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JOHN O. GRIMES

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INTERVIEW

Shea: It is March 18, and we are at the home of my good friend John Grimes who was a long time labor attaché. It is a pretty nice morning here after we had quite a winter. John could you tell us a bit about how you got started in the Foreign Service and a bit about your family background?

GRIMES: I am a first generation American. My father emigrated from Ireland. He came from County Armagh. He married my mother, Mary Gallagher, down in Birmingham, Alabama. I was born in 1924. My father was a grocer. I went to Notre Dame in 1942. I was there just a year, and then I went into the Marine Corps. I was in the Corps from '43-'46. After that I returned to Notre Dame, finished my college, got a B.A. in English, and was out in 1949. I went directly into the Foreign Service as a diplomatic courier. I remained a diplomatic courier or courier-supervisor for 12 years. I then was integrated into the Foreign Service officer corps. My first assignment was as consular officer to Glasgow. I remained in Glasgow for four years. After that, I was transferred to Malta, and I served there for a couple of years before returning to the States for labor training. I was there, studying under the direction of Dan Goot. He ran our little training course within the Department. Later, we went on up to Harvard to Joe O'Donnell's labor leaders' course. I attended with John Becker and Jim Whitlock. Another participant was Bill Bell. Bell resigned from the Foreign Service; he never took a post as a labor officer, I don't think. My first labor assignment was to Trinidad.

Kienzle: Could we back up just a little bit. Did you have a family background in labor of any sort, or, how did you get interested in the labor specialty?

GRIMES: I was interested; when I was at Notre Dame I took some courses in labor studies and while there, I wrote a prize-winning labor paper. I was sort of interested in labor after that. That was in '46. Do you remember, that was a time when American labor was very active with John L. Lewis, as a leader, and all that; so, it was sort of natural to be interested. You couldn't help but be interested.

Kienzle: What facet of labor did you write on in your paper?

GRIMES: I did a piece on labor relations in the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. It was interesting because the company officials I interviewed were very suspicious and very reluctant to talk to anyone. I never saw such defensiveness on the part of anybody. This was a, hell, it was an academic thing. It was absurd, but they were gun shy for some reason or another. But, it was fun doing that.

Kienzle: Within the service you applied for the labor program?

GRIMES: Yeah. When I was in Malta, I was doing a little bit with the Malta Labor Party, and I was interested there. It was actually a consular assignment, consular and economic, but I got interested in the Malta Labor Party, and I felt that was something I would like to do. I liked the kind of people who were in the Party. Anyway, I applied for it, and my Ambassador recommended me, and I got it.

Shea: Was there any one particular labor attaché that particularly stimulated your interest?

GRIMES: I didn't know any labor attachés. I simply didn't know anything about the personnel doing that kind of work. I had heard that they had been very active and instrumental in the success of the Marshall Plan in Europe. I knew that bit of background. But beyond that, I didn't know too much. I found the training very interesting.

Kienzle: This was at Harvard?

GRIMES: No, before I went to Harvard. The exposure we got around Washington and in travel to New York and travel around to places like that -- that was my first encounter with the welfare state gone crazy, man. This was the period of the War on Poverty you know. I don't know how to describe it; it was almost evangelical, the attitude I saw in the Department of Labor and some of the exposure we got. For example, we were taken down -- they were big on storefront social projects in those days -- they took us down to someplace in the Southeast, I guess. We went in there and saw a bunch of people sitting around doing nothing. They were wearing something that looked like paramilitary garb. They had these berets. I was really astounded. They were on duty; they were being paid. I looked at the bulletin board and they had a lot of stuff on there, but one of the things I noticed was a little notice that there was going to be an anti-Vietnam demonstration at such and such a place. People were urged to go and encouraged to go. I thought, “What the Hell is this!”

Kienzle: You reacted as an old Marine.

GRIMES: In a facility funded by the U.S. government, they are encouraging these people. It was out of this world.

Kienzle: Was this a Labor Department project?

GRIMES: Yeah, I think so. I think it was a Job Corps thing. Another thing that interested me … we were taken up to New York and taken around to their Social Welfare Department. This fellow was explaining the benefits everyone got and how generous they were and so forth. I asked him, “Do you have any appreciable number of immigrants on this welfare?” “Oh, yeah,” he replied. I said, "Well do you ask them? I mean how do you know?" He said, "Honestly I don't know, but I think we have quite a number." I

continued, “Well, you know, an immigrant who becomes a public charge is deportable." “We don't look into that; we are not interested in that; if a person needs help, he gets it," he replied. Well, not too long after that, I noticed that the City of New York had gone broke. This was the kind of crazy atmosphere.

Kienzle: This was the John Lindsey administration?

GRIMES: Yeah. This was the atmosphere I found there -- welfare gone crazy.

Shea: At that tine, did you deal with Jim Taylor a lot?

GRIMES: I met him, but I don't know much about him. I didn't really have that much to do with him. Dan Goot, Dan Lazorchik, those were they guys we worked with.

Kienzle: Did Lazorchik coordinate the program?

GRIMES: Not really. He began with us, but later I don't know what happened. He was moved out or something, I don't know what happened to him. He was a great guy though.

