing.

Q: Really?

CONDON: Yes. A major feat, but that required the employment of as many as 4,000 American workers and over 10,000 Moroccans and other nationalities by the time. And my first job was a GS-5 general clerk. And as a matter of fact, my first real job was to run the mail of the corps of engineers district that was established there. It was an enjoyable job. I did it and enjoyed it and on SV work organized and structured and got the district fully staffed. There was a labor relations officer who was part of the staffing of the corps of engineers districts and who came to supervise the labor policies of the contractors. In our case it was a cost-plus fee contract. That kind was the most expensive but the most expeditious way of building what needs to be built. The contractors have the possibility of buying and selling and doing all that it takes and get reimbursed plus a fee. That's why it is so expensive because there is no incentive on the part of the contractor to limit the costs, because on the contrary the fees calculated on the amount expended.

Q: Oh, it's a percent of cost.

CONDON: It's percentage cost plus fixed fee.

Q: Oh, it's a fixed fee?

CONDON: On the basis of a fixed fee, in terms of the percentage, fixed. And not a fixed amount.

Q: Right.

CONDON: So therefore, as usually is the case in an operation like this, the labor cost was the major item which had the elasticity for the contractor to engage and increase the payroll. So the labor relations officer was there in fact for the purpose to control labor practices that may result in overpayment and payroll padding in the sense of paying more than the market would call for. And indeed _____.

Q: Of hiring more people than the market required.

CONDON: Of hiring more people than the market required, exactly. So the labor relations _____ I managed to appoint myself as assistant labor relations officer and the thing worked out for a few months and then the labor relations officer had a breakdown, a nervous breakdown, over tension, and for these reasons he left. Another one came and he did not do very well for a number of reasons and he left. The post was then vacant and the district then was in the position of filling the vacancy. And the usual practice was to go back to the States to find someone, a labor relations officer in the stateside district who was experienced, to come on over and take the job because at the time I was too young and did not have enough experience. Nobody would think of appointing me to the job, but I thought otherwise, so I drafted, I typed on an official form, the order appointing John B. CONDON as labor relations officer, and put it in the mill.

Q: John, this is so typical of the way you operate! In the future, I'm just amazed that you had those capabilities at the age of 26 or so when this happened.

CONDON: So I put it in the mill. My immediate superior chief was the head of the legal division. The labor relations officer was on the staff of the legal department. The labor chief, Thomas D. Dopler, who died a few months ago, or a couple of years ago, who came from the district in Oklahoma, so he _____.

Q: Did it have any bearing on your work with him that he came from Oklahoma?

CONDON: No. So he got the paper and said, "Why didn't we think of this ourselves?" So he endorsed it, went up to the assistant district engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Haseman; he endorsed it; he went to the district engineer, Colonel Derby, who decided that he would notify Washington that they were promoting the assistant labor relations officer to the position and I found myself labor relations officer of the district in Morocco. That's how I got my first real responsible job in the government.

Q: By this time it was a CAF what, do you remember, 7, 8, 9. What was the rating?

CONDON: Yes, yes, by that time it was 7, and then I became a 9.

Q: That was the stepping stone; no 8.

CONDON: Seven to nine. Then I became a GS 9 and then we began to have, because the air base [personnel] started coming, and the air force was staffing itself, occupying the bases, and we developed relations with the Air Force headquarters in Wiesbaden, which was the USAFE (United States Air Forces, Europe).

Q: Yes, until this point were you doing essentially personnel functions, rather than industrial relations?

CONDON: No, not at all personnel. Only labor relations with supervising the personnel policies of the contractor.

Q: So far you're not doing anything about American personnel. Oh, the contractors were also Americans.

CONDON: Americans, too, among the 12,000 personnel employed. And with the pressure on the part of the French authorities not to increase labor rates because that would affect the local economy, disturbing the wage rates. We paid higher, but nevertheless we had two incentives to control the practices of the contractor: one, not to increase the cost to an unreasonable extent; the other one, in respect for the international agreement not to disturb and upset the local economy, which is a reasonable concern. So in this contact with the Air Force we had frequent people from the personnel department in USAFE coming to Morocco and one of them, in particular, George Pease, who subsequently came with AID and now I think he is in Argentina. George Pease came and we worked together in a few business problems together for one thing and another and one day a telegram came from USAFE to the district asking for the transfer of John Condon to the Air Force and offering me a GS 11. I must say that the district was very reasonable about it. They thought that if this advances the career of one of theirs, why they couldn't stand in their way, and in May 1954 we were leaving to Morocco to go to Wiesbaden to take the position in the Personnel Department of USAFE responsible for the management and the labor policies of employees, the local employees, in the US bases throughout Europe, with particular for France, England, Morocco, Turkey, Greece, the Netherlands, and England.

Q: Excuse me but you keep referring to "We." By this time you had married and your family...

CONDON: Right, I was married in Casablanca to a lady Nancy Fleischman whom I had met in New York and we had a civil ceremony in the municipal building in Casablanca.

Q: You were married then in?

CONDON: In Casablanca and it was greeted by the local press as a major event and it was the first marriage since the end of the war of Americans.

Q: Oh, really?

CONDON: So we had the benefit of a newspaper photographer who came to the wedding and the reception and the corps of engineers district threw a big party for us and then we left on the same day for Algeciras and Seville which in 1951 was quite backward and not developed as it unfortunately has developed in subsequent years. We stayed in the famous Alfonse XIII hotel within a major palatial room and all of which was subsequently our first daughter who was born in Casablanca and when we left in May 1954 she was only a few weeks old.

Q: So you're now located in Germany...

CONDON: In Germany, in Wiesbaden, in the USAFE headquarters, in the personnel division in charge of the labor practices of the commanders of the various bases throughout Europe, especially in the countries I mentioned before. Then I in that capacity I had quite a free hand, or I gave myself a free hand, and I developed an interesting system of representing the US in the various countries. And that system was named the indirect hire system which consisted in negotiating with the host government to appoint an agency which would assume the legal responsibility of being the legal employer of the local employees, and the US forces as a matter fact, the Allied forces because the Canadians had bases and were associated the Allied forces become the utilizers of that force of that number of people.

Q: Let me interrupt you at this point and ask you what your experience had been up to this point in dealing with unions as against dealing with contractors.

CONDON: Yes, that is a good question because in the beginning of course in Morocco there was no way of talking about unions because they were under the control of the Prince and the opportunities were not there to develop the unions but as soon as the labor movement began to rise in Morocco as well and now we are talking about 1951, 52, 53 and in the bases of course in the presence of the American management there was a certain receptivity and I must underline that on the part of the management of the contractors and the engineers and the movement began to take shape and who would be head of the movement but the workers in the Moroccan base near Casablanca by the name of Ben Seddik.

Q: Oh, my!

CONDON: And Ben Seddik was a young man at the time when we got to know him.

Q: Maybe we should tell the people reading this interview that he subsequently became a very important figure in the labor movement in Morocco.

CONDON: And in Morocco in the world as a whole. A major labor figure, Ben Seddik.

Q: And his name is spelled Ben Seddik.

CONDON: A gifted man, a charismatic figure, a wonderful speaker, but totally inexperienced, totally inexperienced.

Q: But he did have one thing, as I recall; didn't he have good French?

CONDON: He had good French, yes...

Q: And that was valuable to him in rising in the world trade union movement.

CONDON: Right but about that time the majority of Moroccans spoke good French.

Q: Yes, but not if there was to be a trade union representative from the whole Maghreb area, the fact that he could speak in French at the international meetings?

CONDON: But the thing is that it was not so unusual because anybody who had any brains and had been exposed to some general activities spoke good French.

Q: In Morocco. That did not—or did it apply to Algeria?

CONDON: All of them, even more in Algeria and just as much in Tunisia. It was in subsequent years that French declined. Then you would have had difficulty in finding people who were not formally educated and spoke in French but even people who were not formally educated spoke very good French, elegant French.

Q: Good!

CONDON: So, visiting, the important thing from the point of view of history is that my experience in sitting in negotiations between Ben Seddik, and his colleagues, new men representing the local force without any experience, appointing general manager of Atlas Constructions the constructors who was no other than Ben Peterson, PPS, a formidable man, a powerful personality, as smart as they come, really American management at its best, especially in the construction industry.

He would sit visiting across the table and would negotiate and Ben Seddik would ask for a bus stop here, and he would ask for a change of the routing of the busses, and he would ask for more leave, or he would ask for increases at various times. And Ben Peterson would negotiate with him and would present arguments against acceding to Ben's requests and Ben Seddik inexperienced, sitting across from the general manager of a major personality known internationally almost and he would run out of ideas and arguments. And in this case Peterson would say "Damn it all Ben," and he would point out the weakness in his own arguments, go ahead, and Ben Seddik would take it up as though he had the idea himself and he would grasp the essential of the observation; he would elaborate on it and would reply. And then Peterson would have another riot and then he instructed Ben Seddik in the processes of collective bargaining!

Q: He instructed him in the processes of collective bargaining!

CONDON: Exactly. He was giving Ben Seddik a lesson in collective bargaining. It was an admirable performance. I'll never forget.

Q: He gave you a couple of lessons, too, in collective bargaining... [Laughter]

CONDON: Very much so. Very much so. I had a high opinion of that Peterson anyway, but when I saw his performance with Ben Seddik, recognizing that he had a weak counterpart and he was not about to take advantage of him.

Q: Years later, did you ever have an opportunity to describe this to people like Irving Brown who had to deal with Ben Seddik?

CONDON: Yes, I did. But it was very interesting. But I have told this story countless times, because it is precious.

Q: Well, I'm glad you got this story in here because we had passed that time. We were in Europe already and then we got back. So your experience was not in dealing on the other side of the bargaining table with trade unionists as much as observing the negotiations between contracting parties and the unions.

CONDON: Right, right, right.

Q: When you came to Europe did that change?

CONDON: Yes.

Q: Was the institution of this new policy?

CONDON: It changed the issues of the policy and another detail needs mention, namely that there were Naval bases, Army bases, Air Force bases. At that time even more so than today the rivalry between the three units the three groups was enormous. The Air Force had the negotiating responsibility for all three but the other two insisted on being consulted in advance. So, before the system I introduced, every time there was something to be done the Air Force had to write to the Army and Navy, ask for their opinion, and Navy and the Army would reply back and modify what was suggested. Then the Air Force would have to go back in interminable correspondence, time consuming, that was playing havoc with the management of the local employees in each individual base and irritating the host government because of seeing that things were just lost in interminable correspondence.

Q: And your new system obviated the need for that?

CONDON: Yes, obviated the need also because it was supplemented or complemented by another institution, the institution of coordinating committees whereby the agency of the

host government that had assumed negotiating the employers' responsibility and the US forces would sit down and negotiate what was on the agenda. Here comes my initiative, reduce these talks into minutes, countersign them and engage both parties as of the moment of signature without reference to any headquarters.

Q: Did you have the authority to do that.

CONDON: I assumed the authority. I assumed the authority. Nobody gave me the authority. My superiors in the department unfortunately shouted and at the same time knew that I was doing things in an expeditious way. They knew that I was defending the US interests in the best way but I was not referring back to what I decided on the spot _____.

Q: And this would be called administration by exception. You administer something and wait for somebody to raise hell.

CONDON: If they do. They never did. For four years I ran that system in France, in England, in Morocco, in Greece, in Turkey, and in the Netherlands with coordinating committees meeting with agenda and establishing in the two languages minutes countersign them and becoming binding executive agreements.

Q: The two languages being English and French?

CONDON: English and French, English and Dutch, English and Greek, English and Turkish.

Q: Oh, depending on the individual...They did that from '54 until?

CONDON: Until 61, I mean 60.

Q: For six years?

CONDON: For six years I did that.

Q: And therefore I won't place on you the responsibility of being overly immodest when I say it was this reputation and ability to work in this area so effectively that was open when I first met you and this reputation you had in advance in State and Labor Departments for being a good "operator" in the best sense of the word in the labor field.

CONDON: Possibly it will. But there were there were papers, read them about my coordinating committee, minutes, as executive type agreements, but written by the Legal Department of USAFE _____.

Q: Alright then, in case anybody wants to look them up. This was in the archives.

CONDON: In the Judge Advocate's Office of the USAFE Headquarters, US Air Force, Europe, headquarters now in Ramstad [Germany].

Q: Well, that's very good. That gives any historian looking into this the opportunity to look at the original sources. Well, you did that until 1960, gaining knowledge about the labor movements in Europe, I imagine by that time from the direct relationship _____.

CONDON: Yes, because the labor movements that were developed were active on the bases in the various countries. But the unions in the various countries dealt with the host government agency who was the legal employer and then the legal employer depending upon their view of what the union demands were would come to us and say that we are under pressure from the unions to do this and that. We think they are right on these and these issues; we think we should refuse this and this. It was then that the coordinating committee would put that on the agenda and I would go and negotiate in place _____.

Q: Making an agreement, a final agreement.

CONDON: A final agreement.

Q: And during this period before we leave this important period, your relations with the American government in Europe, with the Marshal Plan, Truman Policy and all that, was that, did you have such relationships?

CONDON: I had not very much; I had relations with the Embassies, in particular the Embassy in France, and the Embassy in Athens and the Embassy in Morocco.

Q: And none with the headquarters of the Marshall Plan? There was no reason?

CONDON: There was no reason. None whatsoever, but with the Embassies, yes. And then the people who were responsible for the bases from different points of view would ask me to brief them. If at times some local host government would go to them instead of coming to us, they would transmit, but always they were respectful that we were the military and we had our own area of jurisdiction and area of negotiation and therefore there was not much in the way that they had to _____.

Q: None with NATO at all?

CONDON: None with NATO.

Q: Too bad, we would have met each other a few years earlier.

CONDON: I know it.

Q: I have another question to ask you about Europe. During this period, many people in the US government were concerned, as you know, with the problems of the Communist influence in the Marseille waterfront, which has been covered, a very important issue for students' examining the activities of the AFL and its representatives in southern France. Your function

had nothing to do with that problem of dealing with Communist influence in south France and the efforts to make sure that the Marshall Plan shipments came in, ok.

CONDON: We had nothing to do with it. We would be concerned about any Communist influence in the bases and trade union representation, especially in France but the host government shared that concern and _____.

Q: Could be depended on?

