

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

HARRY FLEISCHMAN

*Interviewed by: Morris Weisz
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Fleischman.]

Q: This is Morris Weisz with the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project. The date is January 28, 1995. I am sitting in the charming home of Harry Fleischman in Longboat Key, Florida to follow up on an interview that took place on January 27, 1992 (three years ago) in which Harry gave an account of some of the work he did for the Voice of America and the USIA or its equivalent at that time for the few years that he worked there (1952-1953). We have transcribed that very interesting interview. That are a few blanks that we want to fill in on it with this second interview and then go on to have Harry comment on some materials he has since dug up which illustrate the work that a person of his background was able to do for the Voice, which had some very good effects during the period that we were in this terrific propaganda war with the Soviets at the beginning of the Marshall Plan period.

Harry, there are two purposes to this re-interview. We thank you for it. The first purpose is really to follow your career afterwards, after you left the Voice, in 1953 and to get an idea from you as to the value or the critique of your work that became sharper as your career went on and an evaluation of the government programs in that period from a sort of 20/20 hindsight point of view, how did your career in the government affect your future activities? Please mention those, of course. So, will you begin with your departure, for this segment, from the USIA, what jobs you sought, what you did, especially as an official of the Socialist Party of the United States, and how you assess your work in the light of what you did for the government?

FLEISCHMAN: Well, let me say first of all that I worked for the Voice from 1950-1953. Towards the end of 1950, what happened is that I first was working as a WAE (when actually employed) doing scripts for them. Then when I was cleared, I went on until 1953 when I was praised, promoted, and fired all at the same time as a result of the budget cuts in the Voice of America, which were a result of the McCarthy's campaign against the Voice and the State Department.

Q: But not against you personally?

FLEISCHMAN: Not against me personally, although I was scheduled, as I think I told

you in the earlier interview, to be called before the McCarthy Committee, but for one reason or another, mostly, I think, the threat of newspaper men to attack McCarthy if I was called before him, I wasn't. And also the support of the trade union leaders on the issue on which I was supposed to be vulnerable, mainly the use of the song "Solidarity Forever." It sounds funny to mention that now, but at that time it was serious. After leaving the Voice, I had to find another job. I must say that my colleague, Liston Oak, who remained as labor editor at the Voice of America, did a superb job of contacting trade union leaders all over the country and other people as well with the possibility of jobs.

It finally came down to a possibility of a job as director of the National Labor Service of the American Jewish Committee. In this respect, a number of people were extremely helpful. Probably the main one was A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Sleeping Car Porters.

Q: Originally AF of L.

FLEISCHMAN: At that time still AF of L. This was before the merger, which was in 1953. Let me go back a little bit. After being fired, I had to get some kind of work immediately. If I remember correctly, one of them was with the Jewish Labor Committee, which I think I described in the earlier one. I'm not sure now whether that was before the Voice job or after the Voice job.

Q: But you had gotten to know...

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. At any rate, for the job at the American Jewish Committee, people like Phil Randolph really went all out to get support. He wrote to George Meany, urging him to send a letter to John Slawson, the executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, to recommend me.

Q: You should mention that you originally knew A. Phillip Randolph from his activities within the Socialist Party when you were an official.

FLEISCHMAN: I knew him from probably even before that. As a young socialist in the '30s in New York, I was organizer of the Harlem Circle of the Young People's Socialist League. I would help with the Negro Trade Union Committee, which Frank Crosswaith led. He was a black organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and president of the Negro Labor Committee. There was Noel Walters, who was in my Yibsel Circle in Harlem, and with whom I was very busy distributing leaflets at laundries that we were trying to organize for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. He later became assistant manager of the Laundry Workers Joint Board and then Workman's Compensation commissioner for New York and then federally as well.

Q: He was a Black, a Negro.

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. A. Phillip Randolph was a great leader to all of us, although he was in the early stages of building the Pullman Porters Union as a real union. But at the time when black nationalists were picketing the Apollo Theater because it was owned by Jews, Randolph organized a counter picket line pointing out that Jews were among the most steadfast supporters of black causes. This was a long, long time ago. So, when I came back to New York in 1942 as national secretary of the Socialist Party, I continued my work with the black groups, particularly the Negro Labor Committee and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. So, I knew Phil Randolph from his work there. In fact, Norman Thomas and I, if I remember correctly, in 1944 tried to convince Phil to run as a vice presidential candidate on the socialist ticket. He was very, very anxious to do that, but... I'm not sure whether this is 1944 or 1948. My memory is not certain. It was either of those years. What happened is that the Brotherhood's executive board urged him not to do that because they felt it would take away from his activity as president of the union. Also, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights urged him not to do it because they felt that there was a chance to get a permanent FEPC passed that year and Senator Taft was one of the people that they were wooing very hard in that respect. Arnold Aronson, who was secretary of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, told me just a few weeks ago when I met him in Washington that he was one of those who had pressured Phil Randolph not to run as a candidate on the socialist ticket.