Shea: I saw him last week.

Kienzle: Yes, he is going to be interviewed shortly. Can you describe your program at Harvard?

GRIMES: Yeah, it was good because it put us in touch with a lot of real labor leaders. Up to that point, we had been dealing with bureaucrats of one kind or another, but these really were people working with organized labor. That was an eye-opener in a lot of respects, all good guys, some of them from abroad, some of them were just local. We had people from Australia and all sorts of places.

Kienzle: Joe O'Donnell.

GRIMES: Yeah. It was a good program. They taught us public speaking. There were parliamentary rules, labor negotiations. They had us negotiating with computers even in those days, and even negotiating with people from the Harvard Business School – presenting the employer’s point of view -- so it was an interesting, stimulating several months up there.

Kienzle: Then after Harvard, you were assigned to Trinidad?

GRIMES: I was assigned to Trinidad, yeah, that was my first post. There was no political reporting officer there, so my job was partly political and partly labor.

Kienzle: This would have been from 1968-1970.

GRIMES: Right. That was kind of an interesting time down that way because Black Power had kind of swept down to the islands of the Caribbean, and it was an active movement in Trinidad. There was always the fear of conflict between the Indian community and the black community. That was an interesting place to be because you saw two races, neither of them white, and you saw their interaction with each other.

Shea: You were in Port of Spain.

GRIMES: Port of Spain, right. That was interesting.

Shea: Who was your Ambassador?

GRIMES: Symington, Fife Symington.

Shea: How did he regard the position of Labor Attaché?

GRIMES: He wasn't a pro, you know. He was a political appointee. All he wanted to see was that things were covered, so he didn't focus too much on whether you were a labor officer or a political officer, or what you were. He just wanted the job done. He was very much a gentleman, very generous and helpful to me in the things I was trying to do. I was trying to stay in touch with the Black Power movement. There was a group there called the Tapia Group, so-called intellectuals. Really they almost succeeded in staging a coup. A pitiful little thing, it is almost opéra bouffe but at the time it was kind of serious. The government could have been knocked off if we hadn't gotten some material down there to them. The army revolted; the police remained loyal. But they got mortars and stuff down there to them and they were able to contain the army which didn't amount to too much.

Kienzle: This was in Trinidad.

GRIMES: Not in Port of Spain proper, but in Trinidad.

Shea: What year was that, John?

GRIMES: That would have been about '69. We had a little prior official information on this. But because my office was on the ground floor, I often was passed a lot of people that reception didn't know what to do with. I was glad in a way because I got an Army -- he wasn't a deserter – but he was an active Army person, a walk-in who wanted to tell us about a coup that was being planned in the Army. It turned out to be true. We were able to confirm it through our contacts with that Tapia House, the intellectual Black Power wave; we were able to meet some people who were actually the legal representatives of the Tapia group. One was of Irish extraction. She was afraid for herself, so she kept us posted on exactly what was happening and when the coup was coming. She had it within a day. The agency representative down there, the CIA guy, maybe you don't want me to talk about this?

Kienzle: No, go right ahead if you feel comfortable.

GRIMES: It was so long ago, nobody cares. He wanted me to give him the name of the person who was giving the information to me. I told this guy that I wasn't going to do that, you know. So he got the ambassador to call me in. I told the ambassador, "No I just can't do that; he has the information, he can do with it whatever he wants to , but I am not going to put somebody in danger for their life." The ambassador backed me up on that. She was a reliable person. They wanted to know about the source's reliability; that's a legitimate question, but not the source's identity. They sure as Hell wouldn't give me the identity of their informants!

Shea: Did you have any regional responsibilities in Trinidad?

GRIMES: No, just Trinidad. I remember the leader of the Indian group the sugar workers. His name was Saigon Badass. He was a bad ass in many ways. He carried a weapon and was on drugs; he was a mess, but he kept the Indian community under control.

Kienzle: When you say "Indian," do you mean from the south or...

GRIMES: East Indian.

Kienzle: East Indian, you don't mean native American?

GRIMES: No East Indian. These were people imported by the Brits to grow sugar cane.

Kienzle: So the same thing that happened in the Fiji Islands. Anyhow the Agency confirmed there was a coup in the making, and they believed it?

GRIMES: Oh yeah. When they got the request from Eric Williams who was the Prime Minister, they got the request for some military support, and they got it down there promptly. They got it down there within hours. They saved his bacon.

Kienzle: Were the British involved?

GRIMES: No the Brits were not involved. There was a British officer who commanded what they call a fleet. It was really just a gunboat, but he played a crucial role because the Army had started in toward town, and if they had gotten there, they would have succeeded. This guy brought his gunboat up along the shore and he blasted a cliff that overhung the highway. He blocked the highway that way, which gave the police enough time to deploy on top of a hill with their mortars and they were able to stop them.

Shea: It sounds like the Army just gave up. As I recall, the oil workers were pretty strong there.

GRIMES: Yeah, the oil workers were strong. But I don't know, they didn't seem to cause

much trouble, not while I was there, anyway. The great fear was that the students and the oil workers would get together. It never happened.