CONDON: Yes, could be depended on. Exactly.

Q: Ok. I interrupted you.

CONDON: Now we come to see how I got into the Foreign Service.

Q: Right.

CONDON: So, in Morocco the agreement to build those bases was negotiated between the US government and the French government. Of course Morocco was a Protectorate at that time. When Morocco became independent in 1956 Morocco said I don't know about American bases in this country. So we negotiated these and you can go and find out with the French who have no jurisdiction in this country and there was considerable tension. Altogether all the more reason to see if we can get the Moroccan government to take over some legal employer so the Moroccan government "Nicht Wissen Zie?" [Laughter] So, but I had friends in Morocco from my four years there, good friends, who after independence came into positions of influence.

Q: Including Ben Seddik?

CONDON: No, but he remained in the leadership of the trade union movement. So I told my headquarters in USAFE well let's go ahead and negotiate an agreement with the Moroccan government. So everybody said "Who is this young punk that is going to negotiate but at the same time they couldn't say no and here I was negotiating so they said alright. So I said I would take my family with me and this may take a little [time]. So I go to Morocco and we rented a house of the DCM of the British Embassy at the time who [lived] near Tom Brady who was the New York Times correspondent in Madrid and Casablanca, a delightful person and a competent journalist with whom we became very friendly, good friends. So we went there and I started pulling strings and explaining the situation to the people in authority and especially to the Minister of Finance who was the person who would have to set up the budget and an account, a special account, in the Bank to which we contributed the money to reimburse what was _____.

So he told me, John, can we do that? We cannot do that. Oh, my head blanked out. He died two years ago. So, we've got to do it, I said. In the interests of Moroccan citizens, they have no recourse, they will go to the local courts and the Moroccan doesn’t have the benefit of the being protected by their government. You cannot ignore that. I'm not asking you to declare

that you recognize the bases or to assume responsibility for everything they'll do it, they're out to protect the Moroccan employees with the _____ of course the opposite count down were still _____ 4,000 what was it, so I could have extended, and I said, all right, Let's draft a paper, so we drafted a paper and this took 27 days within 27 days we had drafted the paper. He had opened a special account in the Moroccan treasury and I had selected the man who was to head the Moroccan agency who was going to carry out the responsibility, an old friend, Mohammed Mjid. He's known as Monsieur Mjid. So, head of the Tench [?] federation an athletic personality.

Q: So out of curiosity, which bank did you use?

CONDON: No, it was not a bank, that's why I corrected myself; it was the Treasury [of Morocco.]

Q: Oh, the Treasury...

CONDON: A special account in the Treasury to which we paid first and in which reimbursed the expenditures and so we staffed an office together with a selected staff and we set it up. And then ...Ambassador Yost, then _____.

Q: Charlie Yost?

CONDON: Charlie Yost, Charlie Yost was the Ambassador at that time and he, I threw a party, in the DCM's house, to which I invited Moroccan ministers and the Ambassador and Steve McClintick who was the labor attaché at the time and during the _____.

Q: I was just curious, any French officials there?

CONDON: No, I don't think there were any French. I don't think there were any French and then during the dinner the Ambassador Yost offered a toast to John Condon for what he did and I remember so well, "He put us all to shame." He was a big enough man to say because everybody had doubted it. Everybody. I heard subsequently.

Q...Doubted that it could be done...

CONDON: Doubted that it could be done and particularly that young punk that came from Germany to do this job.

Q: It felt good!

CONDON: It felt good. It was good and this was all in one month, 27 days.

Q: Twenty-seven days, but you had your family with you.

CONDON: I had them.

CONDON: Yes, now we haven't come to the in a way amusing case then that says a lot about how life develops. During the time that I was...the minister came from Washington...

Q: Are you talking about Morocco?

CONDON: This was during the time of the negotiations, during those twenty-seven days. The ministers came from Morocco, two from the Labor Department to see the Labor Minister. The Embassy was in charge of the visitors, of Steve McClintick especially, but there were other people, too. And the visitor had already been there for five, six days and he was not getting the appointment with the Labor Minister and he was frustrated and I was at a reception for some reason at the Embassy and I was invited and I got to meet the visitor who was no other than Simpson.

Q: Oh! Smith Simpson. Where was he located?

CONDON: He was the African affairs specialist from the State and Labor Departments. So I met him and he was talking small talk why he was there and he mentioned his frustration about getting the appointment with the Labor Minister and I looked at him and said "Bob, when would you like to see him?" And he said with the incredulity in his eyes dripping and he said, "Well, anytime." And I said, "Tomorrow?" Tomorrow was fine, and I said "Eleven o'clock?" Eleven o'clock, fine. I'll confirm it to you tonight or tomorrow morning. So I still remember the expression on Bob Simpson's face, again who was this young man who going to do what the entire Embassy was unable to do for me? He tells me tomorrow at eleven o'clock!! So you know Bob, of course, always in control of the situation and he didn't express any of his doubts and he said, let's see what happens. So immediately I called the number two man in the Labor Ministry, and said there is a visitor from the Labor Department in Washington who is an interesting man he has interesting things to say and he wants to see the Minister and he must see him tomorrow at eleven o'clock because he is leaving. I'll come to the point that I wanted to make here and he said John, well you say eleven o'clock and I'll put it down, and bring him over. So I called Bob Simpson and said I will come and pick you up tomorrow at 11 o'clock and you'll go and see the Minister. Thank you very much, thank you very much. He saw the Minister. I wasn't present at the meeting. He saw the minister and it must have been less than a month later that a telegram came from the State Department asking the Air Force to release me to join the Foreign Service.

Q: Really! That is wonderful. Is that the only reason you think that came or was it in the works anyhow?

CONDON: No, it was not in the works. No it was not. It was Bob Simpson's doing.

Q: Robert Smith Simpson?

CONDON: Robert Smith Simpson is the full name.

Q: Otherwise known as Smith Simpson.

CONDON: George Cabot Lodge was the assistant secretary and before things developed that you wanted to introduce and we made an appointment to meet in Geneva.

Q: To put a time on this, would it be during the [International Labor] Conference of June 1960, would it have been?

CONDON: June 1960; we left June 1959, it must have been June 1959 at the Conference in June. Actually, it was not the Conference, it was later it was in September. Cabot was coming in connection with the ILO so I arrived there from Wiesbaden and I called him up at the hotel. When I heard his voice I thought I was hearing his father [Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge] who only a few years before had been in the [UN] Security Council showing the famous evidence of the Russians' eavesdropping at the American Embassy. Anyway, so we met. And here is another one: Actually my appointment was due to my taste for Yoghurt as breakfast. Because he orders Yoghurt for breakfast and when I saw that I said this is my man and I ordered it myself which was to my liking and we started talking and then the table started rolling.

Q: Actually, I was meaning to ask you what you would like to have for breakfast in the morning. Fortunately, I have bought some Yoghurt. [Laughter]

CONDON: No, we don't have breakfast because we have been eating too much. So we so the paper was and even _____ January 1960 I was reporting to the State Department and assigned to replace Smith Simpson as the African area specialist in the Labor Department.

Q: In the Labor Department? He was on leave from State?

CONDON: He was on leave and I was on leave again from State to take his [place.]

Q: So you arrived in Labor from the Department?

CONDON: Labor Department. I believe it was in the beginning of 1960. And then I had quite a bit to do with labor attachés in the African area and there was the question of what to do about Tunisia and this was being debated and again I drafted the telegram about the positions of labor attaché in Africa in Tunisia and drafted a memorandum for the personnel people in the State Department appointing John B. Condon as labor attaché.

Q: You don't leave much to chance, do you? You life save people and they work! So you went to Tunisia shortly after you entered the Foreign Service?

CONDON: Right. I actually might have the dates for a year because we went into to Tunisia in 1961 leaving June of 1961 so actually the recruitment into State and Labor Department for about a year, yes I stayed on that work for a year...acting...it was 1960. The interview with George Cabot Lodge was in September of 1960 and then June 61 after almost a year we went to Tunisia, because then again the memorandum went through the mill; nobody objected; nobody; it went through the committee.

Q: This was the first labor attaché.

CONDON: The first labor attaché in Tunis.

Q: Well, it was about that time, then, that I don't know whether I was working first with Peterson or with Mitchell in the Landrum Griffin and I met you casually at that time. Down in the basement. [Landrum Griffin Act of 1959]

CONDON: Yes, in the basement, in the cafeteria.

Q: Well, we've now come clear; finally, we've come to your entrance into the Foreign Service, proper. Where you have had a long experience; a unique experience and a very good experience preparing you for the post of labor attaché. And now I would like to ask you to answer those questions you have in the questionnaire concerning what you did what you feel you accomplished, what limitations there were on what you could do and that applies to each of the posts and when you get tired, you'll stop.

CONDON: I see. I see. Yes. In Tunis, in Tunis.

Q: Did you stay for a full tour?

CONDON: I stayed for thirteen months. For thirteen months and it was my first labor attaché in a proper Embassy post.

Q: What was your rating when you reported? I suppose you were pretty far up in the GS category.

CONDON: I was a three. [Old FSR-3] I was appointed as a three [current FSO-1]

Q: For an initial appointment.

CONDON: For an initial appointment, fairly senior. But by that time I was a GS-14 in USAFE so I had I as a matter of fact I had a very free hand, completely free hand.

Q: Were you a member of the Country Team. Did they have a Country Team?

CONDON: Did they have a Country Team? Yes, they had a Country Team and I was a member of it.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

CONDON: The Ambassador...Oh, I'll have to dig that out. [Walter M. Walmsley]

Q: What's more important than who the Ambassador was, is what were the relations, negative or positive, what were the accomplishments, etc.

CONDON: The relations were very good. I think the political officer was a little bit antagonistic and jealous.

Q: Was he below you in grade? Or about the same level?

CONDON: About the same grade.

Q: That's the problem.

CONDON: That's the problem. The same grade but there one of the happy things that happened in Tunisia was that I got to know Todman.

Q: Oh, Terence Todman.

CONDON: Terence Todman who was third secretary at the time but a brilliant officer as it turned out and effective and again another teamwork with his wife. We have remained friends since then. Very close friends. So I had a free hand, no? And I immediately established contacts with the labor leaders, all of the line; they all came to the house very frequently. Nancy again did her excellent job of receiving warmly and tastefully. At the time there was the Algerian presence in Tunisia and the provisional government was in Tunisia and the labor movement, the Algerian labor movement, was in Tunisia also. So I quickly established relations with them. [As the war for independence from France was ongoing] at some periods of time this was not considered wise but I took things in my own hands and entered into contact with the Algerian labor movement Is Ral which became very very productive when I was transferred from Tunisia to Algeria.

Q: Do you want to make some observations on the relationship between the government of Tunisia then under this charismatic guy who was Bourguiba?

CONDON: Bourguiba...

Q: Bourguiba, who had a long political history and was our host at the 1957 ICFTU Congress there and who sort of took over from the trade union people, the status symbol as leader of the country sort of, I felt, subordinated the trade unions, the Tunisian trade unions. Did he come out of the trade union movement, Bourguiba?

CONDON: No, he did not come out of the trade union movement. But he relied on the trade union movement and he relied on the trade union movement before the independence and he was so self-centered in so many respects as all the heroic figures of that era. They would not tolerate any rivalry any contest or challenge to any of his personal and governmental authority and so he but at the same time he was intelligent enough to know that he would not he could not and should not subjugate the labor movement entirely and the labor movement was not about to challenge his authority because that also was not the patriotic thing to do. So, there as a modus vivendi that had developed and which was honorable patriotic and it at the time it served Tunisia well.

Q: It did not begin to deteriorate until much later.

CONDON: Exactly. The relationship at the time I was there it was a very fortunate time in that respect and because that type of relationship was good for Tunisia good for democracy and good for the free world.

Q: When you left there were none of the manifestations of later, tension, nor the deterioration of Bourguiba as a democratic leader?

CONDON: No, exactly. At that time there was not that situation. There were the occasional tensions that some labor demands at that time would have been excessive or wouldn't be interpreted as if it was a challenge to the government but the basic relationship was a healthy one and it was a good one for all three areas for Tunisia.

Q: What about your relations with the American trade union representatives there?

CONDON: In Tunisia there was none at that time.

Q: No visits from time to time from the AFL-CIO?

CONDON: Visits, oh yes, yes they were very good where Irving Brown would come and one would see him and he would see me and then [names unrecognized] very friendly relationship. And I expected autonomy and independence...

Q: They didn't have any programs there, did they?

CONDON: Not really, there was some help in forms of typewriters and material, paper, etc.

Q: The other side of the American trade union movement? Victor Reuther at that time was the--I think the head of the UAW international department, did he?

CONDON: No, no. There was no AFL-CIO...

Q: So what were the circumstances of your leaving?

CONDON: The creation of a new job in Algeria.

Q: You did not forget how to type up the request for your...

CONDON: [laughter] No, there. We were well established there, but it was obvious that since I had already encountered the labor movement in Algeria and there was a challenging [situation with the transition to an independent Algeria] they made it, the Algerians, the regional office in the State Department with responsibility for both Tunisia and Algeria.

Q: Oh, oh, I see...

CONDON: Yes, so from that point of view it made sense and made sense to put someone to be present there in Algeria during this crucial period of independence of the formation of the new independent government. So we left in December of 1962.

Q: In effect, you moved the headquarters of the regional, of the Tunisian, the Tunis labor attaché, to Algeria and subsumed the responsibility for Algeria, Tunis, and Libya.

CONDON: Correct. So which was only about a month after the independence of the government which was formed by Ben Bella.

Q: Had you known Ben Bella before, by the way?

CONDON: No, I got to him very well there; very well there and we were very friendly. Every time that he saw us any place he would pick up all three children in his arms and play with them and he would recognize me at meetings and wave at me. I remember a couple of times I tried to write a telegram about my encounters with Ben Bella but Bill Porter who was the Ambassador, said you know in Washington we don't have only friends, so let me handle this. Let me have your memorandum of seeing Ben Bella and I [will write the cable.]

Q: I'm afraid I don't get and I wonder if our readers get what you mean if you mean to be more expansive about this about the meaning of Ambassador Porter's comment that he wanted to get credit for it.

CONDON: No, no. He wanted it to appear that he was exercising his ambassadorial responsibility of being the major contact with the president of Algeria. Which I found reasonable.