Q: As you look back on it, would it have had an adverse effect on his influence in the AFL if he had run?

FLEISCHMAN: I doubt it very much. He didn't have much influence at that time in the AF of L.

Q: He used to get up and make a speech and that was it.

FLEISCHMAN: And that was it. Also, one of the interesting things is that Arnold Aronson's point to me about getting Senator Taft and getting the permanent FEPC passed never happened. So, on both those grounds, I don't think... I think that Randolph would have been wonderful as a candidate. He had this marvelous voice, was a wonderful speaker.

Q: He was a great orator.

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, great!

Q: And a City College student in his young and was relatively well educated. That is the reason for his leadership. Would he have gotten enough votes if he had run in 1948 to defeat Harry Truman in New York State?

FLEISCHMAN: No way! I think it was really 1944 now that I think back to it. In any event, it didn't happen.

Q: That is how you got to know Phil Randolph.

FLEISCHMAN: Also, I was called in from time to time to be helpful in doing some PR (public relations) work for the Brotherhood. I could write press releases rather easily. I would be asked to help and I was delighted to do it. So, I knew him from that. I knew others like Ben McLaurin, who was a vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and active in the Liberal Party and the Workers Defense League and other such groups. So I had those contacts with him. At any rate, when he asked George Meany to write a letter to John Slawson, George Meany wrote back to Phil saying that while he thought very highly of me and he had heard a lot of good things said about me, he wondered over the propriety of the president of the AF of L trying to pressure a Jewish group into hiring a particular person. He went on saying very nice things about me. Phil Randolph came back to me and said, "I think this is just as good as writing to John Slawson. I'll give him this letter." Of course, one of the things that the American Jewish Committee was concerned about at that time was whether or not having been national secretary of the Socialist Party, the trade unions would accept me as a person who could do a good job with them.

Q: Your national secretaryship ended before...

FLEISCHMAN: The Voice. That was in 1950. Then from 1950-1953, I was with the Voice.

Q: Did you go directly from being national secretary of the Socialist Party to the Voice?

FLEISCHMAN: Pretty much, excepting, if I recall correctly, I did do a conference for the Jewish Labor Committee on Jewish labor against communism, which had about 2,000 people at it. I did a pamphlet based on the conference. Then I did a pamphlet for the Anti-Defamation League called "A Primer on Communism" with questions and answers about communism, which they used as a bases for the pamphlet that they published at that time. Then the next job was with the Voice of America.

Q: Then Randolph was influential in your getting support for the job with the AJC.

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, yes, very influential in that.

Q: What did you do there and what was its relationship to your work abroad? How was it affected and how did it change any views you had as a result of the work for the government? Did you use that?

FLEISCHMAN: I used everything that I had done at the Voice with the American-Jewish Committee in a variety of ways.

Q: Please describe those.

FLEISCHMAN: First of all, one of the things that happened as a result of my work at the Voice was that I had contacts with a tremendous number of union presidents, union editors, and union educational directors. I had interviewed all of these people or gotten material from them for my Labor News Roundup for the Voice, which was a weekly feature that [inaudible] and I did together and for my labor specials, which were special articles on a particular subject. For instance, one of them was going to Unity House, the vacation place of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. I went there with a team of another announcer from the English unit of the Voice and an engineer. We interviewed people who were workers at Unity House, who were guests at Unity House, union members who were guests, other people there who were not members of the union, and we would give a whole picture of what it was like being there. It was so effective that The New York Times did the lead article on the second section with photos and about a half page that they devoted to the Voice at Unity House. We did a lot of things like that at the Voice, which many unionists were aware of. What I did there as a result of having been at the Voice is, when I first took the job, I went around to a lot of the union leaders and asked them what was it that they needed? What kind of work could I do that would help them, particularly in the spheres of civil rights and civil liberties, which, of course, were basic parts of the American Jewish Committee agenda. A number of them gave various ideas, including Gordon Kohl, who was editor of The Machinist, the paper of the International Association of Machinists of the AFL. He suggested that what they could use would be a column that I would write. He knew about my writing from my scripts at the Voice of America. He suggested a column which would have a lot of short items so that even union papers that couldn't carry the full column could carry excerpts from it. He added that it would be a good idea to have some of the items be humorous so that it wasn't all a serious thing. I came up with the title "Let's Be Human" and I started that column, which was syndicated both by the American Jewish Committee and by Labor Press Associated at that time.

Q: So what your experience seems to have given you is a leg up on your next job in terms of contacts.

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, tremendous.

Q: But substantively, it gave you (Or am I drawing too much out of it?) some materials that you could adapt for your new job. I remember the "Let's Be Human" column from the very beginning referred mainly to humorous things to things you had learned abroad or were based on foreign...

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, sure. After all, the issues that I was dealing with were the questions of peace, civil rights, civil liberties, democracy, communism, and of course, my background at the Voice. But before that, my background at the Socialist Party. It was a strongly anti-communist background. So I continued to do that as a regular feature of my work.