Shea: Who was the leader of the oil workers?

GRIMES: I was trying to remember that, George... It is a British name, but I can't recall it. Another interesting thing that happened while I was down there related to American labor -- the Hathaway shirt company had set up an offshore plant down there to produce these fine shirts. I think they produced them at about a dollar and a half or two dollars a shirt and they brought them into the States. They left a button hole unfinished or something so they could import the shirts virtually duty-free. They were sold in the States for the same price that American-made Hathaways were selling. So, the garment workers … which group?

Kienzle: The ILGW or the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, that must have been it.

GRIMES: Yes, they struck Hathaway in several places and told them you either close down or we are going to keep you closed down. They closed the plant in Trinidad. The head of the TTLC, the Trinidad and Tobago Labor Congress, a guy named Spencer came in one day and said, “Hey, you can't do this to us!” I said, “Well, it is not me that is doing it.” He said, “Let me talk to...” I got the Amalgamated folks on the phone and let Spencer talk to them directly. I forget the guy's name up there who was the head of Amalgamated at the time.

Kienzle: The most recent one is Jack Shenkman.

GRIMES: No, that wasn't the name.

Shea: Morty Findlay or even before that Jake Potofsky.

GRIMES: That is it, Jake Potofsky. He said, “Well tell me, if you were up here in my shoes, what would you do?” That did it for Spencer. He said, “I guess I'd do the same thing.” He said, "But don't worry too much. I hear that Hathaway's parent company is going to keep that plant down there and produce women's girdles or some damn thing.” That is what happened. Those guys in Trinidad didn't lose their jobs.

Kienzle: Any other notable labor issues there?

GRIMES: No. That was the only thing. There wasn't that much going on, actually.

Shea: Did the AIFLB have a representative there?

GRIMES: No, there was a traveling representative based in Barbados, I think. Anyway, he'd come our way once in awhile; that's about it.

Kienzle: Then after Trinidad you went to Paris as the Assistant Labor Attaché.

GRIMES: Yeah. Let's see. After Trinidad I was back here for something.

Kienzle: Oh the international organizations.

GRIMES: Yeah, I had been out so long that I had to have a tour in the States.

Shea: Yeah, for 12 years. I came up against that myself.

GRIMES: They didn't have any labor job for me, so they threw me into this damned international organizations thing doing international conferences. That was a stupid thing. It was a frustrating assignment. It was interesting in a way to see all the damn organizations we belonged to that produced nothing, absolutely nothing. One literally was called the Codex Alimentarius.

I looked at that organization; it was in my bailiwick, and I said, "What the Hell are we doing here?" I recommended that we drop out of it because they had been in existence for, I think, 12 years and they had never agreed on a code on anything. When I put in that suggestion, God damn, out of the woodwork over at agriculture, came all these clowns, "What are you doing to us?" they demanded. "That is our annual trip to Rome!"

Shea: You had a food and agricultural thing, Alimentary.

GRIMES: I found out then, once something gets a foothold in government, it never disappears.

Shea: Then did you take French?

GRIMES: I had a courier assignment to Paris; I had learned a little French. My wife's native tongue is French. I had a few weeks at FSI. Anyway, I qualified in French. I went to Paris as Assistant Labor Attaché, Assistant to John Condon.

Kienzle: This is in 1972.

Shea: Oh you worked for John Condon.

GRIMES: Yes. That was interesting. That and my last assignment in Paris as labor counselor, those were my only two assignments that were purely labor. The others were a mix of labor and political.

Kienzle: That was in 1972. Do you want to describe the issues you worked on and your working relationship with John Condon?

GRIMES: John Condon didn't want an assistant. I was imposed on him. I found that out

after I got there. He was courteous and nice, but he kept me in the back room. I didn't meet any labor leaders to speak of. He didn't want to waste his time trying to inform me or instruct me or coach me in this trade, so it just didn't make too much sense. I recommended that the job be abolished, and they did abolish it. They were having a cutback at the time anyway. I said, "My job is not essential so take it."

Shea: What issues did you deal with there?

GRIMES: Well, I didn't really deal with many issues. I was just a helper to John Condon. He was involved in some things like -- I don't know whether you remember the LIP watch factory. That was a big deal at the time because the CFDT was trying to take it over and make it a worker-owned thing. It never worked out, but that was the major issue that was going on at that time. Honestly, I don't remember much else that was happening. Of course, Condon was interested in keeping close contact with the left there. That brought him into some little friction with Irving Brown. As a matter of fact, Condon sent a group of journalists to the States on one of these leadership grants. Unfortunately, he let the Journalists Association decide who was going to go, and a couple of them turned out to be communists.

Shea: Did he have to get a waiver from...

GRIMES: Honestly I don't know. I don't know if they were card carriers or just sympathizers, I'm not sure.

Shea: Who did your officer efficiency rating?

GRIMES: Condon wrote mine. His, and later mine, too, were written by the political counselor, and then reviewed by the DCM.

Kienzle: Do you want to describe your impressions of the work of Irving Brown and the AFL in Paris?

