The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Labor Series

VICTOR REUTHER

Interviewer: Morris Weisz
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INTERVIEW

WEISZ: This is Morris Weisz for the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project on the morning of Tuesday the 23rd of May, 1995, seated in a beautiful house designed and built by Victor Reuther. I'll be interviewing Victor under very difficult circumstances. He has agreed to be interviewed. We are going to cover a long period of friendship and his involvement in international affairs. I guess our friendship goes back to about '42 or '43. I can't incidentally, Vic, identify when I met you for the first time. I called a mutual friend, Hilda Sexton, to find out when I visited her because that would identify when I met you in '42 or '43. Anyhow, please begin by giving us the origin of your interest in labor and international affairs.

REUTHER: I thank you, Maury, for this opportunity. Just reminiscing about it gives me some pleasure because I think one of the most fruitful and enjoyable aspects of my adult life was the unique opportunity to be involved in international labor affairs working with trade unions in Europe and Asia and Latin America. My interest in labor matters and labor political matters began as a child at home in Wheeling, West Virginia. The father of the Reuther brothers was an active trade unionist, an early champion of industrial unions. He was a close political collaborator with Eugene Victor Debs in the early socialist movement and especially in the struggle against child labor in the mines of West Virginia, and the nationwide struggle for the eight-hour day and the forty-hour week. My father, on each of his forays into the hinterland, when he would return, the subject around the breakfast, lunch, and dinner table was always what he had lived through. He shared it with his sons. One of my earliest recollections as a child of four was when my father organized the delegation to visit Debs when he was imprisoned in Moundsville Penitentiary just south of Wheeling, West Virginia, which was our home.

WEISZ: What was your father's occupation?

REUTHER: My father's occupation at that time was president of the Central Labor Council, but he was still employed for the Schmulbach Brewing Company. He began

literally as a teamster and fought the teamster union that wanted to separate the drivers from the bottling house workers. My father was a devout supporter of industrial unionism, but by then he was the president of the Central Labor Council and went frequently to the state capital to give testimony on important national issues. On this day, he organized a delegation of trade union and socialist leaders to visit Debs. Some of the participants in the delegation took their children with them. Walter and I were privileged to accompany our father on that occasion.

I am certain the only reason why the memory of that event is still burned in my conscience was not so much meeting Debs as my own father's response to it. Permit me to just briefly describe this. First of all, Debs is dressed in prison attire.

WEISZ: This would have been what year?

REUTHER: I was four years old and I'm 83 now, so figure it out. As I recall, Debs was dressed in prison attire. Before he welcomed the official delegation, he greeted the four or five children who were there. He did it with such kindness and gentleness that was most impressive to us as children, who were accustomed to being dragged along to adult affairs with little attention paid to us. Then the official meetings and discussions got underway and I have little recollection of that. When our time was up for the visit and we were escorted out, and the old-fashioned prison gates clanged shut with a loud bang, my father burst into tears. I hadn't ever seen my father weep. He was always such a strong figure in the family and in the city and so much a fighter for the cause of justice. I had never seen him weep in my life. That's why I remember the Debs visit, I am certain, because that has stayed with me throughout the rest of my life.

There was this deep family background in trade unionism, in democratic socialism, in the institutions of democracy. We were an immigrant family. While my father and many in the German community who were immigrants, like Debs, opposed the U.S. entrance into World War I, it was not on a pro-German basis. There was no greater American patriot than my father. The immigrants of his generation knew what freedom meant when they came to America, and they knew they weren't going to put that in jeopardy. Throughout his life, he felt very strongly about the institutions of democracy. That's why he had such bitter resentment about Hitler and about the authoritarian communists as well. This was a mighty good background for his sons, who would move into the trade union movement and begin to play a role in Europe.

As you know, in 1933, there was a recession in our country. Unemployment was widespread. Walter was discharged for trade union activities.

WEISZ: By the way, what was the order of your birth? You're the oldest?

REUTHER: No, the oldest of the four boys was Ted. Then there was an even spacing. I

don't remember whether Mother planned it this way, but at two-year intervals.

WEISZ: Ted is the one who ultimately went into business.

REUTHER: Well, not business. He worked for the Wheeling Steel Corporation as head of the auditing department. He was in management. You were quite right.

Then there was a two year lapse and Walter was born. Then two years later, Roy. I was the youngest of the four. Then an eleven year lapse and the unexpected birth of a daughter. My mother nearly did not survive that birth.

I became interested in following a legal career. I went one year to the University of West Virginia in Morgantown, helped lead the fight there against the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) because I thought it was a damn waste of time, marching up and down with mock rifles. I wanted to spend my free time visiting Scotts Run, which was a horrible mining camp. I couldn't ignore it with my father's involvement with children working in the mines. I'd spend every minute at Scott's Run in the most horrible shacks and shanties of coal miners. The Depression carried on. Strikes were breaking out in Detroit. Walter urged me to join him in Michigan. We'd find some kind of side work.

WEISZ: He had gone to Michigan earlier?