Q: So it was job assistance plus a substantive background that helped you later on. This

was all part of the outreach program of the AJC to trade unions?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. What AJC did was to have a number of specialists. Mine was labor and then a little bit later, race relations was added onto it. I became not only the director of the National Labor Service, but the race relations coordinator for the Committee. But they had people working with women's, youth groups, veteran's groups, and Jewish communal organizations. It was a whole variety of things. It was an inter-group relations agency, which meant that what it was trying to do is to build coalitions along the issues that the American Jewish Committee considered very important. Later on, it added other ethnic groups as part of the area that it went after.

Q: You were not part of the other-

FLEISCHMAN: No, I was not part of that one, except peripherally. We all worked together and cooperated on these things. But, yes, these were the things. It also meant, for instance, that I could move in many different directions as I felt necessary or desirable. My bosses at the AJC had the feeling that I was the expert and that their job was to help me do what I wanted to do best.

Q: Was there ever any attempt to have you move away from something you were inclined to do because of some special interest of the AJC?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, to some extent. For instance, when I would try to... I wasn't successful on all of the things that I tried. I tried to get the American Jewish Committee to support the grape boycotts of the United Farm Workers, but the Committee had never supported a boycott and they weren't about to change then. The Committee didn't believe in demonstrations. It worked behind the scenes. But I did succeed in getting them to support the 1963 march on Washington for jobs with justice. When I pushed the Committee-

Q: The AF of L did not officially participate in it?

FLEISCHMAN: But AJC did, which was surprising when you think of all the things that can be said about the Committee being conservative because it was a capitalist organization. Its membership was upper middle class to a large extent. I pushed the Domestic Affairs Committee of the agency which I served to come out for not only fair employment, which was a given for them, but full employment as the only means of getting fair employment. I remember the chairman of our committee who was the president of the Federal Department Stores, a chain of about 7,000 workers in Michigan and Ohio, saying, "Harry, this is more of your socialist nonsense. You can't expect us to come around to that." Well, within a year, he came back and said, "You know, Harry, you're absolutely right. You can't get fair employment without full employment." The Committee adopted that as its program. So, I was able to move the Committee on a number of issues like that.

Q: You stayed with the Committee virtually for a quarter century or so?

FLEISCHMAN: 26 years, from 1953-1979 when I retired at the age of 65. For instance, there was a consultative conference on desegregation that the NAACP initiated as a coalition even before the Little Rock incident, after the stuff in Alabama with George Wallace.

Q: That was 1960 though, wasn't it? After Kennedy got in. Wasn't it Bobby Kennedy who fought with...

FLEISCHMAN: This was earlier then. This was when Eisenhower was still in.

Q: Then it was after the 1956 Brown Decision.

FLEISCHMAN: It was the 1954 decision. Shortly after that, the consultative conference for desegregation was started. It set up a mass media committee, which I chaired. The consultative conference on desegregation fell apart within six months, but the mass media committee lasted for 10 years. What we did was to bring together once a month the leaders of the various organizations, the Southern Regional Council, the state committees against discrimination that were private organizations, the Jewish agencies like the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Jewish Women, the YWCA, the Christian Churches, the ACLU, unions, and civil rights organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League. We would meet once a month and discuss what was going on in the propaganda field in the mass media dealing with civil rights. We would discuss what kind of articles were needed and how we could get them into mass publications like The Saturday Evening Post, you name it, and on radio and TV as well. Between us, we had enough PR people so that we were able to suggest the names of people who would be good and have some contact with that publication, with that mass media outlet. It worked very well for a good many years. We even called a meeting of the vice presidents for news and special events of the three TV networks at that time. We called them into a meeting where we had Harold Fleming, who was the head of the Southern Regional Council at that time, and we had people from each of four cities that were to undergo desegregation that fall. This was in the summer.

Q: School desegregation.

FLEISCHMAN: School desegregation. This was after Little Rock. We said to them, "Look, we're not suggesting that you censor yourselves. You've got to give the picture of the violence that is taking place. That's part of the picture. But you're not getting the full picture. You're not getting the picture of the people who are trying to make desegregation work. We have people here who can tell you what's going on in their cities with the unions, with business, with the civil rights group, trying to make desegregation work peacefully. What we are suggesting is that you get in touch with our people in these cities who can help you find what is actually going on." After that, for a number of years, these TV networks would call the NAACP, the Southern Regional Council, the American Civil

Liberties Union, or the American Jewish Committee to find out what was going on in the cities that they were going to cover in regard to desegregation. They told us that this was the first time that those networks had ever gotten together on a substantive issue. Of course, one of the things that we did was to have this completely off the record. I didn't even send out minutes about this to the other organizations within the Coalition. To be successful, it had to be something... In that regard, on one occasion, the minutes that we sent out were sent out to the local offices in the south of the various organizations (the ACLU, the American Jewish Committee, the Southern Regional Council, the Anti-Defamation League). One time, in Richmond, Virginia, the copy of minutes that was sent to the Anti-Defamation League was delivered instead to the White Citizens Council. The White Citizens Council immediately brought those minutes to the Richmond News leader, James Kilpatrick was the editor and publisher of it. He did a very smart thing.