GRIMES: I thought Irving Brown was one of the most interesting people and famous people I have ever met. I was impressed with that little office in Paris, that little two-man show they ran there and the kinds of things they were involved in. I give Irving Brown as much credit for turning the communist thing around as anybody else. He was instrumental in the help that got to the Polish trade unions. He never said much about it; he never said *anything* about it as a matter of fact, but you could see what was happening there. He was traveling east quite a bit, not into Poland, I guess, but he was seeing to it that the flow of machines did -- printing presses, Xerox machines all of that kind of equipment that was essential to what Solidarity was able to do. I think that is the best example I ever saw of the AFL-CIO encouraging democracy abroad. I forget the name of that program.

Kienzle: NED?

GRIMES: Is that what it is called?

Kienzle: National Endowment for Democracy.

GRIMES: Then they do a lot of other stuff that busts, but there I think he made a difference.

Kienzle: This would have been during your second tour in the early 80's. Did Irving coordinate at all with the Embassy or inform you of what he was doing?

GRIMES: Oh, no. He was very close about what he was doing. He was just sort of mildly interested about what was happening in labor in France. He knew everybody, and of course, everybody knew him. I think they thought of him as a CIA agent. A lot of them did; the people on the left did anyway. The Force Ouvrière, he had been very close with them. I don't know how he felt. He wasn't interested very much in the CFDT or the socialist side of things. He was interested in things he needed from the Embassy. If he needed transportation for Kirkland, or something like that, that is about the only time he would ask anything of me. I used to go around to see him frequently, maybe a couple of times a month, to see what was going on and to exchange information with him. He was very close, and I guess he had to be, with what he was doing.

Shea: Who was working for him at that time?

Kienzle: Is this the first tour or second tour we are talking about?

GRIMES: First tour. Jeepers, I really didn't have any contact with him in the first tour because I was in the back room. In the second tour, I can't remember his name, a Polish man. Anyway, he kept track of the union publications from Eastern Europe, that kind of thing. He had languages.

Kienzle: Anyhow, after your job in the International Organizations Bureau, you went to Kinshasa in 1974. Could you describe your assignment there?

GRIMES: That assignment really wasn't a labor assignment, although it was sold to me as a labor assignment. Maybe it had been at one time, but when I was down there, the labor movement was dormant. The government just smothered it. There was an AALC guy down there named Peter Robar, of German extraction.

Shea: A great tennis player; did you play him?

GRIMES: I couldn't play him. My son could. I played him, but I couldn't beat him. Peter stayed in touch with the unions but it was a *pro forma* kind of thing. He didn't spend much time with them. He spent most of his time on the tennis court.

Shea: It must have been a time of great turmoil there.

GRIMES: Well, the interesting thing that was happening while I was there was what was happening next door, over in Mozambique. That is the old Portuguese colony on the west coast.

Shea: Mozambique was on the Indian Ocean side, and Angola was on the other side.

GRIMES: I'm sorry, Angola was the country. The Portuguese had just let the thing go, and a civil war had developed between the Savimbi and the communist forces. The Agency had a big operation in Zaire supporting Savimbi. As far as labor there was nothing. I listed a couple of trade unions, but they were asleep. They had to be. The government was on top of them, and they had no way to do anything. The only possibility of organizing would have been down in Katanga where there was mining and the diamonds and that kind of stuff. They were not active down there, either. I was down there.

Kienzle: You were the number two person in a three-person political section. How was that structured?

GRIMES: Yeah, that is what I would have been. There was a counselor and three of us; I wasn't very junior, but I was the second guy there.

Shea: Who was the ambassador there?

GRIMES: Dean Hinton. Before him was Sheldon Vance. After him was Walter Cutler.

Shea: Was that a complete dictatorship by that time?

GRIMES: Oh yeah. The United States continued to prop up, and continues to prop up Mobutu. He's not a very palatable, but is an alternative, to chaos. That is what it would have been if he were out of there. You know the Belgians. When they left that country, it was a fairly rich country. It was an agricultural country, and they had big herds of cattle. They were pretty well off.

Kienzle: They had mining too.

GRIMES: Yeah, the mining produced all of the revenue, but the agriculture part of the country was in pretty good shape. When I was down there, I used to fly around the country with these missionary pilots in these tiny planes. They would describe to me – "You see that grazing ground there, that used to be covered with beef. But they ate it all up. The trees are all chopped down. They just used up the country."
Shea: It is a huge country.

GRIMES: It is a mammoth country.

Shea: Did you get out a lot?

GRIMES: Quite a lot but by plane. Because, you know, I took a couple of trips by car, but it is kind of hard to get around by car. Flying in, the only way to do it was with the missionaries. I used to try to find out from them what the attitude was toward the government. Everybody wished they were gone, they said, but nobody knew what the alternative would be.

Kienzle: You mean Mobutu?

GRIMES: Yeah. I guess he had begun as pretty good, well he had begun as a peacemaker. He brought peace out of chaos at the time of the revolt down there, but then he became so damn authoritarian that it made life miserable for the people.

Kienzle: How about corruption? Was that a problem?

GRIMES: Oh, terribly corrupt; a lot of crime.

Kienzle: Were the labor leaders on the take at all, or were they not powerful enough?