Q: Any sense of tension between Ben Bella and others that you could see at that point?

CONDON: At that point. No, no no. And although we have yet to go but after I had left in a way it surprised me. The tension was between Ben Bella and UGTA.

Q: The union?

CONDON: Yes, the union. There was considerable tension. That type of balanced relationship that Bourguiba and the UGTT, the trade union of Tunisia, were able to establish did not develop in Algeria. Even from the beginning, so partly because at the time the Socialist sloganeering of Ben Bella dominated the political scene and the one party system was the dominant theoretical approach to government which did not evolve for a competitor in the power structure on the part of the labor movement.

Q: That was generally characteristic of North Africa.

CONDON: Yes, Yemen [Guinea] was the classic example.

Q: What were you in my interview with George Lodge. He had so many nice things to say about our labor attaché in Guinea at that time and a little bit time, Phil Heller, whom he gave very great credit for being the intermediary between the normal American attitude toward such extremist socialists as Touré and the knowledge that Phil had of Touré which I thought was very good for Phil's memory and very good in illustrating how a labor officer can serve as a good contact between a government that is not too friendly with extremist socialists and yet we have to maintain relations with them.

CONDON: Very true, and I gave Phil considerable support because I was the African desk man at the time and I felt sympathetic with the view that he was taking and I was giving him considerable support and somewhat of the things that George Weaver said...

Q: George Lodge? I'm talking about George Lodge. George Lodge went to, as a matter of fact Heller was appointed with the influence I say that strictly off the record it's Lodge's, as a result of Lodge's intervention. Later on. I did not interview Weaver, somebody else did. We have some of that in there.

CONDON: Some of that, some because I had written many many a memoranda to support the view that Phil was taking and his Ambassador wrote a book, Atwood.

Q: Well, then; one other thing I wanted to ask you about Ben Bella. What sort of a problem does it create for a labor attaché to have very close contacts with a government leader like Ben Bella, and then has to keep his contacts with the trade unions?

CONDON: No, no; not at all. The labor leaders understood that as a member of the American Embassy I had to have contacts with everyone and if anything they knew how sympathetic and supportive I was of the labor movement as an instrument and an institution of democracy and they were hoping at least that in my contacts with the governmental officials I would be putting in a good word for their role.

Q: That you would serve as a bridge...

CONDON: Yes, as a bridge, yes. Never and at the same time there was no eyebrows raised on the part of government officials Ben Bella included and the fact that I was the labor attaché and therefore by assignment in contact and in support of the labor movement as a matter of fact my phone conversations with Ben Bella and with other government ministers in which I reminded them of the important role that trade unions have to play in an independent Algeria from the point of view of structuring a democracy, and institutionalizing the life of the country. And he would never contest that and he would profess every time that that's the way he looked upon it. But I knew at the same time that he wanted [to ensure that] this institutionalizing of the labor movement would not assume proportions that would challenge [his authority].

Q: That would good too far...

CONDON: Yes, challenge his authority and his power.

Q: That leads me to something I forgot earlier in your history. I should have covered this: You have a remarkable background which led to your involvement in labor affairs and yet I see nothing in your early life...Your father wasn't a trade unionist or anything like that. Did you have any attitudes toward trade unionism in your early years, one way or another?

CONDON: Umm.

Q: Politics?

CONDON: Yes, I was very much interested and active in politics from my birth. And I was always in support of the underdog and of the weak and the structural power and I saw the trade unions as an instrument of support of the weakest side of the economic relationship.

Q: In an intellectual way, rather than like some of our labor attachés come out of the _____?

CONDON: That is true; it was totally intellectual.

Q: What about student activity as a student?

CONDON: No.

Q: None? OK.

CONDON: Yes.

Q: That's alright. [Laughter]

CONDON: I know it's alright!

Q: So, now we're...you were regional labor adviser.

CONDON: Right. Regional labor adviser and periodic visits to Tunisia; periodic visits to Libya;

Q: How about travel money? Because one of the problems we have is that so many of these people, regional affairs officers, really have to stay close to home if only because of their travel money.

CONDON: That was the time that it was not a major problem. Six months after I had been in Algeria it was time to go to Tunisia and visit my other territory there and the Ambassador gave a party, a dinner party, for us. He asked me who to invite and I suggested inviting a number of people including the head of the fisheries in Tunisia, a remarkable man who brought me into every village in Tunisia.

Q: Did you give his name?

CONDON: El Woun. A genius of an organizer. A right on imaginative and he accomplished that by employing a refrigerator trucks and sending them out to every village in Tunisia for the first time in the history of Tunisia Sahara villages ate fresh fish. I really had a tremendous admiration for this man so I invited him to the dinner so with a cup of coffee in our hands we were talking about things improving, there was myself and three Tunisians and somehow we started talking about diplomats and we focused especially on the transfer of diplomats from one post to another and all three Tunisians were unanimous and vociferous and almost aggressive about the fact that the American diplomats were being transferred too soon after they had been to the post and they found that was difficult to explain and understand and in their frustration to express their strong feelings about the matter one turns to me and said Take you, for example. I think you were here in Tunisia for four or five years that's the way to do it.

Q: [Laughter]

CONDON: I mean that was hard to tell him what it was like 13 months.

Q: Well, that just goes to show. Like thirteen months to you.

CONDON: The Ambassador and I exchanged glances and he appreciated the fact that I was able to say while I had been there for four or five years it seemed like only thirteen months.

Q: Did you have anybody in the Embassy in Tunis or in Libya for that matter who in your absence would cover labor issues in any way?

CONDON: Yes. In Tunis, Terry Todman.

Q: Oh, he was left there as the more junior officer.

CONDON: The most junior of all.

Q: And he did well?

CONDON: Yes, he did well, of course.

Q: I see. Has for many years.

CONDON: Right.

Q: And in Libya?

CONDON: Libya. Yes. But he was the political officer and he had [the labor portfolio]

Q: I don't care whether he had the title of labor attaché, but could he cover the labor field?

CONDON: It was Ambassador Newsom. [Note: Ambassador to Libya 1965-69]

Q: OH! He was very interested in the field himself.

CONDON: Right, exactly so. He was David Newsom.

Q: Ok. Anything else about that post?

CONDON: No, there was the AFL-CIO representative in Nigeria at the time.

Q: Was he with the AALC or AFL-CIO?

CONDON: No, I think it was AFL-CIO. I suspect he was CIA. But we maintained normal relationships and I did not act on the basis of my suspicions which was confirmed later, but he was treated as a genuine AFL-CIO representative the Tunisians treated him likewise.

Q: Was there any effort as I must say there was in India to identify an AFL-CIO representative as a CIA agent?

CONDON: That was the point.

Q: ...Of the people who were fighting American interests.

CONDON: No, never.

Q: Well, you were more fortunate than other people in that respect than others of us. Well, ok.

CONDON: Why yes. Unfortunately when he came back he committed suicide.

Q: Oh, that's too bad.

CONDON: Yes. He was a high strung young man.

Q: What did he do, did he do anything effective, or so far as you know or was he...

CONDON: He could have been more effective. Someone else might have been more effective. But he gained the confidence of the UGTA leaders and they had relied on him for maintaining the contact with the AFL-CIO and whatever they asked him to do he was there to do it and he was present at Embassy dinners.

Q: Ok.

CONDON: He did well. He was a bit high strung, his subsequent fate proved that.

Q: How much do you think, what union do you think he nominally represented?

CONDON: I don't think he was from any union.

Q: Well, we have many of those but they would always have a union identification.

CONDON: Well. I never pushed into the matter...

Q: From the North African region you moved to?

CONDON: I went to Vietnam. Right where we had the chance to meet and work together.

Q: Well, that was working together that was a really pleasant situation but the situation was, is this the right time to begin with, or are you ready to go to sleep or do you want to continue?

CONDON: I don't mind...

Q: I don't but I want to get as much time as I can. Why do you think we're putting you up? It's to take advantage of

CONDON: [laughter] Well. If it works, it works. So, Vietnam.

Q: So you came back from [North Africa] when did you get home leave in all this?

CONDON: Uh, we got home leave. We left Algeria in '64 for purposes of returning and the day before we left the orders were changed from home leave and return to home leave and transfer to Vietnam. The day before.

Q: Do I understand that you had home leave, came to Vietnam after home leave, arrived in Vietnam when?

CONDON: In September of '64.

Q: In October '64 I arrived in New Delhi and was there for five years.

CONDON: [Laughter] So you and I have something in common.

Q: So you started in there in September 1964 and because of the importance of the general political situation...I'm going to raise a whole lot of questions with respect to labor and the place it had in the South Vietnam government and with relations with the United States. You arrived in Vietnam with the family...

CONDON: With the family...

Q: Which then had to leave for Thailand later...

CONDON: That was in February...

Q: In February 1965...

CONDON: In February '65...

Q: And, this is shortly after the explosion and all that...

CONDON: Before the explosion...Shortly before the explosion.

Q: Shortly before...Will you describe the labor situation in and the relation between the government, the changing governments, and the trade unions, the government, and the United States, and the attitude of the US trade union movement toward a labor policy in Vietnam.

CONDON: Well, that's a big order. Now the labor movement, it was not strictly a labor movement in Vietnam. It had political underpinnings. It did not have autonomy of existence in terms of a programmatic view for activities but nevertheless it represented an institution in being, being born, to take advantage of some freedom, of democratic freedom that was being developed for the whole country in its anti-communist stand. The governments were very jealous.

Q: You came there at a time when Diem was?

CONDON: Just shortly after Diem had been assassinated.

Q: Right. So you had a series of governments following that only the first of which you were there. Thieu?

CONDON: No, it was...

Q: Before Thieu.

CONDON: Before Thieu. It was before Thieu, but there was a series of governments there. This was a very important period. As a matter of fact when we arrived, the day we arrived, Sunday was a day of a coup. And I had just arrived and I saw tanks and didn't realize, and then the following day when I reported at the Embassy they were asking me questions about the coup that had been attempted the day before. So Tran Quoc Buu of course was ...

Q: Now we're Tran (three words) Quoc Buu.

CONDON: Tran Quoc Buu he was uncontested leader the uncontested leader of what we should call the labor movement of Vietnam.

Q: And he was an intellectual?

CONDON: Yes. I would call him an intellectual. He reflected and he had an agility of mind and a perception of things which was quite uncommon.

Q: Well, he actually was never a worker in a trade that I recall hearing about.

CONDON: No, ...No... No.

Q: And he puts and I'm sure you found that in North Africa, too.

CONDON: Exactly.

Q: And that is what gave me the impression frankly that he had been there so long that he spoke so warmly when I would speak to him, so, you say you arrived in September?

CONDON: In September of 1964. About the seventh.

Q: You were there, you were there just over when I arrived at Tan Son Nut [Saigon airport]. Anyhow, the previous I guess the temptation for me is to give you the impression that I had when I arrived there which will be referred to in my own interview, as I am preparing a number of types on my but I want you to give some reaction to that. I came there under circumstances you may remember, Jim Cullen [?] the AID administrator had, resisted Weaver's suggestion that he get someone out there who could advise him on whether a labor program was necessary. I believe at that time you felt the labor program was necessary, Jim Curran, didn't think it was unnecessary, but he just didn't want some broken down business agent assigned to head the program and he and Weaver agreed that at that time I would come out there for a couple of weeks, months, with a view to looking over the situation and make recommendations. The first thing I found was that there was some, whereas in the United States, people felt and were feel much more strongly later on that there were two sides to this. There was the North Viet Nam government and there were some Americans who felt that this was the wave of the future and others feelings that it was the evil empire and a few in between. And on the other side there was the government which some people felt was ineffective and some of us thought was on the wrong side of progress, et cetera. And I didn't have the feeling that the, I'm sure you did in North Africa, that there was anything in between. The first reactions I got from Tran Quoc Buu was he arranged some things, but I don't know if he really attended some of them, was that we're not followers of the government we criticize the government, too, we don't have a perfect democracy like the government says it has, but for crying out loud, if we have people operating the railroads from the north a beautiful city where they speak French, in the north right close to the border,

CONDON: Nga Trang?

Q: No, right close to the border, the airport, oh no, a beautiful. Well, I'll think of it later. We got people offering this train that goes north once a day from Saigon to ...Maybe it's Da Nang. Da Nang is on the...

CONDON: Da Nang...

Q: ...And this is in the ...and occasionally our people, our members were killed on the way because the Communist know have...what we're trying to get out of this government is some sort of treatment of the will of these people so that they don't suffer, because in building up an opposition when the Communists underground has the opportunity to throw a bomb in a train and destroy the least that you have is some sort of protection for our people to think that there is an American presence, with the Americans' system of standards, etc. we can get something out of that. He was the one who exposed to me that there were many opinions on this government. Some thought it was evil and some thought that it could be depended upon and mainly that the labor issue was one in which justice could be attained or at least fought for with some element of American labor presence. I give you these details because I want to know the option

Q: [If I] said, John, I'd like your reactions to the _____ the labor role as to the war, that is [not] simply choose the good guys and the bad guys, but see what there is in either side that would lead you to what would comprise a labor program in even a country as with as little democracy as South Vietnam if it has to oppose a country like North Vietnam. How would you react?

CONDON: Two things. First there is no doubt that the Communists in Vietnam were in the labor movement. What made them do what they did in their participation in the labor movement is attributed to the fact that they could not expose themselves to American criticism and to the skill that Tran Quoc Buu had in retaining personal relations towards the leaders of the [government?]. I think there probably were representatives of the American government in the country who were suspicious of the leaders in the labor movement.

Q: Was there a suspicion as to their loyalty to the anti-Communist fight? Or suspicions of their selfishness?

CONDON: Suspicions as to their selfishness and of their challenge to the authorities. Their position of power.

Q: Not their selling out to Communists?