REUTHER: Yes, he had gone there some years earlier. He was already working as a skilled mechanic with eleven men under his direction at the River Rings Tool factory of Ford. The Ford Motor Company wanted to send him to an aeronautical school because he was such a bright young mechanic. I think that was before I went to Detroit. Walter may well have followed management's invitations. There are good friends who have worked in this. I made some reference in my book about Walter's changed attitude once I got there. I started dragging him into the slums of Detroit on weekends. We would dress in the cheapest clothes we had and check into a flop house, refumigate it, and then, along with all the other unemployed, eat in the chow line, and engage them in conversations. Or we'd be out on the streets interviewing prostitutes and finding out where they hailed from and so on. This all became important raw material for our college papers at the College of the City of Detroit predecessor, Wayne State University. We would write these for our class in sociology or economics.

WEISZ: You were evening students?

REUTHER: No, morning students. The three Ford workers lived with us, and I cooked and washed clothes and ironed shirts for them (That's how I paid for my tuition). We went to the university in the morning and they worked the second shift and would finish at 11:30 or midnight at night. That's what we were doing. Then we began getting involved in some of the labor struggles.

WEISZ: Is this covered in your book? We should mention your book because people who will be using this material will have to---

REUTHER: Yes, Maury, I'm glad you mentioned that because much of this background information that I'm giving you is covered in greater detail and more accurately than I can recall by dates and names and so on in my book, which is called The Brothers Reuther and the Rise of the United Auto Workers, published by Houghton Mifflin of Boston. It's available in most libraries.

WEISZ: And recently reprinted.

REUTHER: Recently reprinted by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW).

WEISZ: Were there any changes in the book?

REUTHER: Nothing excepting the-

WEISZ: Let me interrupt this, Victor, by saying, that characteristic not only of your kindness but of your interest in this field is the fact that you are frequently being interrupted by phone calls because of the unfortunate circumstance that Sophie Reuther (she's one of my favorite Reuthers) is in the hospital. You have nevertheless insisted on meeting this commitment to be interviewed. So there will be interruptions of this sort. I want to thank you for being willing to be interviewed under these difficult circumstances. Go ahead.

REUTHER: Maury, I can assure you that if I had any qualms about the care of my dear wife, Sophie, after 59 years of marriage, I would not be here talking to you now. She's in good hands in the hospital and the report is good. She'll join us at home this afternoon.

Getting back to what I was talking about---

WEISZ: This book---you said there were no changes in the Canadian edition.

REUTHER: Except in the introductory statement by the then-president, Bob White, of the Canadian Auto Workers. The book details what happened in January of 1933. There was a strike in the Briggs Motorcar Company. This was a big supplier of the Ford Motor Company. Some of the strike leaders were very close to Walter and me. We were out on the picket line, helping them, and organizing strike relief for them. Although Walter was a very respected technician in the tool room of the Ford Motor Company, where they wanted to promote him to the aerospace industry, with some eleven older men under his supervision, they fired him. He was obviously fired for union activities. Harry Bennett was already in the picture. Here Walter is fired. It was the end of the school term. We had

gotten all of our papers in. Our grades weren't that laudatory, because we were so involved in extracurricular activities, but they were passing.

WEISZ: Was this your first year?

REUTHER: This was the completion of the first year that is quite right. Walter said, "Look, I'm fired. We ought to decide to do something really worthwhile." We were both terribly concerned about the reports of the rise of Hitler in Germany. We had some distant relatives we had never met on my mother's side there. Meanwhile, Walter had become interested in the agreement the Ford Motor Company had signed with the Soviet government to help build a huge new automobile plant in the ancient city of Nizhny Novgorod.

A fellow worker of Walter's, named John Rushton, an older man, born of a British colonial family in India, was an intellectual communist---I doubt if he was a party member, but he was deeply moved by the Russian Revolution. Some six or eight months prior to Walter's discharge, Rushton had agreed with the Entour Trading Company to go over as a skilled craftsman to help tool the factory in Gorky, which was the new name Stalin had given Nizhny Novgorod, the city and administrative center of Nizhegorod oblast (region) of western Russia The Ford Motor Company had a small core (maybe twelve or fifteen) of skilled technicians there when John went. Rushton began writing back personal letters. Meanwhile, several hundred Soviet technicians from Nizhny Novgorod arrived at River Rouge for training under the agreement with the Ford Motor Company. Walter participated in training these young Russian technicians, got interested in this huge new development, and he said, "Why don't we scrape together such savings as we have (He was speaking for himself. I had none.) Let's go over and see if they will accept us as workers. We'll stop off in Germany and maybe in London and visit some political trade union friends there and so on."

WEISZ: This is important in view of the allegations made by many people to the effect that your going to Russia was related to a political affection for what was going on there, rather than Walter as a technician. By the way, where did he get this training to be a tool and dye-

REUTHER: He got it at the Wheeling Steel Plant in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he served his apprenticeship. He went through the whole apprenticeship program, then went to Detroit on his own, where they hired him at Briggs as a tool maker, and finally he was transferred to River Rouge.

WEISZ: But you had no such technical training.

REUTHER: I had no such technical training at all.

WEISZ: I remember seeing in Roy's house some beautiful furniture that Walter had built. So, he was not only a skilled metal worker but also a good woodworker.

REUTHER: Yes, of course, when you're a skilled metal worker and work within a tenth of a thousandth of an inch, working with wood, where a 32nd of an inch may be close enough, that's a very---

WEISZ: Roy told me he loved to do it.

REUTHER: Yes. I do to this day. I build a lot of furniture. I've developed a real interest in it.