Q: I don't know whether he was the editor and publisher. He was at least a columnist there. He was very influential.

FLEISCHMAN: I'm not sure either at this moment. I think he was an editor. He not only printed the full minutes, but he had an editorial. The editorial was not one denouncing the Committee. Instead, it said, "Look how smart these integrationists are, how they work to get their point of view across. Now why can't we segregationists do the same kind of thing?"

Q: That's interesting.

FLEISCHMAN: Well, the Jewish community in the South was scared stiff about this. I was sent down to travel to the various cities in the South to reassure the Jewish communities. I remember going down to Georgia, to Atlanta and to Macon, and discovering that the treasurer of the White Citizens Council in Georgia was Jewish. His nephew in Macon was the president of the NAACP. You found this kind of thing happening all over. I would say a large majority of the Jews were supportive of desegregation. But I was able to dampen down the fears that they had and we went on. On another occasion, one of the things that I did that certainly stemmed from my work at the Voice, was to deliver a lecture to the Jewish Labor Committee on the history of the Communist Party. I did a flannel board lecture on the zigzags in Soviet policy and what it meant in the United States as well, going way back to the history of the seven zigzags that had taken place up to that time. It was significant enough that The New York Times put the story on the front page of the lecture. I also was called upon by the National Board of the YWCA to give a lecture on the same subject to their national staff. One of the people at the National Board level was worried that they had some fellow travelers of the communists on their staff and they felt that this was necessary to help educate them. So, I did that kind of thing for various groups, too. Again, I would teach at union summer schools and I would teach on all these different subjects, on communism as well as on civil rights and civil liberties. Also for some of the unions, I taught on public speaking and how to put out a newsletter.

Q: Your PR.

FLEISCHMAN: Right.

Q: As I said, what I wanted to get from you, if possible, is some commentary or running commentary on what you observed after you left the Voice happening to the trade unions and the labor parties and the socialist parties in Europe and the United States and how your experience with the government affected your understanding of what was going on and your critique or changes in views or maintaining your views. You said to me some time ago that you felt that the socialist parties in Europe were closer to your analysis of what was happening politically than other wings in the socialist and pro-labor movements in the United States. I would like you to develop your rethinking to the extent that it took place or your reaffirmation of your socialist... I take it that you already mentioned or we should put it down right here that you remained a socialist and remain still a socialist, although your understanding of your socialist beliefs may have taken a little bit of a turn based on economic and political facts, but you retain your interest.

FLEISCHMAN: Absolutely. It's a long time now since I first joined the socialist movement back in 1931, but while my views have changed on some of the issues. I still retain the essential vision of a socialist society, which means that I no longer say, as I used to say when I first joined, that socialism is the social ownership and democratic control of the commanding heights of the economy of all of the monopolies and everything else. My views on that have changed as a result of many factors that have happened in the world, including fascism and communism and the nature of a totalitarian state, which makes me, as well as most socialists today, feel that we do not want an omnipotent government. We want to have as much democratic control as is possible, as is feasible. Let me go back to 1944. In the presidential campaign in 1944, the Socialist Party came out with a platform which envisaged what became the Marshall Plan. That is, aid not only to our allies, but even to our enemies to rebuild their economies, to make sure that we would have peace. We were very happy when the Marshall Plan was promulgated and when it was offered to the communist countries as well as the others (and as you recall, both Poland and Czechoslovakia at first accepted the Marshall Plan aid and only rejected it when the Soviet Union forced them to do so), we felt that that was the right approach that the government had. We also supported the Korean encounter. We felt that this was one that was the United Nations and not just the United States. We thought there was something that needed support.

Q: NATO?

FLEISCHMAN: NATO, we were ambivalent about because we were of the opinion that the United Nations was the instrument that should be used more than anything else. But over and above that, we came to the belief that instead of the social ownership, there are other forms of social control that can be used that will be effective. This is not just something new. I was looking at one of my scripts for the Voice of America back in 1953 where Norman Thomas had written a pamphlet on "Democratic Socialism: a New

Appraisal” in which he said that nationalization has not been the simple solution of all problems which many socialists had assumed and called for a variety of forms of social ownership, including public authorities like the TVA, and consumers and producers cooperatives. Incidentally, even then, what we said about the TVA is that it should have a board of directors composed of the managers, the workers, and the consumers to be able to give democratic control. But we’ve seen, for instance, with Sweden how the social democrats in Sweden were able to use taxation, have been able to use other legislation to have control over production with incentives that were very effective for a great many years.

Q: But the incentives, as I put in my own bias, in Sweden and in many other social democratic countries, were directed toward labor. The incentives of those countries were not only to encourage investment by private enterprise, but also investments in incentives in education and other elements of the structure of society which would aid the workers. The opposition of the American labor movement, it seems like NAFTA is an opposition, it seems to me, to be based upon incentives provided only to owners who are encouraged to contract abroad and to move facilities abroad with the idea that that might ultimately help the entire society of the United States in the long run. But in the short run, there are no incentives like training, etc., given in advance to the working class to purchase from them the opposition to these one-sided incentive plans. This is my personal view, which I couldn’t help getting in.