CONDON: Not their selling out to Communists. I think that to the extent that they might have articulated suspicions as well, they did it only for the American consumption. And I fear that there probably were Americans, not of the highest authorities, but Americans with whom government officials were in contact who did fall for that suspicion on the part of the various government representatives. I feel that if it wasn't for Buu's skill, personal touch, personal relationships, the situation would have become really very worrisome. And there were certain points in the relationships that exposed the Vietnamese government to severe criticism and to severe second thoughts about their commitment to democracy and freedom. However, Buu was able to prevent that worst

scenario that would have developed. But basically nevertheless all political leaders looked upon the labor movement with considerable suspicion as potential challenges to their authority. And that suspicion was even shared by some of that facet that facility on the part of the political leaders was shared by some of our government representatives and perhaps even at the highest levels including the Ambassadors Taylor and Lodge, and people down the line. I operated always on the basis of that awareness on my part and I tried to thwart it and I tried to modify it and at least I think I succeeded to some extent in preventing it from becoming too widely spread and to articulate it and it became a personal fault on the part of the Embassy people more than something to be talked about and conspired to do something about it. I think I was successful to some extent.

Q: What did you feel was the appropriate operating relationship between the US government, Embassy and AID both, and the trade unions? How did you feel about a labor program? I know you welcomed the idea.

CONDON: I never had the slightest doubt that the labor program was needed, was doing good, was what was needed and nothing less than, or slightly less than _____.

Q: Did you have any relations with Jim Killen that would indicate that he had these doubts?

CONDON: No, if anything Jim Killen might have had a bit of doubt about whether it really was going to make any difference. Is it really as effective as we would like it to be, or as the people who are running it say it is? And that view was understood would have a touch of cynicism. That things are not going to be decided on that basis and otherwise I don't think that, well probably Killen was the one who shared least that sensitivity on the part of the political leaders toward the labor movement.

Q: You never, of course, had a trade union background. You were succeeded in that job by Barney Taylor. Who was in the Marshall Plan in Paris before. What was his attitude on the trade union program. He obviously came from a trade union, the UAW, did he feel that that something could be accomplished in the country?

CONDON: I believe so. I have no reason [to doubt.]

Q: Oh, he came here with Tran Quoc Buu.

CONDON: I feel that he was strongly favorable.

Q: Did you have an overlap with him?

CONDON: Maybe a month.

Q: Did it because of a sensitive place like that it seems to me that an overlap period of a considerable time would be so valuable but he evidently knew French.

CONDON: He knew French...

Q: And he evidently made very good contacts since we met Tran Quoc Buu here. He came with Barney, I think, oh I know, in May. He was here with Buu on May 19, 1964 because he...

CONDON: I succeeded Barney Taylor.

Q: Yes, you came in September 1994...

CONDON: Yes, we had I think we had some overlap. Maybe less.

Q: But it is true that he was never able or did this was this arranged before, he was never able to push the idea of having not only a labor attaché but also some labor functioning program of any size in Vietnam because I got the impression from Killen that either Barney was unsuccessful or he hadn't pushed hard enough against Killen's cynicism, as you referred to it.

CONDON: Probably, but you must remember also that this was the beginning of [the U.S. military escalation]…there was no major military buildup [yet.]

Q: Yes...

CONDON: Before this all happened the importance of the Viet Nam war [to Washington] was just beginning at that time so he can be understood not to have pushed, there was no urgency, there was nothing we still were debating what we would do next and so I wouldn't I think I could understand why Barney may not have pushed may not have had the idea because up until that time when I came Vietnam was we had 23,000 people there so what, we could very well have left so I can understand that you know it did not appear to be of immediate urgency.

Q: How long did you stay in Vietnam how did your opinions develop during that time toward the development of the feasibility of success toward the beginning of a sizable program of labor aid?

CONDON: I stayed until 1966. Just about three years, yes three years [sic]. It was up to September 1966.

Q: Nancy and the children were in Thailand during most of that time?

CONDON: In Thailand. So I was [unaccompanied] from the beginning. I felt that if we are going to be there, we must do the thing properly and I was reflecting what my old Vietnamese contacts in the government and the labor movement were telling me: bomb the dikes [in North Viet Nam]. There is no alternative, there is nothing else to do but bomb the dikes. Well, we didn't do it. Because we were concerned about the thousands of people who would have drowned. We killed over two million to say nothing of the

American who were building the bridges and did nothing. When you go to war for something you do it properly or you don't do it at all. It had to be done: bomb the dikes.

Q: Did any element in the Embassy propose that?

CONDON: No.

Q: The military however.

CONDON: Not even the military. I think the word did get back but I don't know whether I put it into a memorandum to the Ambassador but I don't think I put it in a telegram.

Q: Who was the Ambassador when you were there? Lodge?

CONDON: [Maxwell] Taylor, and then [Henry Cabot] Lodge.

Q: Taylor, and then Lodge. Ah hah.

CONDON: Taylor.... For that matter, so my contact was [as a] member of the Country Team. It was very very disappointing very disappointing.

Q: This military?

CONDON: The military: Westmoreland. Oh when they hired Westmoreland to be a—my god.

Q: You are on the record, I want you to know. But weren't they...what I am trying to get you to do is to comment on the function of military capability in the social situation like that. For instance, I would have expected the military to take a position that an extreme...an extreme hawkish position, let's bomb the dikes, we'll save more people that way in toto and then the other, but they didn't even express that.

CONDON: You will recall that the record is what the communications with the military maybe it was considered and then they thought that the political costs would be too high to pay. If they had done it in the beginning there would have been an international political [issue]…In the UN...

Q: In the UN...Well, you stayed there three years and you saw the beginning of a labor program that consisted of more than just the Embassy reporting on labor matters but actual involvement in carrying out programs through US AID. Which were the more effective ones; which were the less effective; or how do you asses them?

CONDON: From the point of view of the programs of the various elements of the programs?

Q: Let's take one that I knew a little about. We got Teddy Gleason there to work on the longshoremen.

CONDON: Right.

Q: What was your view of the purpose and the success or failure of it?

CONDON: Well, I think it was a successful program because there was an area where it was indeed needed and it played a little bit havoc with the internal structure of Vietnamese society because there were the labor bosses like in every other port. But, it gave the rank and file a feeling that they were getting someplace and that the American presence was improving their lot and enhancing their freedom and autonomy vis a vis the labor bosses. So, I think every bit of a program labor program that was conducted for the AID or through the volunteer services of such people as Teddy Gleason helped to enhance the feeling of the [dock workers positively]…..[and] for the Vietnamese workers that there was hope that things can be getting better that the feudal society could be replaced by something else and that the fight against the Communists was worthwhile.

Q: Well, let me give you a different perspective. I happen to agree with you about it, because you know I had something at this to do with getting him interested volunteering to do this great work. I have an admiration for many of the things that Teddy Gleason did. The problem I found at this end and I got to know him pretty well, I used to take foreign groups to meet with him and he was of course a dictator, a beneficent dictator in his own union and the reputation around the trade union movement had this, whereas I would say that no matter what he did in his own local union he may not have had elections too often and he may have supported bad elements in there but he did get the American longshoremen a status which you know what like Jimmy Hoffa got for the at a price not the same price for the Transport Truckers. Somehow or other in the fight on Vietnam policy later on the fact that he had been and praised his efforts himself so assiduously among the trade union people and among the population generally the AID program, the labor AID program in Vietnam somehow got the reputation that well, it's the sort of a program a guy like Teddy Gleason would support, well it must be no good. So, that it cast a negative slant on the things that the AFL-CIO was doing including Teddy Gleason. That disappointed me very much.

CONDON: It is disappointing. I know but that doesn't surprise me.

Q: No, no. Not surprising...

CONDON: In general politics though often it can be hardly things thought and said. Let's face it, Teddy Gleason and the Longshoremen's didn't enjoy the best [reputation].

Q: A clean reputation...

CONDON: A clean reputation. So when they saw this it was too facile for people creating so forth the labor movement first and all the longshoremen association in

particular to cast doubts and to express misgivings and doubts about the whole operation, so that doesn't surprise me. I was more concerned about what effect it had in Vietnam.

Q: Right. I know there it was very positive.

CONDON: Very positive. Very positive and to say nothing of anti-Vietnam people, the anti-Vietnam people who were seeking [ammunition] for arguments.

Q: You mean the people who were against our Vietnam policy?

CONDON: Against our Vietnam policy. So what was easier for them to use the image that the Longshoremen's Association who kept out and put in critical views...

Q: Well, beginning with that time and at later times, too, I felt very frustrated in talking to groups in the American trade unions that were more highly thought of in terms of their social policy and international interests etc. when I would try to talk to them about the situation in Vietnam and would present this view that you know it's not just black and white but there are people in what you consider to be the wrong side of the Vietnam fight, that is, the south Vietnam who have genuine grievances and we as a labor movement here have an obligation, irrespective of the government or the support of the government to try to help these people get you know get better conditions. Very difficult at this end to do that because some of the unions that had the best programs, not Teddy Gleason's type of running a union, were so decimated by the strength within their own organizations of the anti-Vietnam policy political policy that it was hard to get them to understand [the value of their participation].

CONDON: Right. I can understand because the anti-Vietnam policy sentiment or so was so inspired by beliefs in social justice and democracy and which they did not see being promoted in Vietnam therefore they felt quite justified in abstaining from participating in that effort.

Q: So this is a constant deficiency in our labor programs. Believe me that my observation at this end from what I was doing in training people was that the same thing happened on Salvador policy. People just were unwilling to accept the political responsibility of supporting a government that was far from perfect but at least closer to perfect than the opposition to them. I think that if there's anything that I would direct some research into is trying to discover any positive possibilities in treating that sort of a problem with the argument that it is not between perfection and evil but between evil and less than perfection. And the need to support elements within the less than perfection.

CONDON: That's right.

Q: Have you got any solutions for our project?

CONDON: No, you put it very well, exactly, that's all except that we focus on the imperfections of the existing system and we don't realize that the alternative is even more imperfect. And it is utterly evil.

Q: And I would go further than that and say that even in the imperfect one rather than the more evil one, you're not selling your soul if you select those parts of a program that you're willing to push in the absence of perfection as this one.

CONDON: Right.

Q: Well, I think in the what happened in Salvador might have been ultimately a little better than that but certainly in Vietnam we sort of failed on that.

CONDON: Yes.

Q: Any other comments about specific labor projects, because we are covering the AID field, the labor aspects in AID also.

CONDON: There is something to be said perhaps about the trips to the States at that particular moment. Of course there were rewards for having done well and having shown leadership and perhaps after returning from the trip to America they would be more effective, but I think we should have put more emphasis and used the money that was used for the trips which were not inexpensive to do things locally. I know that there are many people who do not share this view but I think that the money could have been more productive, both immediate results and more urgently needed in place then that the results obtained sending people to the States.

Q: Well, we feel that the trip that Tran Quoc Buu made in '64 was of value, getting him exposed to people who might successfully support us, but on the general question of awarding individuals who had been doing good work by sending them on a trip to the United States, you're probably right. But, I want to tell you that just today sitting at this table, Don Kienzle was reviewing a transcript of an interview I conducted with a guy who was very active in the Marshall Plan, Jim Silberman, who pointed out the direct opposite. It just applies the same understanding to a situation in the developed countries where he said that for purposes of our productivity program in the Marshall Plan, totally different from this political situation, it served our interests and those of the recipients much better if we used our funds, instead of abroad, in the countries in which we were trying to see productivity programs in having teams come to the United States.

CONDON: I fully agree with you.

Q: But isn't it interesting. An example of the same problem being faced in two different areas in which the opposite approaches would be appropriate.

CONDON: I fully agree on that. That one of the great things that the Marshall Plan did was affording those trips to the United States.

Q: It's very interesting. It just happened this same day--that Kienzle was here, earlier, and we were discussing. But I agree with you.

CONDON: Even if you had asked me without citing what Silberman had said, I think I would actually have said the same thing: In the developed countries of Europe there was the more effective aspect perhaps *the* most effective aspect of the Marshall Plan.

Q: Do you have any other comments about your period in Vietnam? You made friends there.

CONDON: ...made friends there...

Q: Lost most of them? Lost touch.

CONDON: Most of them. They're now broke down...

Q: Tran Quoc Buu--died---

CONDON: Tran Quoc Buu...I and Irving Brown were the only Americans at his funeral.

Q: Really? Where was it?

CONDON: In Paris. That was a sad case indeed.

Q: There was a labor minister who had a daughter who had us over for dinner. What happened to him?

CONDON: He's in California someplace...

Q: Really!

CONDON: Yes. He was the labor minister whom we all worried about he came from the young man he served five, 7 years in a prison camp.

Q: He came from where, did you say?

CONDON: Esso, he was the employee of the Esso and then he became labor minister...

Q: Oh, the American oil company!

CONDON: That's right. And he so now he came out and he's in Paris. He came out to the mill. [With] his wife, he aged considerably.

Q: Well, that's what jail does to you.

CONDON: He said why look at you 20 years older and I look 20 years older. 20 years older than you. And but he goes back and forth to Vietnam. He's trying to promote business. Now other companies are trying but he's in relations. We see him and we talk. He travels quite a bit in other parts of Asia and just before we left the States I called his wife and he was in Hong Kong and he was going to be gone for a month or so.

Q: What did it do for your career?

CONDON: I don't know. I don't know. When I was promoted to from a 3 to a 2 I think was in Vietnam.

Q: Oh, really?

CONDON: Or, no Dick Conn, he says he was on the promotion board that promoted me and I don't remember when. Now from the personal level, perhaps career-wise, I got know Dick Holbrook who was the assistant to Lodge and I got to know Peter Tarnoff who is now the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and I got to know who else, who became now because Dick Holbrook was my battleship he was the assistant secretary for Asian affairs Far East, as you know.

Q: Well, we haven't breached your career yet

CONDON: and Peter Tarnoff and Frank Wisner. But Frank Wisner I knew him for many years when he was...

Q: So you went then from Vietnam to Beirut?

CONDON: At Beirut there was again my good luck would have it a period when Beirut was a thriving metropolis...

Q: ...beautiful city.

CONDON: ...beautiful city. People...how many of them ethnic groups...

Q: It must hurt you to see what's happened to them...

CONDON: Oh, absolutely, absolutely terrible.

Q: Well, it shows you that nothing can be that good in a developing society that remains that good. You came there in '66 you say. And stayed?

CONDON: And stayed until 1970. Beginning of 1970.

Q: Two year posts?

CONDON: Yes, but I had gone on leave in '69 and returned and so with the prospect of staying another two or three years.

Q: Until ?

CONDON: Until I got the orders to transfer to Paris. And I delayed my departure for a whole six months. [Laughter]

Q: That was a temptation and I'm sure. Well, you served as the ...that was a regional job, too. What did you cover?