Walter and I, after spending a wonderful evening as guests at the home of Norman Thomas in New York, set sail (steerage passage) for Hamburg, Germany. The day we arrived in Hamburg, the Reichstag was set afire. We lived through the next eleven months waiting for a Soviet visa. They had no housing for us. We said, "Well, hell, we can't just sit in one place." We bought bicycles and we began visiting one country after another country. It was a horrendous experience. Hitler was coming to power. We rushed on to Berlin when we heard the Reichstag was burning. We were among the first who were conducted through on a Nazi conducted tour in which they had placed false evidence against various political elements for having set it ablaze. The purge against the trade unions got underway and the purge against the socialists, the purge against the Jews, had already been underway. Even in the hometown village of my mother in south Germany, we witnessed a bonfire being built where trade union books and banners were thrown into the open flames as horrible, inflammatory speeches against all elements that opposed Hitler were made. We saw the first showing of the Nazi film, "Horse Vessel" where the whole audience rose in a Nazi salute. We remained seated and there were shouts of "These communists, throw them out!" My two female cousins, Walter and I just weren't going to rise and give any Nazi salute, but we were damn glad to get out of that theater quick.

WEISZ: What happened to those cousins of yours?

REUTHER: They both died natural deaths, one of them from cancer. They both passed away some years after. They lived through the war, however.

After seeing the rise of Hitler, we were going on and experiencing fascism in Italy under Mussolini, marching in the final free May Day march in Vienna, Austria. We wound up in the Vienna woods with young socialists and trade unionists. We went back to Germany again for a farewell visit with relatives. The final vote in Berlin, the "ja" vote was for Hitler since you didn't have the choice of voting "no." We boarded the train for Poland and Russia.

WEISZ: You had gotten your visas by then?

REUTHER: Yes, we finally got them. It was November of '33. We were still dressed for moderate temperatures in Europe, but we had our tool box with us with our scaled instruments. By the way, before I left Wheeling, West Virginia to go to New York and board the boat, I had an intensive two weeks of training under Walter's supervision in the metal shop of the high school where I had graduated. I was a half-assed mechanic when I arrived in Russia. I can tell you the workers who were assigned to work with us in the brigade had not seen anything more complicated than a pitchfork and a wheelbarrow in their life. I was moderately skilled and I took over the direction of the second shift under Walter's supervision. He directed them during the day and lined us up for work. That's another story, but I'll keep this short because the book details this considerably.

I became fluent in German in Russia. I had a fair grounding of it through the family and my stay in Germany and Austria, but how come I learned it better in Russia? Thousands of Austrian fled after the '34 uprising when the Heimwehr (the Home Guard) crushed them. Many thousands of German refugees sought refuge in Stalin's Russia. I had to be pressed into service as an interpreter. They knew no English. They knew no Russian. I found myself learning German more rapidly than I was learning Russian, although I learned enough of that to become moderately fluent. This gave me---

WEISZ: You didn't speak German at home at all?

REUTHER: As children, we did. I could carry on a routine conversation around the dinner table, but I could not discuss political or technical matters. Hence, I really became much more fluent. It became a second language in Russia.

The Russian experience broadened our outlook enormously. It continued our interest in depth with the anti-Hitler forces that were still underground in Austria, Italy, and Germany. Thousands of battalions fled there. They were housed with us in what was first called "The American Village." The village was built to house the Ford technicians who were under contract. The first housing blocks were for American unemployed, many of whom were committed communists who went over out of political loyalty. Most of them went because it was an exciting experience or a place to get a job. There were many, many hundreds of Finnish Americans who went over. The great bulk landed in Kareliya, Russia, next to their motherland, but hundreds came as construction workers to Gorky. Special barracks were built for them. Their political outlook was one of friendship to the Russian Revolution because perhaps with the Russians' help they could overthrow the white fascists who became allies of Hitler in their motherland. It was freedom for their motherland that obsessed them, not loyalty to Stalin or anyone else. That was apparent from the day when I met the first Finnish Americans in Gorky. It was a fascinating community, you know. Barracks for the Finnish Americans, for the Italians, for the

Austrians, for the U.S. and Canadian citizens, for many Germans, and later for Spaniards after Walter and I had left after the Franco takeover.

After three years of fascinating experience there, some with hardship and some exhilarating, joyful experiences, too, we finally got our passports back and made arrangements to go home. They didn't want to return them to us. They twisted Walter's arm by withholding passports because his skill was terribly important to them, no question about it. We had learned early in our stay there that they didn't want to return our U.S. passports to us. We had to surrender them the day we arrived at the factory to a special agent of the foreign office who looked after the foreigners. God knows how many people snuck across what Soviet borders with our passports and without our knowledge!

When the great May Day parade was scheduled in Moscow and, later, the October demonstration in Leningrad, which we wanted to see and witness, we went as part of the factory delegation. They didn't want to return our passports to us. Walter and I said, "Look, we're not leaving this closed city of Gorky going anywhere without our American passports." It was not easy to get them. So they dragged their feet in the final days when we said, "Look, our time is up. We're going back home." We had received letters from Roy that the recession was over and they were hiring in auto factories again, so back we went.