FLEISCHMAN: Well, it’s not only your personal view. Certainly, it is true that while things might be benefited in the long run, people live in the short run. People have to eat in the short run. They have to get money to live in the short run. This is one of the problems that I find with all of the proposals that are currently being pushed by not only the Republicans and Newt Gingrich, but also by the Democrats with Bill Clinton. I think that it’s sort of like declaring the war on poverty and then making it a skirmish. What you do is, you do 10% of what is needed. We never permit that in a real shooting war. In a real shooting war, we don’t say that we can’t afford this; we get it. We do it. But this is what we do when it deals with the lives of people. I still think very, very strongly that that is the wrong way to deal with things. This is something that I have felt all these years and feel that it is imperative upon us to do it. I am reminded that it is not only socialists who have said this kind of thing about it. I am reminded of what General Dwight and President Dwight Eisenhower said about the military industrial complex, how that steals from the lives of people. General Douglas MacArthur said the same thing.

Q: In Japan?

FLEISCHMAN: Not for Japan. He said it for the United States. He said it for the whole world.

Q: In his final speech?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. It has been said by Harry Truman. Harry Truman, when he made

his speech in 1950 to the United Nations on October 25th, the fifth anniversary of its founding. He made a speech for universal disarmament under universal inspection and control which spelled out the kind of things that disarmament would mean for this country and the world. It made more sense. I feel rather pleased about that particular one because I had done a memo to Cleon Swazy [ed. note: may be referring to Clinton Swezey] of the State Department along these lines. Norman Thomas had done the same thing in a letter to President Truman, whereupon President Truman asked him to come and meet him. After meeting with him on this subject, he wrote to Norman, urging him to listen in to that broadcast because he felt that he would be happy to hear it. He took all of the points that Norman had made on this subject and used them in that speech.

Q: Let me ask you this question. What you're saying is that there were enough elements in our society that were not formally socialist who accepted the ideas just like the ideas on social security in the 1912 platform of the Socialist Party that were adopted later on. How do you look back then upon your activities in 1944 and 1948 in which you opposed the candidacy of those elements within the Democratic Party who were at one with you on these important things? You weakened the effect of those ideas within the Democratic Party by running a separate candidate. Have you reexamined that?

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, sure I have. In 1950, as you recall, I resigned as national secretary of the Socialist Party. I was one of those who said that the party should stop running candidates. Now, in retrospect, I could go back to even 1934 and say that we should have done what Upton Sinclair did at that time. What he did was to try to bring a socialist platform into the Democratic Party of California. His epic plan, "End Poverty in California," was that kind of program. He not only won the democratic nomination, but he came close to winning the governorship. He got a million votes.

Q: Frank Merriam was running against him?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, the socialists did and the socialists and I denounced him at that time for doing it. This is an interesting story. Back in the 1960s, I was speaking at a civil rights conference of the International Union of Electrical and Machine Workers with Senator Paul Douglas. I knew Paul Douglas from Chicago. He and I had debated in 1940. Well, it wasn't a debate, but rather a symposium. The two of us and a republican, Clifton Utley, spoke at Randall Hall at the University of Chicago for some 1,500 people on the campaign. He spoke for Roosevelt. I spoke for Thomas. Utley spoke for whoever was the republican candidate (Willkie, I guess). Now, here in 1968 or something like that, Paul and I are discussing civil rights. But before the program started, we talked with each other. I said, "You know, Paul, if we socialists had followed Upton Sinclair in 1934 and gone as an open caucus within the Democratic Party, we might have made greater strides." Paul Douglas says to me, "Well, Harry, I'm not sure that's right. We needed the ginger of your opposition of the Socialist Party and Norman Thomas' opposition to make us move in the correct direction. I'm not sure you could have done it from inside. You might have been co-opted easily."

Let me make another point. In 1944 and 1946, Truman did some good things and he did some really bad things. He tried to have the labor draft when there was a strike by John L. Lewis' miners. He wanted to draft the strikers into the Army. Things like that.

Q: He advocated that, yes.

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. And things like that did not ogre well for him. You will recall that in 1946, the Republicans won both houses of Congress. In fact, I did a tour of the country for the Socialist Party at that time and I predicted that that would happen in the election. We had organized with a lot of other people a national education committee for a new party, which met in 1946 and had as its sponsors the Humphrey Wing of the Democratic Formal Labor Party Eugenie Anderson and Walter Matheron, who after Hubert later became among the people who were staring it together with the people from the United Auto Workers, the National Farmers Union, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workman, and the chairman of it was A. Phillip Randolph at that time. It had the Liberal Party of New York State in it as well. It wasn't setting up a new party, but to do education for a new party. We figured that in 1948, Truman was sure to lose, the Republicans would win, and then the labor unions would be willing to start a new party along the lines of a Cooperative Federation of Canada. This was our reading at the time of that. We were wrong, very wrong. I was at that Democratic Convention in 1948. I saw what happened there that changed it. I don't know if I've talked about this at all.