CONDON: I covered Syria, which became meaningless after 1967 but then it was in the program; Bahrain, Qatar, Yemen, I incorporated Egypt which was not in the original project, but Newsome [agreed?], and he saw to that. And Saudi Arabia, of course.

Q: And you were able to travel to all those countries?

CONDON: Yes. There I succeeded the big man Harold Snell who had been already been seven years there.

Q: Yes. Harold Snell...

CONDON: Harold Snell.

Q: Yes, he's just not well at all. And doesn't go out much. His local national, now we call them Foreign Service nationals, is now working in the Labor Department. Did you know him, Habib?

CONDON: Yes, I knew him. He was my assistant, too.

Q: Oh really?

CONDON: He's done well.

Q: Yes, he's done well here but he's so sad about what is happening there. He has relatives there.

CONDON: ...relatives, yes.

Q: He's Lebanese Christian, right? And he's so devastated by what's happened

CONDON: But his daughters have done very well—doctors and [professionals.]

Q: Yes, yes, his family...

CONDON: professionals, very well, indeed.

Q: Were you visiting the Labor Department at all?

CONDON: Yes, I hope so.

Q: You might want to drop by to see him. Well, and by the way, his has been an example of continuity in service, which is very good in terms of our coverage of areas in which we don't know all the languages and where we have a sophisticated person. I should tell you that in this project we had a local employee now foreign service national whom you may remember from being there--PKV Krishna who was my assistant and who was the assistant of everybody: Burgess...

CONDON: Of everybody...

Q: Burgess, all the way up to 88. And we had many of them over. He came to visit the United States and show it to his wife and one of the great things about our project is that I spent three evenings, he was staying with us, and his wife three evenings interviewing him about the different service of the various labor attachés, all of whom he visited going around the country.

CONDON: Fascinating!

Q: Except for the six or seven we had here to see him and his insights into how differently we approached the problems, very diplomatic.

CONDON: It was a brilliant idea to interview him, Maurice. That was exactly he would go for.

Q: Do you know what he did? His last service to the government, or to our project? He took the tapes home and transcribed them and we now have his original tapes and the transcriptions which he typed out himself. He's a great typist! Which I am reviewing now. Anyhow. His is a very important one. Maybe I'll sit down with Habib and do a similar thing.

CONDON: Yes, that's what I'm trying to think. Just me and Harold Snell. Who went after me? Who went after me? Yes, I'm pretty sure the one who succeeded me in Algiers and then succeed me in Vietnam.

Q: Anyhow, what did you do that was different, what did you that was the same, in Lebanon?

CONDON: In Lebanon.

Q: You came in '66 after Snell left and in 65 the Ambassador didn't permit him to go to India because he was so anxious to keep, but he did stay, and his wife was ill, he did stay a year longer and then became a Mission Chief...

CONDON: Snell?

Q: That's it. And you came in in 1966.

CONDON: I came in 1966 and we overlapped because I was at the Arabic school.

Q: Ah hah.

CONDON: Yes, for six to eight months, so he was carrying on normally and I was a student of Arabic. Now what do you know, I think I continued the same policy that Harold had established and did so well, of trying to keep the various religious elements of the labor movement in continuing dialogue and good terms. In as there is cooperative effort toward the labor movement if there was one place where the ethnic and religious differences in play [ought to be] reduced [that] ought to be the labor movement. I sought with the open house that we always had, I always made sure that the labor leaders from the various religious groups were all there and the evening was used to promote their friendships among themselves more than their relations with [their various religious affiliations.]

Q: Did their wives come to those things?

CONDON: Often...

Q: Really?

CONDON: Often, often. Often including even the Moslems.

Q: Really? That's really remarkable. What about Arabic? Was it a great advantage to you? Did you get to know Arabic well enough?

CONDON: Enough to speak. I was almost 3 level of speaking. Almost.

Q: Of course, they all knew French, didn't they? Or English?

CONDON: Yes they all knew French; and English, or French, but primarily French. But the Arabic came very handy when I was traveling to the other countries. I was able to conduct pretty good business conversations in Arabic. I was surprising myself as a matter of fact.

Q: Well if you're not concentrating on having a good grammar then you're willing to talk in a way to make yourself understood.

CONDON: Right. So no, I was able to understand them so as I said I was able to conduct business with them, with labor people, but with the labor ministry people in Arabic and it was a meaningful discussion.

Q: There was no looking down on the French language.

CONDON: Well, for Lebanon, yes Lebanon was no problem. Because most of them spoke French, most of the, but on the Moslem side they would not speak [French] so I would speak Arabic and that pleased them no end. No it was an asset. It was a very good idea to make the expenditure.

Q: And the situation was still good when you left there? There was no [civil war].

CONDON: No, the war started in 1972, a whole two years after I left.

Q: one of the things I would like to develop with the interview with you is some things about your character. We joke about it among ourselves, but there are certain characteristics you have. It's sort of a combination of refusal to recognize difficulties and just barging through them like writing a memorandum naming yourself to something. That's one of the things I love about you. But here we are, Yettie and I, coming back on home leave through the Mid-East going back to New Delhi, to India, from the States. We take a ship to Southern France and then fly to Rome and fly from there to Greece problems with our kids and we were going to go back to India and decide to stop off for we couldn't stop off in Israel because of the Israel war which had just been completed [Six Day War 1967]. And we decide on your invitation to visit you in the Lebanon. Do you remember that?

CONDON: I remember that.

Q: Ok. We were refused a visa they wouldn't stamp a visa in our passport because we have a visa and indication of having visited Israel on our way out. And the normal thing is to get a second passport as we did in the service that time. I was a very rigid type myself and I refused to get another passport. And I tell you by phone or wire or something that I don't have a visa to get in there. And you reply in what I must say is typical Condon flashing. Well, come anyway, don't worry about it. I don't know what possessed me to take you up on it and go because I should have known that that's an impossible thing. What was the type of slight of hand that you used when we arrived at the airport and you were there to greet us and somehow or other I think it was a factor of French double talk that you got these people to let us go around the thing so we could join you and we went to the hotel where you put us up where we stayed for a few days and had this interesting visit. Literally, tell me what went on? Did you talk to somebody in advance? Did you clear it? Or did you just feel that you could wave us through? Do you remember?

CONDON: Yes, I remember. No, I talked to a friend. A friend.

Q: What did you tell him?

CONDON: I told him that these people were coming and were coming on a visit [without a visa?] so I wanted them through and that's all.

Q: You said that they're coming without a visa..

CONDON:...Yes, without a visa and I told them that they had an Israeli visa on their passport..

Q: Oh, you did tell them?

CONDON: Yes, I did tell them. And I wanted them through.

Q: I think you're amazing. I had a wonderful time. Thank you very much.

CONDON: Not at all...

Q: Yes, it was an exposure to a place that made us still sadder when we saw what happened to it.

CONDON: True, true.

Q: As far as your career, you know, the usual you make friends on all that. Was there a negative part of the [assignment?]

CONDON: There was some. I had a little bit of a problem with the political officer, Jones, who resented that I knew everybody.

Q: That is a problem that labor people have generally, and you would have extraordinarily more [contacts?]

CONDON: True, true, but I must say that after having heard a lot of my colleagues complain about this issue, I must confess that I have not had anywhere near similar problems. I mentioned Jones in Lebanon, but that was a minor thing because I acted independently and I had established myself and he couldn't possibly express in any direct manner any misgivings, jealously, rivalry, or whatever.

Q: What about the business about status within the Embassy in terms of grade? You've had a few cases where the labor officer was of higher grade than his boss the political officer. Did you run into that problem?

CONDON: No, I did not run into that. No, no. I have always operated on the principle that the personal qualities was what counted and not the official recognition in terms of grade.

Q: I had a question about that and that is you were in the political section, although you had direct access to the DCM. The question comes up about what happens when the

political counselor leaves or is on leave or goes on home leave or is away. Is it in your normal practice for the labor attaché if he's a senior person to take his place as acting political officer and do you try to avoid that because you have so many other things to do...what do you do?

CONDON: My experience has been this issue this situation arose in Paris and indeed when the political counselor was absent I was automatically designated as his replacement temporary replacement because I was the most senior officer in the political section and that worked out very well, because there were no problems and there was recognition on the part of the rest of the political section that since I was the most senior it was natural that I should be the one designated.

Q: Well, did that interfere with your ability to carry on with your normal [duties]? Did you have an assistant labor attaché?

CONDON: Yes, I did have. Grimes, but this was much later. It interfered, there's no doubt about it because being the acting political counselor demanded time and it did interfere but that's the way the cookie crumbles. When it comes to that something has to give and being the political counselor was of importance to the Embassy and importance to the overall mission of the Embassy. So the labor function had to give way to the necessities of the moment.

Q: O.k. Are we ready to leave Lebanon?

CONDON: Not quite, before I tell the story of Enzio Frizo. Because that is something that I consider as an accomplishment. One day Enzio Frizo who is now the assistant deputy secretary of the ICFTU, a man of very capable and very committed and dedicated to the labor cause, came to the [the Embassy?] ...

Q: And he had a long experience?

CONDON:...A long experience first in the Italian labor movement, he was a young man, he rose considerably in the labor movement. So he came to my office and he was the ICFTU representative in Lebanon for the Middle East almost in tears and announced to me that the ICFTU had decided to abolish his job and he was soon going to be without a job. I was appalled by the decision because of the qualities of the man, and the competence of the man, and the dedication of Enzo Frizo. Also because I felt that the point of the representation of the ICFTU in the Middle East located in Lebanon was an important element in the overall developments in the Middle East. So I decided I was going to fight the decision. Immediately send telegrams and orchestrated a major operation which became the talk of the Embassy because they followed through the reading file the battle that I was waging.

Q: And the Ambassador supported you?

CONDON: The Ambassador [Dwight Porter]. I resorted to the usual technique of helping the local labor leaders, Lebanese labor leaders, express their views by drafting the letters that they were supposed to be sending me. And it was a period of less than, almost a month if not more maybe six weeks left [before Frizo's removal?] with the Embassy in Beirut bombarding constantly Brussels, Washington, with one piece of paper and another, with different labor leaders with a different point of view trying to show that the decision to abolish the position of the ICFTU representation was wrong and had to be changed. And finally I won the battle to the satisfaction of the Ambassador and some of the rest of the people in the Embassy. Enzo Frizo remained. Subsequently he was transferred to Indonesia. I wrote to my colleague at the Embassy in Jakarta. And he was able to do the competent work for which he was capable in Indonesia as well. Then he was brought back to Brussels and now he is a very successful and effective deputy secretary general of the ICFTU in Brussels.

Q: That's really wonderful. And let me match that story by telling you that the British decided to abolish the job, first of the assistant labor attaché they had there and then finally the labor attaché, under a labor government, and I took it upon myself to fight that thing and lost completely.

CONDON: [laughter]

Q: The people in the Embassy didn't think that I should butt into another country's [affairs]. Not quite like your situation...

CONDON: True.

Q: But my Ambassador [Chester Bowles or Kenneth Keating depending on year] disappointed me in that but he and I paid a call on the British High Commissioner, and told him that from the point of view of my job it would make it much more difficult and I thought that they were losing out, since, you know this was, a part of the British Empire and they had a whole lot of business that this guy was covering, very very well, and it didn't carry any weight. They had some budgetary problems. But in this case I got no input from the Indian labor movement, which you had.

CONDON: True, I had, yes.

Q: There was a little criticism of me for you know engaging in such an operation fortunately, so I failed where you succeeded.

CONDON: Lebanon, right.

Q: You transferred then...

CONDON: Transferred from Lebanon to Paris with the excitement that such an appointment justified and immediately plunged into the French labor scene, with the division of the labor organizations and the ideological connotations that each one carried.

But because of my previous service in French speaking countries my colleagues at the Embassy thought that it was my second tour of duty and this within a couple of months from my assignment there, but so.

Q: You came there in 1970...

CONDON: the beginning of 1970. March 1970 I stayed there until February 1977.

Q: I was interested in a few things with respect to the labor movement and a few things with respect to the internal Embassy issues. And on the labor movement scene, we have frequently covered the subject of how does a person deal as a labor attaché in a country with both a Communist-oriented if not a direct Communist union like you had there, the CGT, a vigorously anti-Communist union like the FO and other organizations. How do you deal with covering the Communist trade union movement? What context for instance, one of your predecessors, Dick Eldrige, had serious conversations because he knew them from the war time period when there was cooperation with the Communists. They did not seem to affect adversely his relationships with Bothereau the FO man. That I found impossible, in others cases. Certainly in my case, to the degree that I would permit myself to be known to be meeting with Communist trade union leaders in India it would have lost so much support on the others. How did you deal with that?

CONDON: I don't know how we developed. I think I had never involved because the Force Ouvrière and the CFDT but the FO especially knew especially knew that I had a contact with the CGT but they had enough confidence in my knowing what I'm doing and in knowing what the score was as to not to affect them at all. Not at all.

Q: Were your contacts with them official and going to their congresses, being publicly identified on platforms or were they[low profile?]

CONDON: Well, I didn't go as far as to go to the CGT congresses but I did go to their press conferences. When the opportunity presented itself I had direct contacts with CGT officials including the known Communist but also the so-called socialist elements within the CGT. This was known to the Force Ouvrière but then it was the element of personal confidence that they had and also recognition that as a diplomat I had to have contacts with the entire spectrum of the labor scene in France.

Q: The important point being that it did not lose your [credibility or] result in any criticism from the non-Communist unions...

CONDON: None whatsoever, none whatsoever. Never, never expressed even Bergeron who was known for his rigidity in this respect. Bergeron would occasionally kid me about it. Your friends, primarily with the CFDT, and he would not refer to your friends in the CGT but the people you see in the CGT. But it was also in a very good, natural, feeling manner and over which we both had a joint laughter.

Q: You have to identify for the record, the CGT is the Communist-dominated organization the FO is the one that was really formed with the help of the AFL in early years as a breakaway from the CGT as a matter of fact it is still called the CGT-FO is it?

CONDON: Well, they would like to be called the CGT-FO the tendency is to be recognized as Force Ouvrière.