WEISZ: Let me ask a question about that at this point. Your book does not cover what one of my favorite books, The Cormier Eaton, does, that is the evidence that Walter typically was his own type back there in the Soviet Union. They have all these quotations from Walter's letters to the editor, complaining about things, just as he would in an American factory. I found that fascinating in terms of what I read later on about how this visit garnered some sympathy for them. He was just a trade unionist; sort of obstreperous, wasn't he?

REUTHER: He took on the local factory management for some of their stupid efforts to cut corners, which caused accidents in the factory and did not really save them time and money. I could cite a specific example. If my own book, The Brothers Reuther, does not deal with this in as much detail as Eaton and Cormier's, it's because the copy I sent the publisher was three times too long. You will find in the original manuscript most of the direct quotes from the Moscow News and other publications in which Walter blasted the hell out of the local factory.

I remember one specific incident. We were working in the tool room and these tools, these dyes, some of them weigh several tons. They have to be lifted by a huge crane to be moved from one machine to another to continue the machining operations to finish the die. Every Western country learned from experience that you drill holes in the side of these heavy castings so that you could lift and thread them. You just screw a hook in, hook it on, and lift it up. The factory management made a decision, "What the hell?

Those holes don't serve any functional purpose. We're going to cut corners." They would have the workers slit a steel cable made of multiple threads of wire. They'd just put it around this huge casting with sharp edges and balance it. On several occasions, as they moved it, it would slip and fall. Once it fell on a very expensive Swiss boring machine that must have cost how many kilos of butter that was exported to buy items abroad. Other times, the lives of factory workers were put in jeopardy by ignorance of what were common Western practices and tools. I'm glad Eaton and Cornier left those details in.

WEISZ: Let me ask you further about the original version being three times the size. This gives me an opportunity to ask namely where is your stuff so that a student who wants to go into the original version can see it?

REUTHER: At the Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Yes, indeed. They've got not only the official papers of the UAW and many other unions there, but you have my personal papers, as well as those of Walter, and Roy and many other individuals who played important roles in the rise of the union.

To get on with the story, Walter and I returned. We returned to Detroit, which was just coming out of a deep recession. Walter knew then that he was on the blacklist of the corporate structure and that he would not be hired in any factory under his true name, Walter Reuther. So he used his middle name, Phillip, as his last name. It was Walter Phillips who was hired into local tool and die shops, not the big three directly, but specialty tool shops that supplied the big three.

WEISZ: This would be '44 now, right?

REUTHER: This would be the fall of '35. I did not immediately return to Detroit because I did not have the kind of specific skills that were in demand. Walter and I, soon after our return from Russia, went to visit our brother Roy in New York, where he was on the staff of Brookwood Labor College. We spent a few days there before Christmas. That's where I met my bride to be, Sophie Liblovic, who later became Sophie Reuther. She was a student there. In our conversations with the head of Brookwood Labor College, Tucker Smith, I told him I knew I would have difficulty getting work back in Detroit, but I wanted to go back there. He suggested I come to Brookwood and work for him on a special project being funded by the Quakers. It was working with trade union groups in conducting seminars on the international crisis, the danger of fascism, the threat of a new war, etc.

WEISZ: Tucker Smith at that time was the head of Brookwood, succeeding after this internal conflict between Musti and---

REUTHER: Quite right, yes. Brookwood had gone through a difficult period, but, thank God, it had survived with the support of a number of very important unions, e.g., the

Garment Union. The mine workers put some funds in. The typographical workers and so on.

WEISZ: Matt Weinberg was a student there at the time?

REUTHER: In the last two graduating classes of Brookwood, a very high percentage of the graduating students played important roles in the rise of industrial unionism, CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) unions. I went to work for the Quakers. Sophie and I were married. We organized a series of labor institutes in different parts of the U.S. In preparation for that, I had to interview a lot of trade unionists. Some were unemployed steelworkers or auto workers, or paper workers. We drew them from AFL (American Federation of Labor) unions, and independent unions. We recruited from many then existing centers of unionization and certainly from Wisconsin and Chicago, southern Illinois among coal miners, and then eastern areas.

One of the interesting institutes we had was when we leased the facilities of the school at Mina, Arkansas. That was a fascinating experience down there. Nothing could have been better as preparatory work for the days ahead in Detroit when the UAW (United Automobile Workers) began to come together than this opportunity to get around and see what the situation was among young trade unionists. They were searching for answers to very difficult problems about how we can really organize in vast industries where the old craft unions had never shown much interest. That means steel and auto and rubber and so on.

WEISZ: At this time, all three of you were still members of the Socialist Party?

REUTHER: Oh, yes, very much so.

WEISZ: I want to get into that later.

REUTHER: Yes. I was at the Quaker House in Philadelphia attending a conference along with Tucker Smith, reporting on the progress we had made in our institute programs when I got a telegram from Walter from Detroit, saying, "They are hiring." I asked Tucker Smith to get a hold of another chap who had then taken over the direction of the labor program, Nelson Cruikshank. Nelson was a very dear friend. He later became head of the Social Security Department of the AFL/CIO (American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations).

WEISZ: And one of our friends in Paris.