Q: I don't think so, but it would be relevant to say that for you to observe with Truman's active campaigning in that year whether your 1950 decision to ask the Socialist Party to not run candidates anymore would have been of greater value in 1948 or relevant at least in 1948 when it really was... I was scared as Hell about Wallace and Strom Thurman on the left and the right taking away enough votes in critical states like New York.

FLEISCHMAN: I was at the convention and I saw what happened there. What happened is that it was as though we were in a mausoleum, a morgue. The gloom was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Then Hubert Humphrey came up with a minority report for civil rights. It was a minority report, I remind you. They won that battle and the Dixiecrats walked out. Suddenly, the atmosphere in that auditorium changed immediately. Euphoria crept in. I asked Andy Beamuller, "Why did you have this as a minority report when you passed it with such a big majority?" He said, "Oh, it was a minority report, but the big city bosses decided that Truman couldn't win and therefore they wanted to latch onto black votes, so they came on board for the civil rights report." By doing that, they actually made it possible to win. Another thing happened at that convention.

Q: What happened in New York state? Do you remember? How close was it? Do you remember?

FLEISCHMAN: I don't think it was very close. It was pretty good. But at that convention, Phil Randolph had a picket line around the convention against segregation in the armed forces. Norman and I joined the picket line, of course. We doffed our

newspapermen's hats for that.

Q: You were both covering it?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, we were covering the convention. What happened after this was that Truman invited Phil Randolph and Norman to come down from Washington to meet with them about this question of segregation of the armed forces. Afterwards, he issued an executive order forbidding it.

Q: He had guts.

FLEISCHMAN: He had guts. Years later, he was at a dinner of the Italian-American Labor Council. Norman was president. He insisted on calling Norman over and having a photographer take a picture of the two of them together. He wanted it.

Q: That's interesting. But essentially

FLEISCHMAN: My point thought was that if we had done in 1934 the business of going within the Democratic Party, in retrospect, I now think it would probably have been a wise decision. Actually, it happened to a very large extent anyway. Our members, both from the right wing and from the left wing, did exactly that. They went into the New Deal. They went into jobs with Roosevelt.

Q: But the difficulty created for socialist trade unionists like Dubinsky and Reuther was that they had to reject their Socialist Party membership because the members just would not have stood for anti-New Deal.

FLEISCHMAN: Well, that goes back and it's one of the things that I want to get into this interview. I felt that it established for me two things. One was the fact that, looking back, you can examine areas in which other decisions may have been better, but also the essential difference between the various parties on the left that were non-democratic (the communists and the others close to them, the Trotskyites, etc.) didn't have this pragmatic feeling of "Maybe we should examine some of our views and change them" even in retrospect.

Q: That leads me to one other point that I want to raise with you, which I think should be developed. That is the attitude taken by the democratic forces within what we'd probably called the socialist or the labor party group. How do we treat these people who are communists and are now being betrayed by their own groups? What do we demand, if anything, of them in terms of their reexamining their views and their policies and the actions they took? What did we do about demanding some sort of explanation from them, if not in support of their early position, but at least an explanation of what democratic institutions or what democratic imperatives led them to change their mind and join groups such as yours?

FLEISCHMAN: This is a very interesting question. It reminds me, I have been at many meetings at which ex-communists have explained why they changed their minds. We had many such meetings at Norman Thomas' home back in the 1940s and 1950s. I was there when Howard Fast explained why he broke when he did. One of the things that interested me and that interested Norman Thomas' wife, Violet, very much was that these ex-communists could understand how one could be a member of the Communist Party until they broke, but how anybody could stay later was utterly beyond them. This was one of the things that we noted very much. I'm still interested in the question of what you do. I remember the Democratic Socialists of America.

Q: We should identify it as a group which Harrington led for many years.

FLEISCHMAN: It was led by Michael Harrington until he died in 1989. It has people, some of whom are former communists, but who broke with the Communist Party at various stages along the way. Mostly they had repudiated that past very much, but not all of them. Some have just said, "This is what is needed now." Well, I would prefer that they give a confessional, but I know that it's hard for people to do that in many cases. I was in Eastern Europe in September and October of 1994 and one of the places we went to was Hungary. We met with the chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Party, which is the party that was formerly the Communist Party and is now the government of Hungary. One of the reasons I wanted to meet with them was to find out was he really an ex-communist and what of the party as a whole. I was very intrigued with the session that we had with him. I say "we" because my wife, Ethel Kahn, and I both met with him. She took notes. He has become a real social democrat, discarding all of the policies of the former Communist Party. He says that there is almost a watershed kind of thing within the party. Those who are over 50 tend to be hardliners and retain much of their former communist beliefs. The younger people overwhelmingly are picking up the social democratic patterns (as in Sweden and Germany). He feels that there is no way that the party could go back to the communist past, that that is a past that is completely bankrupt as far as the country is concerned, as far as they are concerned. Even the hardliners know that that is the case. Where they go from here, I'm not sure. They face economic problems that are almost hopeless. The economy has no machinery. Nevertheless, they are trying. They want to do something that will bring them into the Scandinavian, Western European mold of democratic socialism. Whether they're going to succeed or not, I don't know.