Q: And the formerly Catholic-oriented organization which is no longer as closely connected with the Catholic [right]

CONDON: No, not at all. In fact not at all, not all, because they split from the CFTC which is the Catholic organization and they became the CFDT and independent left leaning doctrinal organization which did not feel that the labor movement was suffering if they were to engage in some form of cooperation with the CGT. And then there was the fourth remaining, which was the CFTC, which was a smaller organization.

Q: Used to be very much larger until the split, yes.

CONDON: Right, right.

Q: But you had relations with all of them...

CONDON: With all four of them, with close relations and with very friendly with mutual confidence. I still am debating the issue of having relations with the CGT was or was not a good thing, but when our government was engaging in negotiations establishing the co-existence frame of relationship for the labor attaché to have some kind of a conduit with the CGT was totally insignificant. It was to my view a very useful thing because I got to know the personalities. I had a better understanding and I could follow their doctrinal rigidity and their subservience to the Communist doctrine more closely and identify and I could cite examples and I could illustrate the fact that it was a Communist-dominated [dynamic] which I might not have been able to do it as effectively without an inside knowledge that I was able to obtain with this occasional contacts.

Q: Were you criticized by the Communists as being a CIA agent or anything like that.

CONDON: Never.

Q: Well, earlier some of your predecessor had some problems in that direction but the times were different and also your ability to negotiate relationships.

CONDON: True, I was able to establish a degree of professional confidence, that I was a professional diplomat and I was acting on that basis and therefore this had to be recognized and accepted as a method of operation and representation of my country, the United States, to their country, France.

Q: Well then, the next question is this impartiality, not impartiality, but this ability to deal across the board with all the unions, did that create any problems in your relations with the American trade unions?

CONDON: No, it did not. Irving Brown, rigid as we know to have been, with good reasons from his point of view and perhaps wisely so. He accepted perhaps because he knew how I was doing it. He knew that I was not falling into any traps and he knew that I could hold them at a distance and that I could call their bluffs and I could expose the doctrine and the ideological bent of the Communists and do that openly to their faces. So he did not see that my contact with them was a compromising contact, a concession to them. I was contacting them as a professional diplomat and I was able to speak my mind to them to their faces. So although he probably felt that perhaps it was better not to do it at all, but he never criticized me and never took any steps to thwart me or to intervene with what I was doing.

Q: Did he ever complain to the Ambassador? What Ambassadors did you serve under?

CONDON: I was I served under Jack Irwin, and what was the last one's name. It will come to me, the record will show. [Arthur Watson to 1972, Kenneth Rush from 1974]

Q: Jack Irwin, only came there after 72 because he was my boss in the State Department until I retired.

CONDON: Correct, yes. It was the Undersecretary of State Department who was who came from Defense.

Q: I liked him very much. He was a wonderful supervisor during the period I worked with him...

CONDON: Oh, Jack Irwin. Oh, a gentleman a gentleman a distinguished man a distinguished man. He came to visit us several times to the mill with his wife and stayed at the mill. [He was] a widow, his wife was the Watson lady and then she died and then he married this other lady, a lovely person and both of them came to the mill and stayed with us on several occasions.

Q: After that, I don't remember who the Ambassadors were, but I assume you got along with them very well. The DCM?

CONDON: The DCM yes,

Q: You worked directly for the political counselor?

CONDON: Direct with the political counselor. But I had access to both the DCM and to the Ambassador. Never encountered [problems] I know from my colleagues with the other Embassies, they had to watch their channels of communication. I have never had such problems.

Q: colleagues...you mean other labor attachés?

CONDON: Other labor attachés of the US, right. So to hear them talk it was as if they were talking a foreign language. It was something with which I could not identify because I had never had any problem of this type.

Q: In all the time I was there when we were there together, 72 to 75 I never heard any comment about that from anybody, so I guess you are right about that. I heard plenty of favorable comments from people like Hank Cohen and [others] I don't remember. Now the DCMs should have included Galen Stone who came there with Irwin.

CONDON: Right. Correct. Before was Bob Black.

Q: Any problems in your relations with.[these officers?]

CONDON: No, no problem whatsoever no no problem whatsoever.

Q: Remarkable. How do you assess the efforts of our American trade unions, was there any remnant left of the AFL dispute in France which was so serious during my first tour there in the 50's between Reuther and Brown?

CONDON: No, no that evaporated with time and there was no remnants of that dispute of which I was aware but never never surfaced...

Q: Instead of Irving, Paul Barton was there.

CONDON: Paul Barton..

Q: And he is still there...

CONDON: He still is, right...

Q: And Baker had not come yet...

CONDON: No, no. He came after, Paul Barton.

Q: You spent seven years there...

CONDON: Seven years.

Q: And during that period. I didn't come until 72 when everybody gave me the impression you had been there 7 years already. What you develop is the breadth of scope of your contacts. I was quite impressed by the fact that shortly after I arrived, you had this dinner at which you introduced me to this person I had never heard of Jacques Delors. He was not a trade unionist what brought you to identify him as a person who would be able to

educate you on general political developments around which to understand the trade unions. Because I gather you know that what I am referring to is the fact that many of our labor attachés stick so close to the labor function in fact the trade union function not only the labor function, that they tend not to have this relationship that puts labor in the larger focus of political activity.

CONDON: No, you're right. You put your finger on the one shortcoming if I can qualify it in that manner on the part of the of some of the labor attachés is that they confine to trade union movement, primarily and perhaps in larger to the labor movement to include labor affairs in general, labor legislation, and working class identification and behavior. No, I because of broader intellectual interest I was concerned more about the intellectual fervor and the politics of the dissidents, of the challengers, which included the labor movement. The ones that were challenging in the best sense of the word, the establishment, the established order, the established way of doing things.

Q: How did you meet them?

CONDON: Whenever I dealt, it was the government of Chaban Delmas which was roughly the equivalent of the New Deal of France at that time. And Jacques Delors was an advisor to Chaban Delmas, the Prime Minister, in charge of labor affairs, so he was my primary contact.

Q: But he wasn't the minister of labor?

CONDON: He was not the minister of labor. He was the advisor but in some respects he had more responsibility for the French government's handling of labor affairs and social affairs than the Labor Minister himself. And he as a matter of fact was the source of inspiration and ideological restructuring of the whole thrust of the Chaban Delmas government to promote the French New Deal. And which President Pompidou did not appreciate very much and a year and a half later the resignation of Chaban Delmas came about but Jacques Delors had made his mark in the French public scene by his work with Chaban Delmas.

Q: But he left the government for a while, didn't he?

CONDON: He left the government and then he taught at the University and one of the things for which he personally would recognize that he owes me a small debt was that I put him on the list for the economic studies that the USIA had developed at one point which reserved for exclusive, for a limited number of representatives in each country, a handbook. And I was able to include Jacques Delors on that program at a time after he had left the government and he was a simple professor, assistant professor, really, in our terms, assistant professor the university. Thanks to my influence or personal authority with the USIS he was included and he received the package that came every month which was serious stuff.

Q: That's the stuff that emanated from the Council of Economic Advisers...

CONDON: Exactly. Really very serious high-level, profound economic studies which Jacques Delors with his intelligence and grasping mind was able to absorb and grow with it.

Q: He could read English. I thought he could speak English, too, but he sort of avoided speaking English...

CONDON: True, now because since he has been president of the [European] Commission he has loosened and he speaks English more readily.

Q: And you maintain contact with him...

CONDON: I maintain contact. We are personal family friends, very close personal friends. I don't know whether he has many French friends of the same level, maybe a handful. We are among those very few handfuls of personal family friends.

Q: A personal family relationship which I am happy to have you describe because it's so different from others that other cases that I [am confident] this record will so that this is one of the things I admire about you. I joke with you about how persistent you are in things like selecting menus and restaurants, but I have sure gained a whole lot of knowledge in that initial insistence you had for me to come to your house to meet this fascinating French man you had discovered. Anyhow that was very good. I want to further speak a little bit about your relations with the political side of the American trade union movement. Did you have any relations with people back in Washington retaining contacts with American trade union leaders even those who didn't come to France?

CONDON: Not very much. My only contact remaining through the years was Tom Donahue whom I had the good luck to meet and hit it off well from the very beginning when I came on loan from the State Department to the Department of Labor.

Q: Was he an assistant to ...

CONDON: No, he was the secretary or the president of the...

Q: ...building services employees of New York...

CONDON: ...building services employees of New York, exactly.

Q: But he was the theoretician for the group two...

CONDON: He was the theoretician, indeed.

Q: Actually he was a member of the operative forum by the time he came out of this famous local 32 B.

CONDON: Thirty-two B, exactly.

Q: He didn't work very long at that?

CONDON: No, no, but that is a relationship that I have treasured and on which I was able to draw on occasions and has remained close throughout the years. Other than that I have had occasional contact with Jay Lovestone, but never any really communication, intellectual communication with him was formal.

Q: You never got into any political discussions in that respect I really think my experience was fascinating even though he was not interesting in furthering my career, on the contrary, but the discussions with him on a political level because of where I came from were fascinating and I would have liked to have gotten your reaction.

CONDON: Very true, as a matter of fact I have some regrets myself that I never established any intellectual rapport with him so that I could have [had those type of discussions?]

Q: I don't want to give the impression that mine was intellectual rapport!

CONDON: No, no rapport in terms of being able to engage in a give and take, intellectual give and take so we could have views. I don't know, my relations with him were totally formal and didn't go any further than that.

Q: The other respect in which I think your experience especially in France, but probably before this, too, but I don't know about it was your relations with the political types who came to France. I remember once meeting at your home a congressman who became well-known later in other connections. You seemed to have had a political and interest in American politics to the degree of making a special effort to educate any visiting legislators about the situation in France. Was that because France was important or because you felt that any American politician who came should be knowledgeable?

CONDON: Exactly that. Because any American politician should be. I felt that it was not a chore to educate the American visiting politician. On the contrary it was a welcome opportunity to share with them what I had been able to learn and experience by being on the spot. I welcomed it and that's why this was communicated to them and they responded and they were receptive to what I had to offer them. It was never a chore to receive a visitor regardless of status and position of influence or power.

Q: Was that result of an assignment from an Embassy, that this guy is coming in, this CODEL [congressional delegation] coming in somebody should take care of them, or was it initiated by you?

CONDON: It was initiated by me. It was initiated by me, occasionally it would be a formal assignment but 9 out of 10 times it was initiated by me. It was supplementing

what the Embassy member was assigned to do by doing it on my own and at my own expense of time and energy.

Q: When there was a CODEL it generally was assigned to a junior officer to take care of the mechanics of the trip and a senior officer, in my experience wasn't required to do that type of mechanical thing. You weren't either, I don't think. You just went and initiated the contact?

CONDON: Initiated the contact.

Q: Did this help you in your career at all?

CONDON: I don't believe so, except that it created favorable comments that probably were delivered, of which I was never aware but it gave me a great satisfaction that was enough to me.

Q: [Finish up your time] in France, and then we'll go on to your ambassadorship and go back to your assessment of the labor attaché program.

CONDON: Right. No, the one thing that I want to add and highlight perhaps was because of my knowledge of the French political scene and my personal knowledge of all the people that were involved regardless of specialty, labor, or other political activities. I was able to make a notable contribution if I can call it that to the ideas part of the international visitors program. I believe in the 7 years that I was there, I averaged 7 out of 10 IVs approvals which came out of my memoranda. And I had resisted offers on the part of the Embassy to participate in the committee that was approving, because in this way I had more freedom of action and recommendations. So I didn't have to pass on my own memoranda. I can cite I can cite in the labor field specifically two examples I had identified for IVs and they were approved. Two future secretary generals, one for Force Ouvrière and one for the CFTD, Mark Blondel, for Force Ouvrière, and Jean Gaspard for CFTD who was elected to the new positions late after my departure or late 80's. I had identified and on record in a memorandum to the committee as future secretaries of their respective [organizations] back in 1974.

Q: Well, that's very good, but it raises a question in my mind of the other side of this function which is the AMPARTS. I don't know the degree to which you had access to getting Americans coming over to participate in USIA programs. Did you work with the USIA on selection of AMPARTS to come from the United States?

CONDON: No.

Q: Did you have many?

CONDON: No.

Q: Yes you did. When I was there I know you had many. I know a very famous professor Ummer [?]. The USIA people scheduled him for one of those conferences, but did you have any arrangements at the USIA.?

CONDON: Oh, yes, yes. Every time they had a problem they would turn to me. For example, they had a Fulbright scholarship that was expiring and they called me the day before expiration and they said we have this and we don't have anybody. I picked up the phone and told a friend, Bernard Brisé, who is an economic journalist and so on and if he was at loose ends at that particular time I said there is this position. Come tomorrow morning and we'll put in the papers. He got it and he came to the United States for six months and he wrote a very good report on American management.

Q: Oh, really?

CONDON: Yes. A very good, unique French book on American management.

Q: Well, at that point we were concentrating on AMPARTS for the developing countries...

CONDON: Right.

Q: There was no continuation of two things that we had in my tour in the 50's: one was the Americans coming over for the AID program and the second was the information program. Americans coming over. Well, any other observations on your work in the labor program in Paris?

CONDON: No, more observations, ah yes, one thing I was able to do. There was the association of labor journalists. And the president of which was a skillful, capable, dynamic man. I supported that association and one day he proposed to me and I accepted the idea of sending delegation members of the Association to the United States as part of the IVS International Visitors program. And he of course said that we would have members of the Communist newspaper L'Humanité there and if this offer was going to be used with the association and the association would select the members that would participate. One of the members that they selected, there were five of them, was the labor reported from l'Humanité. I defended the case and the group went to the States. The AFL-CIO raised some questions whether to receive it or not. I don't know how they handled it but the thought was that it was a very successful visit. The men came back and wrote five full-page articles in L'Humanité about life in the United States and the L'Humanité was bombarded by letters from the members, what is this?

Q: They thought they had sold out!

CONDON: Exactly! You sold out. What L'Humanité has come to, to be publishing articles like this? Bombarded, but that was reported and never had any troubles and at the time exactly at the time when the editor of L'Humanité was one of the better-known [spokesman] for the Communists. If he was writing this things and he was putting his signature on these things, it was an objective report and it was a very laudatory report

about labor and management and the effectiveness of economic management in the United States. That's what happened.

Q: Did you ever follow up on what the reaction was in the other cases in which a group had come?

CONDON: Yes, I think there was a little bit of a problem but somehow it never became a problem.