GRIMES: I don't think they mattered. They just really weren't in the picture. It was business people who were corrupt, and they did a lot of smuggling and that kind of thing.

Kienzle: How about personal security in Kinshasa, was that a problem at all?

GRIMES: It was getting to be as we left there because people who were really hungry. I remember walking with my wife, one time. We were just walking from where we lived up to an apartment building where other embassy people lived. A car came up and this guy slipped out of the car, and grabbed my wife's purse. Before I could do anything about it, he was back into the car, and gone! Once, right in front of the Embassy, somebody tried to get into her car while she was waiting to pick me up. So, yeah, personal safety was a problem.

Shea: Was Allison Palmer there at that time?

GRIMES: I know who she is; no, she wasn't there.

Shea: She was there before I guess.

Kienzle: Any other observations you would like to make about your tour in Kinshasa?

GRIMES: No, it was just a, I mean I was glad to see something of the west coast of Africa. As a courier, that is the one area of the world I hadn't, well that and China, I hadn't gotten to see. So I was glad.

Shea: You saw all of the rest.

GRIMES: Yeah, I got to see it in my courier trips.

Kienzle: OK, after Kinshasa, you went to Brussels.

GRIMES: Yeah.

Kienzle: Describe what you were doing there.

GRIMES: Well, there I had responsibility for labor, of course, but it was also for internal political reporting. We had other officers who were looking after political- military and sort of international questions that involved the Belgians. As far as following the political parties and the trade unions, that was mine. It was a big job, and it was added to when they insisted that I cover the Netherlands in the labor portfolio, as well. That was tough, because there was no background, no files, nothing. It was from scratch in The Hague.

Kienzle: Was that a new position that was created or did you predecessor just forget to leave a file?

GRIMES: No, there hadn't been a labor officer there for 10 years, or something like that, so anything that had been done was gone. Except for one thing and that made it possible to do the job. This was the local employee who had worked with the labor attaché when he was there, and who remembered everything and had wonderful contacts in the Dutch labor movement. He was a great help to me.

Kienzle: Do you want to describe the issues in the Netherlands and then we will go to Belgium. What were the labor issues you followed at that time?

GRIMES: Let's see … to be honest, I just don't remember. I remember problems about welfare and unemployment compensation, technical things like that. I didn't see any major strikes or problems along that line. I talked with some American employers who were there, and they were happy enough with the situation. I'm sorry, I just can't remember what specific issues came up at the time.

Kienzle: What about in Belgium?

GRIMES: In Belgium, there was a constant conflict between the Christian, or Catholics, really, and the socialist unions. The society was divided really four ways. You had socialists and Catholics, and then you had Flemings and Walloons. So, on either side, socialist or Catholic, you had a Flemish contingent and a Walloon contingent. You talk about a mess, that really was.

Kienzle: Was there much coordination across the ethnic divides?

GRIMES: No, great animosity all the time. There were parts of Belgium that were trying to pull out of the Flemish-dominated area, and come back down to the Walloon areas, that is administratively, within government. That was a constant source of contention. On specific labor issues, I remember one thing that both impressed and depressed me. In Belgium their welfare setup, I had never seen any country that was so profligate, I guess is the word for it, in their welfare payments. You know, a kid getting out of high school there, what is he, 18 or something like that? Part of his briefing as he leaves school is how to apply for unemployment compensation. He's never been in the workforce, but he's told, "Here is what you do; you go down and get on the rolls, and once on the rolls, you can stay there forever." I mean, that was literally true.

Kienzle: There was no cap or time?

GRIMES: No cap or time; it was just "Big Daddy." I couldn't believe it.

Kienzle: How about the labor federations; were there four labor federations; were there two or how...

GRIMES: There were quite a few. The Christian one, what do you call it? I forget the name, they had a Dutch designation and a French designation, but anyway there was a Christian confederation. Damn, I can't remember his name … I do remember the man who headed the socialists and that was Georges DeBrun.

Kienzle: He was a Walloon?

GRIMES: No, he was a Fleming believe it or not, but he spoke French and Dutch and English. He seemed to personify the bridge between the two in his group. There were technically only the two groups. Within the socialists and within the Christians there were Walloon and Fleming. They had different designations for the name in Flemish and in French. They were very peculiar about language. If you met a trade union leader from the Flemish area, although he might speak French and not very good English, he wouldn't speak French with you, and he wouldn't want you to speak French. You had to speak English to him although there may be some problem in communicating.

Kienzle: Did you learn any Dutch?

GRIMES: No. I tried, but I just wasn't there long enough to do it. Actually, I guess, it wasn't that necessary because most Flemings can speak English. As a matter of fact, the embassy in communicating with the Foreign Office did all our notes in English, which seems strange, but it did keep us out of trouble with either the Flemings or the Walloons.

Kienzle: Any issues in Belgium that come to mind?

GRIMES: I wish I could remember, but it has been so long ago, I 'm afraid I can't.

Shea: How about did you deal with the ICFTU.