Q: What are the political groups that you meet there; any that felt as though this change of heart was not genuine?

FLEISCHMAN: No. As a matter of fact, I met with other people who were not of the Hungarian Socialist Party, but even those who were not felt that this was something for real. In Prague, I met with the Czech Social Democratic Party, which is one of the minor parties there. There, I got the impression that they were not very effective or pushing hard. Even they said that the communists who had broken and had formed another party were mostly honest about it. It's not that they wanted to do it, but that the conditions made it imperative that they act this way. That was true in some of the other countries.

Q: You also went to Poland.

FLEISCHMAN: We went to Poland, too. The people I met with there were not that political. They were starting a center for the study of democracy and trying to start democratic political life, but they weren't very -

Q: Financed by the U.S. in anyway?

FLEISCHMAN: I don't think so.

Q: Those groups who were pro-democracy that operated out of Washington were financed by the U.S. government.

FLEISCHMAN: That may be. These were groups that were financed perhaps by some of the trade secretariats of the ICFTU. The Michael Harrington Center in London is one that is working with these groups. We met with them. It was a pre-Honeymoon, but it was also an occasion for us to meet with -

Q: Now as you come back to the United States, where does that fit in within the general labor and socialist oriented political groups in the United States? Are they all at one on this?

FLEISCHMAN: I don't know. I know something about DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), though not very much because I'm not very active in it. I still do a column for them about local activities, but I don't attend many meetings. On the other hand, I don't know what the Social Democrats USA are doing, if anything. I don't see any evidence that they are even in existence. Are they?

Q: Oh, they're in existence.

FLEISCHMAN: Do they put out anything?

Q: I think they put out a publication. I occasionally get some stuff from them. I don't know if it's a regular publication.

FLEISCHMAN: I haven't seen any regular publications. I've gotten leaflet kind of things-

Q: I think we're going to try to interview Don Slinger, if we can. He had a whole 'nother trade union...

Let's go to the third thing I want to get on tape. It may not require much time, except for later on when you start selecting material. You gave us a wonderful interview on what you did at the Voice. Since then, you were kind enough to pull out of your material individual examples of broadcasts and other materials prepared for the Voice, I think

some of which at least you would be able to describe in general terms and then allow me to have Xeroxed so that we could have them as part of the Harry Fleischman interview -- a continuance, as it were, of the one that was completed.

FLEISCHMAN: Sure. I'll be glad to do that. I have all kinds of material. For instance, I discovered that I have a clipping from Unity House of something that I did there on another occasion where I took some songs of the slave laborers. That was done by former slave laborers who were in the United States. These six songs were broadcast by the Voice of America. I took copies of those recordings and played them to a session of some 200 people at Unity House.

Q: When would that have been?

FLEISCHMAN: While I was at the Voice. What happened is that people, many of them, wanted to have copies of the thing. Obviously, these are not copies that could be made available in the United States, according to Voice rules and regulations. One former slave laborer came up to me with tears in his eyes. This brought back so many memories to him, these songs. That was one little illustration.

Q: Is that still a violation of those rules?

FLEISCHMAN: I have no idea. I had urged the Voice to make that available, but I don't think they ever did.

Q: Do you have a copy of that tape?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, I do. In fact, I think it may be at the Tamiment Library now. https://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/tam/fa_index.html I'm not sure whether I have it at home.

Q: Mention the fact about your materials being at the Tamiment Library.

FLEISCHMAN: What I have done is given probably 100 boxes of my files, tapes, books, and transcriptions, to the Tamiment Library of New York University to be used for research by people. It includes the interviews that I did with Norman Thomas when I wrote a biography on him.

Q: Transcripts or recordings?

FLEISCHMAN: Both the voice things and the transcripts. It includes the interviews that I did with about 85-90 socialists and former socialists when I traveled around the country on a three month sabbatical from the American Jewish Committee back in 1973. This is about how they became socialists, what effect the Socialist Party had on their lives and on their further work. It includes some fascinating interviews. It also includes materials that I did... I worked with the United Auto Workers on a couple of albums of songs that they

did, songs about labor history and some of songs that were protest songs. I wrote the historical notes that went on the albums about each of the songs. I have copies of that. I have copies of plays that were done at Norman Thomas celebrations for his 65th and 80th birthday. There were plays written.

Q: All this material was deposited in the Tamiment Library, named after the famous group on 15th Street.

FLEISCHMAN: It was originally the Rand School Library. That has all been put into the NYU collection called the Tamiment Library, which is the 10th floor of the library.

Q: Is it all indexed for students?