REUTHER: Yes, indeed. Quite right. Nelson was in New York and in close contact with my dear Sophie, a young bride who was left alone in this little boarding house where we had found lodging. I said, "Get word to Nelson. Ask him if he will bring Sophie out to

Detroit." Nelson drove Sophie out to Detroit, and was there when I got off of work at the Chelsea Wheel Plant on the second shift. I was running a punch press. I hired on as one of the least skilled jobs. I didn't give a damn. I would have hired on as a chip puller and a sweeper. I wanted to get inside the factory because we had 38 members in that plant of 5,000 that made parts, primarily, for River Rouge, but also for the other two big three.

Within 10 days, we were on strike. I'll tell you how that happened. There was a woman of Polish extraction who had two small children who worked next to me on the punch press. I found it difficult to talk with her. The noise was so horrendous in this stamping plant. I would at times shout at the top of my voice, singing songs, sometimes German or Russian songs, anything to counter the horrible noise. For those few minutes when I could talk to her when things were a little quieter, I learned she had two children at home and was quite worried about their care. After about 10 days of work there, she fainted. The word of this spread all around. I had a quick, easy answer to it and I didn't keep my mouth shut. I said, "The pace was too God damned great and they were pushing her too hard." It may well have been concern about the children that led to the fainting, but I recruited her as a member of the UAW secretly and I told Walter about it. He said, "Can you get her to our apartment for a little private meeting on Sunday?" "I'll try." I got her over there. We would never meet with more than two or three workers at a time. There was bound to be a stool pigeon if you had more than that.

She told the story of what happened. She did faint. Finally, Walter said, "We must do something dramatic. We can't inch our way to a majority of workers. We'll do something dramatic. We know they're with us, but the fear is so great." Harry Bennett's Ford servicemen paroled the whole damn plant, you know. Walter turned to her and said, "You think you can faint again, but this time on schedule?" She looked at Walter, "What do you mean?" Walter said, "Next Tuesday. Not Monday. We've got to get word to our few people first. Tuesday, just before the shift break, I want you to faint again. We'll get word out to our key people. The second shift will come in a little early, be inside the plant." Okay, it was agreed. I was worried like hell word would leak out on Monday and there would be a lot of people, including us, fired. Tuesday came, shift break approached. Within minutes of it, she went into a dead faint. I went over and pulled the main switch and all these huge presses gradually ground to a halt. The silence was so awesome, it was frightening. The workers stood there with their mouths open. They couldn't believe that anyone of us had the power to shut that whole damn thing down. The superintendent of the whole plant came pounding down in there, cursing, "Get back to work or you're all fired!" He found me up on a box of parts making a speech, telling them the speed was too damn great, and that I was getting 23 cents an hour. My neighbor, the woman who produced more than I did because her fingers were more dexterous, got 22 cents an hour. She was a woman---that's why.

I was making a union speech and he came over and he grabbed my pants legs and said, "Get the hell down off of there or you're fired." I said, "There's only one person who can

get me down off of here." "Who in the hell is that?" I had it all typed out: Walter Reuther, president of West Side Local with the telephone number. Walter was waiting for the call. He got it. Walter said, "What can I do? They're in the plant." "I'll send a car for you." They sent a car. He came in. When he walked into the department, I was still speaking. I introduced him. He picked up where I left off. We both knew that speech very well. The superintendent said, "What the hell is this? Reuther, you're supposed to get them back to work!" Walter said, "I will, but I have to organize them first." We were on a ten-day sit down strike. All the women, of course, were sent out to do work on the outside. We weren't going to play into the hands of the Bennett crowd and their vicious stories that they would circulate. We won that with a seventy-five cent minimum wage for men and women, including black floor sweepers, who won the seniority right to move into production because, prior to that, they were confined to sweeping and chip pulling, or foundry work.

WEISZ: This was not the first of the sit down strikes. That came from Robert, didn't it?

REUTHER: Yes, there had been successful sit downs in Akron. There had been one small sit down on the east side of Detroit, but this was the most spectacular one in the metropolitan Detroit area and more crucial than its size---

REUTHER: Yes. I mentioned that what was especially crucial about the successful strike at the Kelsey Wheel Plant on the west side of Detroit was its timing. We settled it on Christmas Eve, 1936. You realize, this was on the eve of the great General Motors sit down strike in Flint. Had we lost the Kelsey Wheel strike, it would have been a wet blanket on our efforts to build some support for a very courageous and bold move against the largest corporation in the world. Some measure of the success of the Kelsey Wheel strike was not only in the seventy-five cent minimum wage and the seniority provisions (which were a blow for racial equality inside the plant and for women's rights) but at the time of the strike, we had, I think, seventy-eight signed up members paying dues in a plant that had 5,000 workers. Within days after the settlement, we had signed up about 3,700 members. They flocked in by droves. We couldn't collect the dues fast enough, really. It was incredible. We didn't have organized stewards sufficient. Every place there was a gathering, they would look up someone and say, "Sign us up." "Here's a card." and give them money. I think most of it ended up officially in the treasury of the west side local anyway. Those were exciting days.

The strike was hardly over when I was asked by the international union to move to Flint immediately. My brother Roy was a very important leader there, along with Bob Travis, under the direction of vice-president Windom Mortimer, in laying the groundwork for a cadre of loyal unionists in two specific plants. They did not try to do this in every General Motors plant. That was too huge an operation, but Fisher One had a history of some craft unionism going back many years. They'd organize; they'd win some gains. They'd be broken soon by General Motors, and they'd start all over again. In Fisher Two, closer into

town, there had been a similar experience. I want to tell you very frankly that I tried to recount the history of those days. I don't think there was a calculated decision by the national organization to strike General Motors in January of '37.