GRIMES: You know, we had a labor attaché from the EC as they called it, the European Community, that was … what was his name … I wish I could remember these things. He is married to an oriental girl. Bob Sensor! A very nice guy and terrific man to work with there. On issues, we didn't have anything really to do with one another because he was following the community and I was just watching the local movement.

Kienzle: So the division of labor was very clear and there was no problem of overlapping jurisdictions or coordination.

GRIMES: No, nothing like that. His predecessor there, I can't remember his name, was Irish … John Daugherty … I think he is the one, bless him, that recommended that the Netherlands be covered from _____. That is the only real bone I had to pick with the EC.

Kienzle: Was that practical?

GRIMES: Very impractical. If they had relieved me of the internal political responsibilities, that would have been fine, but there just wasn't enough time to do that. I asked the Embassy, I said, "I am picking up labor, I can't do the internal political." They countered, "You have to." So, well I did, but my successor there … I can't remember his name, a black fellow …

Kienzle: Wilbur Wright.

GRIMES: Wright, yes, he just covered labor in the two places, and they somehow absorbed the internal political. I guess somehow, because the political counselor didn't do a damned thing. He just read; he wasn't really producing anything. Maybe they put him to work.

Kienzle: What was the Embassy's attitude toward labor issues?

GRIMES: They seemed to think that labor … well, they weren't very interested in it, really. They were more interested in having the political parties covered. So I used to do a lot of traveling around to interview people on the political side of things, Jean Gauld, and people like that.

Kienzle: Were the trade union federations tied-in with specific parties?

GRIMES: Yeah, the socialists were connected with the Belgian socialist party, and the Catholics, with the conservative wing. I can't really think of anything.

Shea: Was the ambassador a political appointee?

GRIMES: Yes, the ambassador was a political appointee, a woman by the name of Cox Chambers. She was a friend of President Carter, and he appointed her.

Kienzle: So you were there then for three years, 1976-'78?

GRIMES: That's right.

Shea: What about the standard of living of the people there?

GRIMES: They were well-off. People who weren't well-off from their work, were well-off because of the government. The welfare program that I was trying to describe earlier was just fabulously, fabulously generous. They did have unemployment, but it didn't bite the way unemployment here might.

Kienzle: The safety net worked in other words.

GRIMES: That's right. It worked almost too well, because a lot of them didn't bother to look for work. They could receive their unemployment checks while on holiday down in Tunisia, or wherever they went for the sun, you know.

Kienzle: Were there a bunch of rampant government budget deficits as a result of the generous welfare payments?

GRIMES: I don't remember that. They must have been able to make ends meet, but I know in France it was clear that they were going to have to pull up their sox and do something about it because they were killing themselves. The Belgians, too, because the Belgian welfare program was even more generous than the one in France. France had this practice of paying for every child you had, you got so much money, you know, for each one.

Shea: Family allowance.

GRIMES: And it didn't matter. Gosh, you got it just like the poorest family in France; you were entitled to it, you know. They blew a lot of money.

Shea: How about your political counselor in Belgium?

GRIMES: Interestingly enough, my political counselor in Belgium later became my political counselor in Paris, too, when I was there. His name was Francis Gatar. In Belgium, while I was there, he was just feeling his way in because he had come in to replace a man named Olson who had been a journalist for the Los Angeles Times and had come in from the political section in Sweden. For some reason or other he had to take over as DCM, so he got assigned down there as political counselor and later became DCM in Belgium. That is when Gatar came in, to fill his shoes. Our relationship was fine. He would do just as I said was his main job -- reviewing reports created by other people.

He would just check them over, and then pass them along.

Kienzle: Was he actually a political appointee or had he integrated?

GRIMES: Gatar? No, he was a regular Foreign Service officer. Olson must have been an appointee; that is, he must have come in through the FSR.

Kienzle: Lateral entry.

GRIMES: I think so. That is the way they often bring people in when they want to do a favor or something … give him FSR and then integrate him into the regular Foreign Service. He was a damn good officer, Olson. He wrote beautifully; of course he was a journalist, that helps.

Kienzle: So after Brussels, you went to Tunis in 1978.

GRIMES: That's right, and when I got down there, I found the trade union movement was dormant. There had been an insurrection, I guess you would call it, by the labor movement. A man named Habib Assur. Jesse Clear was my predecessor down there. He had been involved with Assur and his ambassador had leaned on him. He didn't want him having contact with the left which was stupid, but that's the way it went. When I got there, all that had been crushed. The group _____ was back on top. The prime minister had a very firm hand on the labor movements. A lot of them were in jail.

Kienzle: Where was Assur at this stage?

GRIMES: Assur was in jail. He got out later, and he didn't make any waves. So, there wasn't much to do on the labor front because just nothing was happening.

Shea: Was Mary Ann Casey there at that time?

GRIMES: She succeeded me. In Tunisia our ambassador was Steve Bosworth. The political side of things was sort of interesting. Everybody was looking for a successor to Bourguiba but he was still hanging on. His wife was sort of propping him up and running things herself, really, they say. I can't quite remember what was happening down there. That's really abut all I remember.

Shea: Did you have any representatives from the ICFTU show up?