Q: I have a number of general questions. One of them will be on the question of McCarthyism.

CONDON: Yes, but before we leave France we must come to my expulsion from the CFTD congress and that was a major event. Must be recalled...Oh, we knew a bit it was coming but the CFDT leadership was hoping to nip in the bud. It was 1973 and I was sitting there with my English colleague and German colleague and at one point when there was a question about Vietnam after the motion was presented to expel the American labor attaché from the Congress.

Q: That was 1974 I don't know where we got the information. It was a couple of years before that.

CONDON: No, it was '73, it was '73. It was a couple of years before that the motion was made to expel the American labor attaché from the Congress. The leadership tried to argue against the motion but the Congress was against the war in Vietnam and it referred to a time when the CFDT was leaning leftwards with force and the motion was carried and I left. The leadership of the CFDT remained seated and at one point they came and announced [break in transcript] any the German and English colleagues in solidarity walked out with me. I kind of left.

Q: You said that at the beginning that you were told to remain seated?

CONDON: Yes, because they didn't want me to be identified in the fervor of the debate and the heated atmosphere after the vote was taken and there was the satisfaction that the motion was carried, that and there was a recess of the Congress and at that time they came and took us away.

Q: But you did not take that personally?

CONDON: Not at all...

Q: But you raised a question I have never discussed in any of the other interviews, but it applies to France, that I know of, Brussels, Great Britain, and India, in my experience where we used to have regular meetings, luncheons, of the foreign labor attachés to discuss among ourselves what was happening and share experiences. Did you have that?

CONDON: Yes, very much and I was the prime mover behind that. The regular members were the English and the German labor attachés but occasionally we would have the Italian labor reporting officer, who was not a full time labor attaché, occasionally the Israeli labor reporting officer and occasionally the Soviet labor reporting officer.

Q: Did you invite people to have lunch with you? We did that in India from the Ministry and other places.

CONDON: Yes. We did that too.

Q: We found that very valuable. And it as a tradition I don't know when it began in France but it was since 1951 that I know of. It took place in Brussels where they have their headquarters.

CONDON: Right. I don't know what was being done before. I think [they happened], but it was not on a regular basis and was on a one and one. You would have lunch with the British and then have lunch with the German. But in this respect what helped was the activities of this labor reporting journalists' association that created this collective spirit and cooperation which extended on the French side with the labor reporting journalists and carried on with the labor attachés of the various Embassies.

Q: Well, I think this is about all that I will want to ask you about France except the general comments. Do you have anything else?

CONDON: One dramatic event at the Embassy at the staff meeting which is a large staff meeting at the Embassy. It was at the time when there was a strike in the Renault plant in Boulogne and Billancourt. Then there was always that myth that when Billancourt strikes France is threatened. And that strike was lasting at the time for about a week, 8 days. There were major headlines and there was preoccupation and at the staff meeting Ambassador Watson turned to me at a dramatic moment to tell me: Well, Mr. Condon, what do you think about this strike. How is it going to develop? And there was total silence in the staff meeting and it was obvious that the some people had encouraged him to raise the question in the firm belief that this was a dramatic thing, that the strike was going to deteriorate and was going to threaten France some and the whole Western world and probably and possibly the labor attaché was not on top of the situation and he was not assessing the situation in the dramatic terms that the that were called for. So in that silence, I said, Mr. Ambassador, Nothing will happen, the strike will end within 48 hours.

Q: And then did they proceed to go on for several strikes?

CONDON: But I must give credit to Watson, because I found out afterwards there were very few people that he respected on the staff as much as the labor attaché when I made this statement he moved on to another subject. He did not debate with me. He did not question my [judgment].

Q: What was the attitude of the staff that was really waiting for something else. Did they have anything.

CONDON: There was always something if you do not predict the worst and the worst happens the roof comes on your head, but if you predict the worst and the worst does not happen everything is forgotten. So the other people, the outsiders and so on, were playing the game. They were going to predict the worst so that they can get the credit if it happens, knowing full well that if it doesn't happen, it will be forgotten and they will not be held accountable for that. But they found their match.

Q: Were you able to say that objective conditions changed.

CONDON: Well, no because they knew that if nothing happened nobody would be asking them questions. But in cold blood after I waited a few seconds for everybody to appreciate the silence at the staff meeting, I said, Mr. Ambassador, Nothing will happen. The strike will end within 48 hours.

Q: Very good!

CONDON: So that was one of the most dramatic events or moments at a staff meeting and I can still sense the silence that preceded my statement and my coolness in affirming that and by implication saying that anybody who advised you that this was a dramatic event in French history was a fool.

Q: ...You became the Ambassador [to Fiji]. When did that appointment take place?

CONDON: That appointment took place in 1978 in the beginning of 1978, I came home one afternoon and Nancy my wife told me that Dick Holbrook and Peter Tarnoff had just called to tell me that I was being nominated as Ambassador to Fiji.

Q: And you knew nothing about this?

CONDON: I knew absolutely nothing.

Q: You did not initiate the paper work?

CONDON: Never, not at a [laughter by both] I did not. I did not. I did not initiate the paper work.

Q: No, seriously, just...

CONDON: I came back one afternoon and it was said that she herself did not believe they thought it was a friendly inquiry, a friendly observation to provide some excitement or not kidding but perhaps, so

Q: Now at that time Holbrook was...

CONDON: The assistant secretary for Far Eastern Affairs.

Q:...Far Eastern Affairs...

CONDON: Peter Tarnoff was the executive secretary of the State Department. And I believe I called back. I believe I called back. No. I waited, and in a succession both of them called as though each one was trying to get the credit.

Q: Had you know both of them before?

CONDON: Very well. I knew both of them in Vietnam. They were both assistants to Cabot Lodge. Both extremely capable men with great brains and great vision and initiative, and operative skills.

Q: Both of them are back in the Department now...

CONDON: Both of them are back. The one is the Undersecretary for Political Affairs and Holbrook is going as Ambassador to Germany.

Q: Had you ever been to Fiji before?

CONDON: No. No. So I knew very little about it. I immediately began to study and get briefed. Immediately I began to receive pressures about whom I should nominate, select as a DCM, and the whole thing started the process and eventually came to fruition and to confirmation. The great moment that I must relate for the record was at the hearings at the Senate. I went and there was someone ahead of me and then I was it was Sparkman [D-Alabama]who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and he asked me a few questions, pro forma questions. I responded and then I see the Senator from Illinois, so Percy [R-Illinois] stand up in the committee and delivered a speech about this Mr. Condon, a distinguished civil servant an accomplished diplomat, a man of great character, and integrity.

Q: Was this something you wrote? [Laughter]

CONDON: No! [Laughter] But I was I couldn't imagine. I had never met him. He had never met me. He never knew who I was. He had only the file. The record. And he delivered this speech and sat down with the satisfaction that he had done well. Extemporaneously.

It was an elegant speech. It made me blush at several points. He had hardly sat down when Sarbanes [D-Maryland] gets up and delivers a speech and surpasses if possible in praise of this newly appointed ambassador to Fiji drawing from the record details.

Q: You hadn't met him before?

CONDON: I had never met him before.

Q: Did he know of your Greek background?

CONDON: The record showed it. What was it? Why was Percy making this speech? For his Greek electorate in Chicago!

Q: But Sarbanes did not have a big Greek constituency?

CONDON: Not at all, but he had the blood. Exactly, but he had the blood which is more important than constituency. He was speaking out of blood relationship. At the end of the hearings he took me aside by the arm and said "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me that you were coming here? So I could handle this a little bit better?"

Q: Weren't you making some calls before?

CONDON: Yes, I did make a few calls but not to Sarbanes and it was a little bit of the scheduling which was accelerated.

Q: Didn't you call on Percy?

CONDON: I didn't call on Percy.

Q: But I find that really surprising, because you have such good fingertip feeling, how could you not have called?

CONDON: Well, I know it, but I didn't think. I had called on Sparkman. Because he was the chairman. I had called on Senator Pell [D-RI] also.

Q: But your residence was in what state at that time?

CONDON: No official residence, it was Washington, DC. In the District of Columbia. No, there was some acceleration in the scheduling and I didn't think the Ambassador to Fiji called for such scrutiny. But nevertheless nobody came, and I have told that countless times the effect of domestic on foreign relations. The one, for his electorate; the other, because of the blood relationship. They made sure that the record showed that.

Q: But you didn't have to reward them with an invitation to come to Fiji?

CONDON: Neither of them came. Alright.

Q: Well, you came to Fiji, then, in 1978.

CONDON: 1978, and I was the first resident ambassador to Fiji because before it was covered by New Zealand and so which presents some [challenges]. There were some inconveniences involved because there was no Embassy, there was no staff, there was no

tradition, and there was no routine. So all this had to be done from scratch, and that required a little more effort, a little bit of inconvenience, a little bit of time, but all this was done in due time. The unfortunate thing was that the entire staff was "first time". First time ambassador, first time DCM, first time administrative officer, first time USIS representative, first time clerk, etc.

Q: Was there an AID mission there?

CONDON: No that was subsequently created. It was headed by a wonderful, competent man, Bob Craig, who did wonders as a single man operation with my full and enthusiastic support. He ran an ideal type of operation for this type of [small mission].

Q: Who was your USIA man? Do you remember?

CONDON: No.

Q: Interesting, because he was the person who was told that when I told you that we were going to be in Australia and New Zealand on one of these USIA AMPARTS programs he was told by you-- I don't know how popular that made him with you. He was told to arrange, on our way back, to program me for three days in Fiji. He didn't strike me as being _____. Was this imposed on him? It was a very successful thing?

CONDON: No; yes. Yes, it was first time and he was so new and it was obviously his first responsibility and he was diffident and the AMPARTS was something he had not initiated. No, but I am sure that he did it and it all went well.

Q: Well, on the record I want to thank you. We had a wonderful time. It was our second time in Fiji, but the first time with an Embassy there and it was very nice. What did you do in the labor field there. Did your labor attaché background give you some special insights?

CONDON: Definitely. Definitely. There's no doubt about it because there was a rudimentary labor movement. Perhaps not so rudimentary and again, just as in the case of Lebanon, because of the two communities, the Fijian community and the Indian community, and the labor movement was the melting pot of the two. However some activities of the Indians were, like the Sugar cane laborers, organized and they were primarily, if not exclusively, Indian workers. Nevertheless the labor movement was one element that brought the two communities together. So that gave me a little bit of sensitivity to that type of function and mission on the part of the trade union movement. I was thus able to be more responsive and receptive to the ideas of the labor institute, that came from the AFL-CIO, to provide assistance. All in all I might not have reacted with the same receptivity if I did not have [a background in labor] definitely, I would not, perhaps I might have reacted with some misgivings with an underdeveloped country like this, the accepted ideology of the time that the luxury of the unions should be permitted...

Q: You made a special effort in connection with our visit to, well, you stressed the need to me of ...stand _____ the community isn't one of the areas in which there is a community of interests between these two opposing very much opposing communities. The local indigenous one and the natural reaction of that community against the Indians who came as foreigners...but they also had an educated Indian group, in addition to the sugar cane workers.

CONDON: Oh, yes. Very much so. All the professionals. All the professional people were all Indians. The doctors and the lawyers and the [other professionals].

Q: They looked down on some of the natives. Do you call them natives.

CONDON: The natives, yes, exactly. The native Fijians. I think it is a little bit of exaggeration to say that they looked down because they felt the certain sensitivity, [realizing] that they could not afford to be so discriminating. But nevertheless the mere fact that they were educated or advanced sophisticated people, as against the more simple indigenous population, differentiated them and created a certain degree of rivalry and jealously which in time as the Fijian population advanced and became also semi-sophisticated it felt more acutely the differences in sophistication between the two.

Q: Did you detect anything about what would happen later?

CONDON: No, no, I left when I left when I left there in 1980 I left very optimistic and hopeful that this bi-cultural society was going to advance without any crisis without any obstacles. And unfortunately I was wrong, but I don't think it was only the question of the sensitivity of the Fijian population but it was also the stupidity on the part of the Indian political party that won the elections, formed a government and they found it necessary to articulate as their first statement of program of action, the abolition of the council of chiefs of the Fijian society. This must be a textbook case of active political stupidity. Of stupidity, a textbook case that should be taught throughout the world of how a political party can lose any sense of proportion, any sense of reality. How they won an election in a society in which they were a foreign element and they find it necessary to articulate publicly in parliament a program to abolish the most revered institution of the indigenous society, the council of chiefs. If that is not a classic stupidity, political stupidity, then I'd like to know what it is.

Q: Does it remind you about the American treatment of the American Indians? Where they came in and they didn't treat the chiefs with appropriate recognition?

CONDON: But we're talking about Fiji. This was a democratic election, and not they didn't treat the indigenous population so, they programmed as a primary object of their government to abolish the council of chiefs.

Q: Hadn't anybody warned anybody about that before? They had not said when we are elected we're going to do this?

CONDON: No. I don't think that they [had thought it thru].

Q: What was the relation? Was this possibly caused by the relationship between the educated Indians and the educated sugar cane workers? Did they want to make some points with the rank and file?

CONDON: No, it has nothing to do with this. This is sheer stupidity on the part of the political leaders and the Fijian figurehead that the Indian party had used who wanted to get even because of the low esteem that the council of chiefs held regarding that particular individual. The Indian, the sophisticated Indian leaders who were the effective leaders of their party allowed him to engage in this kind of petty idiotic personal policies.

Q: Well, how did you learn about what was happening there. Did you follow it up pretty closely?

CONDON: I followed up fairly closely through contacts and both the Fijian Indian and American contacts and I was saddened, yes.

Q: by the events...Well, what were the circumstances of your [tenure], you had two years there?

CONDON: Two and a half years there.

Q: Two and a half years there and then you reached the retirement age.

CONDON: I reached the retirement age which at that time was 60.

Q: They could have held on to you? By appointing you.

CONDON: Well, possibly, possibly. They could have done it, but at the time they felt that there were too many senior officers and they wanted to thin their ranks to let the younger come up.

Q: Do you have any comments about the tendency in the State Department to up and out, you know, to, not to take advantage as we were discussing the other day, of the capabilities that were built up over a long period of time. Besides from you personally, you did very much better by leaving, I'm sure, but the feeling that other people have expressed that we hire people and we train them on the basis that every junior officer should have the capability of being an Ambassador. There seems to be no recognition of the fact that a very good officer who is in charge of visas might be happier staying in that job.