WEISZ: By the national organization, you mean---

REUTHER: The international union.

WEISZ: The international UAW, then affiliated-

REUTHER: With the CIO.

WEISZ: Quanell Lewis had put some people in.

REUTHER: While the national CIO had provided some modest support to help organizers and the printing of leaflets and so on, we did not have proportionately any greater strength in Flint in those days than we had at Kelsey Wheel at the time of the strike. One thing made us confident. This same widespread fear and hatred of the system and the corporation, and the feeling we'd come through a depression, plus they'd had a few paychecks under their belt, so they felt confident enough to be bold. We felt we could count on that. I am convinced to this day that there was no calculated plan on the part of the national officers of the union or the leaders of the union in Flint, Travis and Roy Reuther. What happened was, I think, we were forced into strike action by a premature wildcat strike in Atlanta, Georgia, led by perhaps the weakest member of the executive board of the national union, the UAW. I suspect this was under General Motors' encouragement. They pulled a wildcat strike that the corporation believed they could quickly crush and thus prevent the strike at their center, where it would have hurt them the most.

WEISZ: Were any of you, Walter, Roy, or you, members of the national leadership of the union by that time?

REUTHER: Walter was. He was a member of the executive board without salary. Roy was the first one on salary as a national organizer. My dear Sophie became the second Reuther when she was sent to Anderson, Indiana once the General Motors strike was in progress since there were a lot of women employed there. She had organizing skills and Brookwood training. I was the third one to go on. Walter was the last, although he became president.

WEISZ: Who was supporting him all this time?

REUTHER: He drew a very modest salary from the west side local and his wife was a schoolteacher and helped support him.

WEISZ: Oh, that's right. He had gotten married by then. Roy was not married by then?

REUTHER: Roy was not married, that is right. I will not detail anymore about the period of that strike, but I can tell you that during those tumultuous years, Walter and I tried to keep contact as best we could with friends in Europe. We were deeply distressed by the rise of Hitler and the threat this posed, not only to the outbreak of war. We did our best to resume contacts with trade union and political friends in Europe. Walter was in touch with Ernie Bevin, who became foreign minister in Britain. He was then an official of the transport and general workers union. I was in touch with Fenner Brockway, who was a democratic left socialist and a great activist in the Second International.

Walter and I had an unusual experience when we were wandering around Europe before we went to Russia. The Second International held its Congress in Paris, France. Walter and I were in Paris at the time and sat in the gallery and observed the proceedings. It was there we became acquainted with Fenner Brockway and others from Great Britain. It was there we met Eric and Alter, whom Stalin assassinated. It was there we met Pietro Nenni and established a relationship which years later would prove so fruitful in influencing him to disengage from an unhappy relationship with the communists in Italy. It was there we met Leon Bloom and others. It was there we met Austrians who were key political leaders far above the Schutzbundlers we had marched with in the last May demonstration. These contacts were treasured by us throughout the years.

WEISZ: But they were political rather than trade union ones.

REUTHER: Yes, but it was hard to separate them since in their home countries the real mass base for the labor party of the social democratic movements was the trade unions. Those early contacts stimulated our involvement in doing what we could as trade unionists involved in industrial and political life in the US to support the anti-Hitler forces. When Franklin Roosevelt began thinking about lend-lease, we were very quick to mobilize such support as we could. You know full well, there was quite a segment of the American population that was very skeptical about that kind of open support for Britain.

WEISZ: Including our friend Norman Thomas?

REUTHER: Including our friend Norman Thomas. I think that was the beginning of our drifting away from more active involvement in the Socialist Party and Socialist Party activities and more of a direct relationship with FDR and the new forces in the White House. Walter and I were very skeptical at first of FDR's leadership. This son from a rich family and so on. We became increasingly impressed by his efforts to deal not only with domestic social and economic questions, but his offer of support and friendship to the threatened British and the Russians, who were in a very desperate situation. Nothing was so disillusioning to us as was the Stalin-Hitler Pact.

WEISZ: I'd like to go back to your success in '37. That was after the '36 political campaign. Walter, you and Roy had to face the problem of whether or not to support (because this was rather early in the system) Roosevelt or stay with Norman Thomas and old friends. My recollection is that Walter stood with his trade union responsibilities and supported Roosevelt. My recollection is that Roy remained a member of the Socialist Party. I don't know about you. With these conflicting interests, what did you do?

REUTHER: There was the attraction of FDR at the national level, but the state of Michigan went through a great change, too. There was one Frank Murphy, whom I had come to know as mayor of the city. I had met with him many times with community leaders dealing with unemployment problems and so on. Frank Murphy became a most unusual and compassionate governor. Throughout American history, state troops have often been used to suppress the right of workers to strike and have been used in very brutal ways. I will never forget a crucial moment in the sit-down strike (I was not personally in the governor's office, but this was related to me by others who were.). John L. Lewis was meeting in direct negotiations with Murphy and the president of General Motors, the Norwegian.

WEISZ: You mean William Knudsen?

REUTHER: Knudsen. He had a very Norwegian wife who remained very much a peasant wife who scrubbed her own floors. He was a millionaire. Knudsen was looking after the corporate interest and was a tough guy to negotiate with. He was demanding that Murphy, as state executor, use the troops to evict the strikers.