GRIMES: Yes they did, and I think they used to lean on Tunisia in the ILO, places like that, to release, sure, they finally succeeded. I think they influenced enough to get him released from prison. There was nothing much else going on in labor there though.

Kienzle: How about Irving Brown and his contacts with North African labor leaders.

GRIMES: Irving Brown visited. That is where I first met him, down in Tunis. He came down for a visit, and for them he was God you know, because he had been instrumental in the liberation of a lot of those countries, including Tunisia. I remember going out with him to sort-of-a … the unions had kind of a resort hotel they used to use. People could take leave there and go and have a little holiday at a very reasonable price -- which was sort of unusual in Tunisia -- because mostly it was luxury or utter poverty. The Tunisians seemed like a happy and fairly content people, except the trade unions, of course. They weren't happy because they were suppressed.

Kienzle: Were they actually integrated into the ruling party, or how did that happen?

GRIMES: The union that succeeded Assur's union, that was really a party apparatus. But these men who I say met with Irving Brown, they were the old timers who remembered the old movement and they were very friendly with Irving.

Kienzle: Which group were they with?

GRIMES: They had been with UGGT back in the days of the liberation struggle, and labor had been a factor in that, and Brown had been a factor in Tunisian labor. He was kind of a local hero.

Shea: Liberation meaning independence.

GRIMES: Independence, yeah.

Kienzle: Not the end of W.W.II, the independence.

GRIMES: I understand he had the same kind of contact all through North Africa, Algeria and places like that.

Kienzle: Certainly Morocco.

GRIMES: Well, you know, one time I was talking to him about Zaire. He said, "You know, I have the order of the leopard."

Kienzle: What is the order of the leopard?

GRIMES: Oh some kind of a you-get-a-little-hat-made-out-of-leopard-skin-or-something, but it is an honor accorded by Mobutu. I said, "Are you proud of that?" He said, "Not very."

Kienzle: He was probably not allowed to take the order into the United States as it's an endangered species.

Shea: What about the position of the Embassy people there?

GRIMES: In Tunis, they were very nice. The staff employees lived in an Embassy-maintained apartment building which was kind of nice.

Shea: We had a legal attaché conference there at one time. I think it was after.

GRIMES: I remember that.

Kienzle: When was that?

GRIMES: Robert Hair, I think he was the labor attaché down there at that time. I remember coming down from Paris. John Condon and I flew in from Paris to attend that conference.

Shea: We had one later, and Mary Ann Casey was there. Did you learn any Arabic?

GRIMES: I learned a few words when I was assigned down in Cairo as a courier, but just insults.

Kienzle: Not the kind you can use.

GRIMES: You better not use, you'll get killed!

Kienzle: Any final comments you want to make about Tunis or Tunisia before we turn to your assignment in Paris?

GRIMES: No, it was a fairly brief time there. It seemed like only 18 months.

Kienzle: '78-'80.

GRIMES: Something like that.

Kienzle: Then you went to Paris as labor counselor?

GRIMES: Yeah, I succeeded John Warnof there. Warnof came back here to be SIL. It was an interesting assignment. Strangely enough, it had been designated a counselor position, which was great because as counselor, you don't stand any duty officer duty and you get good quarters, and everybody is ready to cooperate with you. It was great. We had a good ambassador, Ambassador Hartman to start with, and his successor was Galbraith. And for both of them, the representation funds were unlimited, so anything you wanted to do, you could do. I was able to get around and see all these people and feed them, of course. It was a great assignment. Right after I got there -- as a matter of fact, as I got there -- they were gearing up for an election. It was Mitterrand versus Giscard D'Estaing. Anyway, all of the Embassy's contacts had been on the conservative side and they were predicting Giscard was going to win. Of course, all my contacts were on the other side, so

I could see that the people liked Force Ouvrière.

Shea: Yeah, who led the Force Ouvrière?

GRIMES: That was Bergeron. They were pro Mitterrand as opposed to Giscard D'Estaing. With a moderate group like that going for Mitterrand, I thought, no, the socialists are really going to win this time. You know how the French have their voting; they do it in two rounds. The first round and then a second . In the first round you can vent your spleen; in the second you look after the safety of your country. That was the theory that old de Gaulle put in. It had always worked to the benefit of the conservatives, but that time, 1980, it didn't. The second time around, the socialists came in. Anyhow, I was lucky enough to call that one right, and I had briefed Warnof on that with letters. The embassy was a little bit miffed at me.

Kienzle: For being right or correct.

GRIMES: I think for reporting sideways on them you know, not going through them, but political wasn't my bag there. I didn't have to go through the political counselor to clear a letter for Warnof for Christ's sake. So, I didn't. Warnof had been back here and he called me the day the response came in and said, "You were right."

Shea: How about the head of the communist union?

GRIMES: Georges Séguy was head of the CGT and Edmond Mayor was head of the CFDT, that's sort of the ex-Christian socialists. There was a CFTC headed by a guy named Bournaire that didn't amount to too much.

Shea: Did you have any trouble with the communists in the union?