CONDON: No, that is true. That is true. There is a contradiction there. On the one hand we don't want an elitist foreign service and on the other hand we don't want anyone who does not excel so that contradiction has never been resolved and it has not been faced which is worse. The second thing is , what you just said, is there just are some functions

that they do not require brilliance but require other qualities that are just as importance as brilliance of mind and therefore should be recognized as necessary and important and useful to draw upon and maintain. I have seen many cases of people who would have contributed, could have contributed in functions that do not require brilliance of mind but require steady competent responsible judgment and therefore I have had some doubts about the rigidity with which they apply the principle of up or out.

Q: As labor experts we have looked at that and the State Department is now examining its personnel policy but I know of one case in which a consular officer was absolutely wonderful as a consular officer and in the normal promotion process he was promoted to a grade in non-consular work in which he did not excel. He said to me at one point, he wasn't as happy in his job why couldn't they promote him to a job in the consular career if they thought he was so good. Why did they put him into other work in this theory that you got to get all sorts of experience where he was not as happy and he was just not as good or as you said he was good in other areas which didn't require that? Yet, when we hire people we hire them with the expectation that they have that ambition to go up. This particular guy didn't have that ambition and it would have been wonderful to have him say then well, maybe the one of the results of this project will be to open up the possibility of having different types of promotion systems. But there is that anomaly that you point to. Then we really would have an elitist class going into the ambassadorship roles but there are always ways of handling that.

CONDON: Yes, and I have no qualms and I have no problems with an elitist approach to the Foreign Service. As a matter of fact I think I definitely think that this idea of having the Foreign Service be a representational for the population for the United States is absurd. We want a foreign service that would be the best that American society can produce.

Q: Irrespective of origins...

CONDON: Irrespective of origin, color, or we're not going to have a representation of the Foreign Service an image of the population at large or replicated and reproduced in the Foreign Service, no.

Q: Well, we both agree on the need for the best people and there is a difference between the Foreign Service that I first began talking to in the A-100 training course as early as 1948 in which frankly there were mostly from the Eastern establishment, Yale, Princeton, Harvard. It wasn't until a couple of years ago that we got a career ambassador from City College. I feel especially sensitive about it certainly he rose up on the basis of his excellent ability but unless there was I wouldn't say affirmative action, unless there was an opening to those people who came from other than Yale, Princeton, Harvard, etc. Unless there is an opening to that now when I first entered this field there was this over representation from an educated elite which did not give enough possibilities for entrance into the foreign service of people who came from poorer backgrounds. The GI bill contributed a whole lot to people from other backgrounds entering. It's an interesting [debate?]

CONDON: True. No to the extent but it should not be done on the basis that the people should have representation from City College.

Q: but City College people succeeded.

CONDON: Succeeded, exactly and if they have the brains...

Q: ...and we're very proud of the fact that one of the very few career ambassadors comes from City College and a Joint Chiefs of Staff man comes from City College. Do you know about [Colin] Powell?

CONDON: No I didn't know that.

Q: He's been working on this thing that I have been working on with you. Let me go over some of these general questions. Before I do we will insert it in the Paris work. How did you get, I mention the fact that you had these excellent contacts, with your professional colleagues, with political people, because of your general outgoing personality. What about the officials of the Labor Department. Now I know that you know Blackman, now I know that you know Bill Usery, what others? How did you meet them, what did you do with them etc. and what other ones high officials of the Labor Department or other departments did you engage [with?]

CONDON: Well, there was George L. P. Weaver, of course. George Cabot Lodge.

Q: Also true about people like Usery, whom you got to know before he was secretary, isn't' that correct?

CONDON: Yes, I can't I cannot recall the circumstances but I recall knowing him before he became secretary. That's true.

Q: Well, he was the chief of the working party of the OECD, so he used to come over to Paris to the OECD.

CONDON: To the OECD, yes. And but I got to know him more when he was in the Secretary of Treasury, wasn't he? What was he?

Q: He was head of the Machinist bargaining unit for Eastern Airlines and then he took on some special jobs for the AFL-CIO. They were going to name him but he decided not to accept it, they were going to name him the head of organization at a higher level and then he finally decided to stay on as assistant secretary. And then he went to the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

CONDON: Yes, I know, the Federal Mediation that's right. I got it now.

Q: He did that and he was assistant secretary and then he went back to [the AFL-CIO?].all that period he kept coming over to Paris to remain the chief of that working group ...I think you became a good friend of his.

CONDON: A good friend of his, right.

Q: Did you have any working relations with him?

CONDON: Yes. Yes. Because I accompanied him in meetings with the labor ministers in France I had organized conferences with him with the labor leaders and I got him to work on my property on the mill in my residence in France. He drove some posts on the ground.

Q: Well, let me ask you a couple of questions about your [interactions with Usery].and admiring him so much I can't tell you how much I admire him and too. He does not speak he does not project himself as an orator or a public speaker like Lane Kirkland or Tom Donahue and yet the remarkable thing in my relationships with him was his ability, is his ability, to speak not on an intellectual basis but to speak authoritatively to people who are for instance at the OECD. I'd be covering that on mine he would speak to the head of the OECD in Dutch, the equivalent of a baron, well educated in three languages and project the need for labor policies that we were advocating in a way that a person of his education and lack of oratorical skill or rhetorical skill just amazed me. What about these intellectuals when you took him around to the ministries?

CONDON: Because the common sense that he projected, the solid contact with reality and the practical needs to obtain results and the calm way in which he expressed himself, and the calmness of his expression was what captivated his audience.

Q: It was a puzzle to me.

CONDON: No, no I think the calmness conveyed confidence and conviction.

Q: Well, you've covered a number of items in my outline, John, including stories and examples in my outline, how personalities and policy developments. Just a few specific questions: Cold War, McCarthyism, Civil Rights problems, how did they impact, that American experience, on you and your work? Did you ever suffer anything as a result of McCarthyism?

CONDON: No.

Q: Were you ever active politically?

CONDON: No. No.

Q: At the time of this whole McCarthyism you were not in Europe where you had a whole lot of interviews.

CONDON: No. Oh occasionally someone would bring it up but it was occasional an occasional remark and my interlocutors' abhorrence of this phenomenon and we passed on to more [pertinent matters.]

Q: Well, you were working with the military in the mid-50s and we in the AID program were so embarrassed by McCarthyism giving us a bad reputation. McCarthy's agents, these people who came over burning books in Germany. An amazing thing. How did the Army feel about that? Did it have any effect on you were there?

CONDON: Yes, no. That's very true. No it did not have any effect. It was pitiful. Remarkable. I bring testimony it was entirely peripheral. It did not affect relationships. It did not become a subject of heated or non-heated conversation. It was totally peripheral and which goes to show that the common sense of the institutional common sense prevailed and protected itself from being poisoned by this experience.

Q: Oh, how different the reaction of the ____.In the AID program, of the French we would try to help them build up their free trade unions and here we were with people coming over who were doing things like burning and making accusations that labor leaders were [communists?]

CONDON: Yes.

Q: You've gone over your training etc. I know you've gone over everything gone over everything thing here.

CONDON: Right very good, very good.

Q: Civil Rights. That's very serious issue you were not involved in any we never made any claims in this respect it's interesting stuff in our interviews with other people.. CIA programs?

CONDON: No. Not at all.

Q: I asked you about AID and the USIA.

CONDON: And that incident that I mentioned to you with Ambassador Watson and the strike in Renault. I think the CIA people were the ones that were drawing a bleak picture.

Q: What were your relations with the CIA? Did they ever attempt to use your office in any way?

CONDON: No, none whatsoever, but my relations with them were very practical, cooperative, and professional. Strictly professional.

Q: I'd like to have any comments you have about the selection and appointment influence of other groups on the labor attaché corps. The labor attaches came from the Foreign Service, some of them; some of them, from the trade union movement, directly or indirectly, through various service in the trade union movement; some from the labor elements in the government, the labor department and FMCS and other the NLRB and other agencies. So there were many sources. These four and the other fourth being the academic community. So they came from all these sources, got appointments in the Foreign Service under the recommendation of Foreign Service officers, or the trade unions themselves. Not indicating that any of those influences were in any way improper, and probably our service was richer because of the different sources on people who entered the labor attaché corps. But once they got in there what is your reaction about the fairness of the selection of people for the posts and how groups, management, or individual trade union groups, or outside groups of another sort used their influence in directing the assignment and promotions of the Foreign Service officers who were in the labor field. This is not a pure Foreign Service group that is examined by Foreign Service officers but we have all these outside forces that have positive or negative influences.

CONDON: Well I believe that they should be treated as a pure Foreign Service matter. This is a specialization assignment and not a specialization in function from the point of view of recruitment. Recruitment, openly recruitment to people with various experiences, including the academic, and labor, and business, that is one thing and should be welcomed. But, all should be judged before they are recruited and given admittance to the Foreign Service on the basis of the same criteria as anyone else who has done it to the process of examinations and [competitiveness?] Therefore I feel that the labor reporting, reflects a specialization of function and not in specialization in recruitment. I felt that all along that to bring in people from the labor movement just because they had experience in the labor movement was not sufficient justification for bringing them in. There is always the question of the loyalty of those people who are brought in under the special purpose because if they are not incorporated, integrated into the Foreign Service, they have to face the problem of what happens after one or two assignments. Therefore I never favored and I was never comfortable with colleagues who had come in from the labor movement just for an assignment or two and then they had to return to their previous ways of professional activity. I feel that the Foreign Service should be a field where certain intellectual requirements must be met and if these are met from the labor movement so much the better. If they are met by people in the business world, so much the better, and if they are met by people in the academic world that's welcome, too. Therefore for the labor movement to assert a special right to allocate a certain number of people to perform as labor attachés is not justified as such.

Q: Well, thanks. What do you feel about what sort of attitude do you find appropriate for a labor attaché covering this labor function to have toward oh trade unionism? Obviously he should not be, I suppose you would agree, he should not be an active proponent of one labor group as against another. Do you think, though, that it's fair to say that a labor attaché should not be associated with a particular trade union, to especially with their rivals but do I go too far in my own feeling that a labor attaché

should have a sympathetic understanding of the trade unions rather than a pro trade union or an anti-trade union?

CONDON: Definitely. They should have a conviction that the labor movement is an integral part of the whole complex of institutions that make for democracy. That he must have a positive, favorable attitude and appreciation of the labor movement as an institution that promotes democracy. If he doesn't have that he cannot possibly function effectively. That is the basic criterion.

Q: I should tell you that I, certainly from my background, I have that background of certainly a sympathetic understanding and a feeling that in any democratic society we should have a trade union movement and that if it is not a democratic society we should try to build one that could have a trade union movement. But I must tell you that there is one former labor attaché who I thought was really anti-labor but whose reporting was excellent. It's a terrible thing for you and me to say.

CONDON: It's a terrible thing for you to say as difficult for me to believe that it could be so.

Q: I could not look at his reports and feel that he was anything but sort of an anti-labor type but on the other hand the reports were pretty good.

CONDON: No, no, no. It cannot be so. I beg do disagree it cannot be pretty good if he is what you called anti-labor or prejudiced or biased.

Q: There is some strength to what you say because his relations with the trade unionists were not too good but I'm talking about his reporting.

CONDON: If his reporting is negative that means that the labor movement lent itself to critical procedures that has nothing to do with the [personal?] bias probably gave him a more eloquent expression of the criticism which was justified.

Q: On the other hand have you had any experience with people, I don't think it's necessary to identify them from the trade union movement, whose activities were such in what they thought was a good purpose but it reacted against the function; that they leaned over backwards even to become foreign service officers of the pin striped type or that they were so pro-union that their situation in the Embassy was made more negative? We have had a few labor attachés who have had that difficulty.

CONDON: What I have heard I cannot recall it but it's the usual phenomenon that we find the localities which is of a broad [career hazard.]

Q: Which happens in the political field generally...

CONDON: Localities, and with some labor officers when the localities by function rather than geography.

Q: By function rather than geography. Well, I'll tell you one of our problems. I don't know whether you knew him or not, Phil Heller, did you know him, represented a different aspect. I have had much to do with him and I knew him when he came from a wonderful union and I had some interest in Phil Heller's service as an AID officer in Austria. He was so emotionally attached to it that I think it may have affected his impartiality. On the other hand I tell you that many people, including George Lodge, whom I interviewed, give Phil so much credit because his background in the American political and trade union scene made him a perfect person in a place like Guinea, where he served as labor officer with Sekou Touré. Lodge told me he was the only person who could talk with Sekou Touré.

CONDON: Ah, absolutely...

Q: Did you know Phil?

CONDON: I knew Phil. And now I'm going to make an observation a bit critical of Phil and in making an observation, I'm making a critical comment about myself as well. I knew both Phil and I went through an intellectual period where we tolerated a bit too much and too easily the concept that in an underdeveloped world country the _____.

Q: Anti-democracy was permissible!

CONDON: Yes a little bit less than democracy was permissible and a little bit less than independent trade union was permissible. I make a note of criticism also of myself on that matter.

Q: It is a fascinating subject. Lodge claims, and you know his background. He was a north east liberal establishment on the Republican side. He says that anything less than that type of approach would have been against the interests of the US government, but you had to have somebody in there who was willing to work closely. Of course I don't know what Phil's reports were out of there, but if he worked closely to Sekou Touré and got Sekou Touré's [thinking?] so do things that were in our interest and reported adequately on the lack of democracy then that might have been defensible at least in George Lodge's mind.

CONDON: George Lodge is wrong on that point.

Q: He is a little bit naive..

CONDON: And in retrospect the Sekou Touré behavior behaved dreadfully and cruelly barbarically towards the trade union movement of his country, to his entire population.

Q: Well, now Bourguiba may have done the same thing.

CONDON: Also, but he didn't do it, he didn't do it. Despite his megalomania and egomania

Q: Especially toward the end.

CONDON: He showed commendable and identifiable respect for some degree of autonomy of the labor movement which Sekou Touré ignored completely ...

Q: Well this is an interesting observation. Well, John, it's now 1:40 in the morning I feel unconscionably guilty of perpetrating this on you but thank you very much.

End of interview