WEISZ: Who were violating property rights.

REUTHER: Exactly, although it had been a very peaceful form of striking and had, despite the back to work movements and everything else, mobilized an enormous amount of popular and community, if not support, understanding. John L. was a bit of a Shakespearean actor. FDR had the Secretary of Labor, Madame Perkins, phone the governor and put pressure on for the use of the troops. This may not be well-known. She was a damn good Secretary of Labor, but she was carrying out orders then. Murphy began yielding and Lewis could recognize that he was weakening. In a very dramatic gesture, John L. walked over (This was in mid-winter, you know), put on his coat, picked up his briefcase, which he zipped shut, walked over, looked the governor in the eye, and said, "Governor, when you send your troops into Flint, I will be at the side of my striking companions of the auto workers inside the plant. When your troops fire their shots, the first will penetrate my body. When my body falls---" He went on. Murphy began getting whiter and whiter as the blood drained from his brain. John L. walked out and closed the door. Murphy sent the troops in, but he sent them in with instructions that are most rare in American history. Number one, they were authorized to fraternize with the pickets

outside and become friendly. We shared our strike food with them. Number two, the second order, was to open the gates and let food through to the strikers inside. The third was that the company would turn the heat back on inside the plants. Those are the most unusual orders to give troops.

WEISZ: What would be the date of this? I'm trying to locate it before or after the '36 election. It was after.

REUTHER: Yes, of course.

WEISZ: The political decisions were made in '36.

REUTHER: Don't hold me to this. It's in the book. I think it was January 11th, the crucial day when the workers evacuated the plants in victory. There had been one earlier move to evacuate. We found out it was going to be a sellout and we called off the evacuation of the plants.

WEISZ: Getting back to my political point, this was after the '36 decision that you had to make as to whether or not to retain your---

REUTHER: ---Getting to your specific question, I think Roy retained his membership in the party with modest participation in it longer than either Walter or I did. I, primarily because of international developments, was obsessed with this at a very early age, and began to think in terms of full support for Roosevelt's aid to Britain and aid to Russia. I knew what the problems were historically with the Socialist Party. While Walter and I were more impressed with the role of FDR, Roy became enamored with Frank Murphy and the manner in which he performed. He was a democratic governor. So, both at the national and the state level, there was pressure on the Reuther brothers.

WEISZ: Thanks. To continue your international interests, I take it---By the way, I was trying to identify when I first met you, and, now that you mention it, I came out in early '42 as part of this team. In fact, I was counting the ballots in the Ford election and LRB (Labor Relations Board) election. At that time, I was with the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) and I think that may be it. I think I met Roy for the first time there. I might as well confess it: I was in love with Roy, as many people were.

REUTHER: Roy was a member of what was called the "Revolutionary Policy Committee" of the Socialist Party. There were some good friends from Wisconsin, one of whom, Andy B. Miller, became a Congressman, and was actively involved in that.

WEISZ: I asked him about that. He shoved it to the back of his mind.

REUTHER: I think Roy became involved with him as a sort of counterplay to Walter's

and my experience in Russia. Yes, I think that's quite right. In those days, in '42, we had rather frequent meetings because of the internal political problems developing inside the UAW. There was the betrayal by the first president of the UAW, Homer Martin, with his secret deal with the Ford Motor Company, his efforts to split the UAW and finally his taking a small chunk of it back into the AF of L. All of this intensified our involvement in the auto council structure in which young socialists and activists were an important part. Alan Strom was the chairman of that group for some time and Walter and I were actively involved. Roy was up in Flint doing workers education before the UAW launched an official organizing drive. He went on the international staff. So Roy was not a participant in many of these discussions and meetings in Detroit.

Detroit was mostly up to Walter and me, George Edwards, Bob Kanter and, later, Homer Maisy when he got back from military involvement in the Pacific and so on. Those were exciting days. I'm still amazed that I was able to focus so much time and energy on developments in Europe and in the Far East. This became an early obsession with me. I was so relieved after the attempt on my life in '49 and after my physical recovery somewhat that Phillip Murray asked me to head up a mission to Europe to survey the trade union situation and determine what the CIO might be able to do in that current situation. He asked me to become the European CIO representative succeeding Elmer Cope of the Steel Workers. After Walter's presidency of the CIO, he asked me to come back. I succeeded Mike Ross as head of the International Affairs Department of the CIO up to the merger when I returned to UAW.

I presume it will have to be another occasion that we can begin to examine with the same frankness and detail what really happened during those exciting years in Europe.

WEISZ: Before you go into that, you remember, I gave you a copy of my interview for the Marshall Plan oral history. In it I go over the history of the relationship between your group and the Martin group in terms of what later became a continual relationship in different geographical areas and different circumstances. You fought the Lovestone group. I think it's agreed generally that Lovestone either involved himself or was called in to run the theory of Martin's, the ideology of Martin's.

REUTHER: It was Dovinski who brought Lovestone to Homer Martin's assistance. Dovinski had finally decided he'd gone as far as he wanted to go with the CIO and he wanted to go back to the AF of L. Lovestone had been helpful in terms of some internal problems in the ladies garment workers union and had won a reputation as quite an operator. What is interesting is, when Dovinski offered the services of Lovestone, it was more than the services of an individual. It was a nucleus of people, all of whom had arrived on the scene in Detroit at UAW headquarters under assumed names.