GRIMES: No, I had some contact with them once in awhile. One interesting thing that came up while I was there was that the U.S. was trying to assert control over foreign companies that were producing material on U.S. license material. There was some kind of a turbine that was produced in France that they were selling to some country we didn't want it sold to. Maybe it was the Soviet Union; I'm not sure. The French insisted on going ahead and selling it. The U.S. said, "If you do, we are going to withdraw the license, and you are not going to be able to produce any more." That was a major part of the revenues for some of the companies that were producing it, and the elements that went into it. It meant that quite a few jobs were at stake. We had a delegation some down to the Embassy, and there were some CGT people in there in that delegation. They wanted to talk to the ambassador. The ambassador wouldn't see them; he said, "You see them" to me. So, I went down and talked with them. A couple of them were half-drunk, but anyway, there was nothing much to do. I just stonewalled them. I forget how that thing worked out, finally. They said we were trying to extend American law to French trade.

Kienzle: Any you said "yes we are."

GRIMES: You know, you don't have to produce this thing; you can just give up the license. They were concerned about their jobs. I was disappointed in Galbraith for not talking to them anyway. They didn't want to talk to me; they wanted to talk to the ambassador. That was the only kind of friction I had with the higher ups.

Shea: Did you have an assistant?

GRIMES: I had a local.

Kienzle: But the Assistant Labor Attaché position was gone from your recommendations years earlier.

GRIMES: Somebody told me that may be the only time someone ever recommended abolishing his own job. I was ready to get out of there, anyway. Hell, I was tired of doing nothing.

Shea: How long were you there?

GRIMES: I was there about three years. I asked for and received an extension. I was going to go back for another tour, but family circumstances made it so that I wanted to come back to the States. My daughter lives in Denmark. I thought she was going to come back here with her family, and I wanted to be here at the time. That, plus the fact that I was working -- when you consider what the retirement would be -- I was working for virtually nothing, because with my retirement pay, the difference didn't really make it worthwhile.

Kienzle: So you retired in 1983?

GRIMES: That's right, I retired. I didn't really see anywhere else to go, you know. There was no other job in the labor field that interested me, so I thought now is the time; let somebody else have it.

Shea: How many years did you have all together?

GRIMES: In the Foreign Service, 37, something like that. From '49 to '83. Then I had three years in the Marine Corps and you add that in.

Kienzle: That's right. After 35 years of service you don't add any more to your retirement benefits unless your pay goes up dramatically.

GRIMES: Is that right? I didn't know that.

Kienzle: There is a cap isn't there of 70%. After 35 years it is academic unless your salary goes up dramatically and then the base goes up.

Shea: I had 33 and then four years in the armed services and I was at the cap. Well, John is there anything else you can think of?

Kienzle: Or do you want to comment on the relations you had with Washington SIL, the Department of Labor, and other organizations supporting your labor work abroad?

GRIMES: Nothing much. It seemed to me that the Department of Labor's interest in what I was doing was sort of marginal. They are interested in labor technical things, and my job, except for the Paris assignment, were all labor-political really, mostly political I would say, mostly because the labor movements were suppressed. They were always supportive and always nice to me, no complaints at all.

Kienzle: How about SIL?

GRIMES: SIL, I often had the feeling that the reporting was … I just didn't get any feedback. I didn't know whether it was regarded as useful, or silly, or what, you know. Just not much feedback.

Kienzle: How about the labor advisors. Did you have a special relationship with Dan Goot at one point. Did he help in your assignments?

GRIMES: Dan Goot was a nice guy, very helpful to me. I liked him a lot. The other labor advisors I didn't really have much contact with them.

Shea: Was your wife a native of Paris?

GRIMES: I met her in Egypt. She is a Spanish Jewess who was born in Alexandria. Her native tongue is French She speaks Spanish, French, English, Arabic, Maltese and a little German, so I had a linguist accompanying me around.

Kienzle: Very helpful. She was a partner in your labor attaché office.

GRIMES: Absolutely.

Kienzle: That is great. Any comments about the labor attaché program in general you'd like to make?

GRIMES: Not really. What I'm wondering is now that the cold war is receding, I'm wondering about the role of the labor attaché, just what he is going to be doing in the future. There will always be the labor-political aspect because of the importance of labor in so many countries, but for the specific anti-communist thing, that is gone and is there a new role that is going to fill it? I am curious about that.

Kienzle: I think people are trying to examine this and the jury is out.

Shea: That was the defining issue.

GRIMES: It would seem to me that now we have all this stuff here in this country about American workers having to compete with low-wage workers abroad. I don't know, is there a role for that NED, whatever, to focus on with labor in trying to strengthen foreign trade union movements and level-out those differences in wage rates.

Kienzle: Well, there is a program in Eastern Europe to try to promote democratic trade unions in countries like Hungary and Romania and Bulgaria and Poland, but there is a lot of work to be done.

GRIMES: How about in the countries that are our major trade partners or are likely to be, like China, Singapore, people where the competition really is biting I guess, Japan, Mexico.

Kienzle: I think there is an active program in Mexico. Not in Japan, obviously.

Okay, any final observations.

GRIMES: No, I really enjoyed my time in labor, and it is a great job because you can put your nose in everybody's business.

Kienzle: Well thank-you very much for allowing us to interview you.

End of interview