FLEISCHMAN: It is very well indexed. They are now doing it in digital form, computer form anyway, so that this material will be available in a lot of ways. It includes, for instance, oral history interviews of me that were done not only by Tamiment, but by the American Jewish Committee, the Columbia University oral interviews.

Q: Does it include ours? I guess we owe them a copy of our interview.

FLEISCHMAN: I think so. It includes a great deal of stuff.

Q: Does it include the material you are now going to make available, which since it's directly connected to the Voice work, which I'll be making copies of?

FLEISCHMAN: It will include that, too. They will have that also.

Q: They have that already?

FLEISCHMAN: No, they don't have it. What happened is, I am going to be writing my memoirs and in preparation for doing that, just before we came down to Longboat Key, I went up to the Library, scanned quickly through some 65 boxes.

Q: You went to the Tamiment Library and you removed stuff from their library with their permission, I assume?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, I removed about five or six cases of material that I need.

Q: That will go back.

FLEISCHMAN: It will go back.

Q: So, what it amounts to is, everything will be there and the things specifically we want for our interview with you will be Xeroxed and put in there and we will probably send the Tamiment Library the interviews. Okay. Thanks. We'll get that stuff together. If you

would go briefly over some of the topics included, we will have it on the tape of this stuff. One of them you mentioned that fascinated me was the Salesman item.

FLEISCHMAN: The Case of the Reluctant Salesman.

Q: Which covers?

FLEISCHMAN: 13 communists were arrested and convicted under the Smith Act. The judge offered them their freedom if they would go to the Soviet Union and they all refused to go to the Soviet Union. They preferred to go to jail, to prison, here. In the course of the script, I pointed out -

Q: You prepared a script on that for the Voice?

FLEISCHMAN: That script pointed out how fortunate they were. I then pointed out what had happened to members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, how many had been purged, how many had been killed, and that this could have been their fate if they went there.

Q: You mean the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.

FLEISCHMAN: Right. I guess the Voice did permit newspapers to get many of its scripts because, at least in one paper, it was a front page banner headline story.

Q: The regulations with respect to the VOA merely said that the dissemination of their materials abroad could not be disseminated similarly in the United States by giving them to radio stations. But anybody would have the freedom of press here, anybody who might want -

FLEISCHMAN: Actually, we had reporters coming up to the Voice to meet us regularly to take our stuff and to write scripts on it, write stories based on our scripts.

Q: What are some of the other things that you are going to be supplying, anything to be mentioned on the tape? You covered generally the-

FLEISCHMAN: I have scores of scripts on slave labor hearings.

Q: Right. And those hearings were-

FLEISCHMAN: The United Nations International Labor Organization.

Q: Right, the ILO. I remember those. Those were disseminated pretty much, weren't they?

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. The VOA recordings were not, but the hearings certainly were

because I was there at the time. So, there is the slave labor subject, the whole question of communism, the whole exposition, as I recall, of American practices that seemed to be anti-democratic, but explained in their context would convince the listener that this was part of a democratic society, any limitations -

One of the things that we insisted upon doing was to point out things that were wrong with the United States. We talked about coal mine disasters, all sorts of things that were wrong. We had to do that. If we didn't do that, we couldn't get believability from the people who were listening. What we wanted to do was to reflect American society with all of its good points and its bad points. That is what we conceived to be our mission. But we were careful not to exaggerate. In fact, when we would interview workers about their lives here, we didn't want them to say it was too good. That can also create envy abroad. So, we deliberately kept it down rather than playing it up. It was an interesting kind of problem that we faced there. One of them was a sophisticated approach to the problem of reflecting American society as it is so that it would not be overestimated, but nevertheless would give the impression that that is what a democracy is, an imperfect society that can be improved. So, what you were doing was doing some specific publication and interviews on the gulag situation of slave labor and all of that. We got wonderful reactions, I remember. The whole issue of the nature of communism and its extremism and the fact that it doesn't permit correctability, and a fair representation of the United States. But in addition to these kinds of things, I did such things as writing scripts on the whole electoral process of the United States.

Q: Beyond labor, I see.

FLEISCHMAN: Also, I did scripts on the peacetime uses of atomic energy, a whole series of scripts on that. Every time we had a nuclear test, we would dust it off and play it again.

Q: So you were not only a labor expert.

FLEISCHMAN: No, I was also used as a political expert for the Voice.

Q: That was good. In spite of that, which was an effective program, you still were being investigated, in effect, without any charges against you specifically. What did they want you for hearings for?

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, this was because I used the song "Solidarity Forever."

Q: Oh, yes. That's amazing! Okay, Harry, thank you very much. Thank you very much for the original interview and for this excellent expansion of it.

FLEISCHMAN: Let me add one thing. I used to say that socialism was the sum of our desires. After a while, I got to saying that next to socialism, the best thing is struggling for it. Then I got the idea, maybe struggling for it is the best thing. I don't want any kind of

static society. Society has to change all the time. Struggling for social justice in the world is really the aim of my desire.

Q: Well, I hope it continues for a long time to be a successful approach. Thank you.

End of interview