WEISZ: You list those people in your book. One of them struck me. That is Larry Klein, whose party name (I guess they were aliases) you give in the book. Larry Klein is the

name of the person whom I knew at the Bureau of Labor Statistics as a wonderful editor of The Monthly Labor Review. Is that the same person? He used to make some caustic remarks about them and I was wondering-

REUTHER: I can't say. I wouldn't know.

WEISZ: Oh, I'm telephoning him. He lives in Tucson. I know him. If he were that person, I want to know what were the circumstances of his taking an assumed name and doing that---Lovestone was a charismatic character who had people whom he influenced. I guess Trotsky was a person like that. He always had a coterie of people. Norman Thomas had it. There were so many people who loved Norman Thomas even though they disagreed with him. I was one of them. There were certain people who had---Debs obviously was one of those. You recall meeting him because of circumstances. I recall when he got out of prison, my father taking me to 110 Street in New York City, and putting me on his shoulders to see this man that I had never seen. This would have been '23, '24, when he got out of prison. Lovestone had that.

REUTHER: Yes, he did.

WEISZ: He got loyalties from people not only because of jobs he got them or anything like that, but because of ideological loyalty. He therefore brought these people out. They were subservient to him.

REUTHER: He put them in key positions, head of research and education, and a key woman was sent to Flint to take the leadership away from Genora Johnson Dallinger (her name then was just Genora Johnson). She was the leader of the Emergency Brigade. There were a few people out in the field also, who were spotted there to help the internal political situation, to strengthen it for Homer Martin. Most of these people were intellectual types who were not very pragmatic about organizational methods. None of them seemed to have succeeded remarkably because Homer fell on his face in his effort to keep control of the whole UAW and, finally, he split off a pitifully small chunk of it. We won a resounding victory for CIO forces, but then we went into a period of compromise within the leadership, where there were two basic wings to the political character.

WEISZ: I want to get into that later, but when Homer Martin lost out, which was after the election in Ford that I remember so well, where he was---Incidentally, Harry Bennett was the man in charge of showing us around. He made some interesting times. What happened to these people that Lovestone brought in? Only one of them that I know of, Irving, came into the War Production Board and then into international. Munger came into the War Production Board.

REUTHER: Both Irving and Munger's movement towards the War Production Board was

a considerable time before the Martin debacle. I don't think it was because of Martin's having lost out, if I am not mistaken. Irving was out on the West Coast with my brother Roy for the War Production Board. It was later.

WEISZ: He came to the War Production Board relatively early. Incidentally, I interviewed George Seltzer recently, who was Irving's assistant. In any event, it is simply my feeling that they had to get jobs. I thought that Irving came to the War Production Board in '42 or so---

REUTHER: That may be. I'd have to check.

WEISZ: But some of them did come to the War Production Board and then to Europe, right?

REUTHER: Yes, of course.

WEISZ: Where was Newman Jeffrey in all this? I interviewed Newman shortly before he died. He was friendly to Lovestone until he turned against Lovestone.

REUTHER: I don't know too much about his earlier friendship to Jay. All I know is he was involved in some kind of war bond project down here in Washington and Millie was extremely eager to advance her own career. When we began getting---

WEISZ: Mildred Jeffrey?

REUTHER: Yes. We began getting involved deeply in war production and the transition from peace to war production and the social dislocation. The transition brought dislocation with the enormous pressure of drafting men for the armed services and the need for women in large numbers in industry. Walter asked me to look around and find someone. Millie came to my attention. I didn't know a thing about Newman at the time, but I picked up a lot about Millie. I arranged an interview with her and was deeply impressed.

WEISZ: Her name was Mildred McWilliams. I will always remember that.

REUTHER: That's right. She lived in what was dubbed "the Kremlin" in Philadelphia. I guess they had a lot of left socialists who had a communal building there of some kind. Anyway, I didn't know much about Newman's involvement, what his political convictions were at the time, but Mildred interested us. I knew that she had a small child at the time. Before I could really offer her a job, I had to arrange for some childcare facilities in Detroit. I was in charge of the---Really, it was a transitional effort, working with the War Production Board, War Manpower Commission, working with armed services on all kinds of problems that were arising throughout the union. We set up a

special division. I forget what it was called---Emergency something. It's in the book.

WEISZ: But you brought Millie-

REUTHER: I brought Millie out, that's right. I arranged for housing at Herman Gardens. There were good trade union friends, some staffers, and a lot of activists living there. It was very modest.

WEISZ: And she brought Newman with her?

REUTHER: Newman came later. She was out there alone for some time, yes. We arranged for some employment for Newman on a temporary basis, which seemed to satisfy him. I don't remember what his first assignment was, but he was very helpful.

WEISZ: His activity later on in the international field was very important and I (inaudible). Then Martin is defeated. He does retain---Was Washburn one of his?

REUTHER: Washburn was his successor, yes.

WEISZ: Was he another one of the Lovestone group, or was he independent?

REUTHER: He was somewhat independent, not the kind of trade union leader I would look up to. He had some ties with a chap in Ohio who had a scattering of small shops that Martin was able to hang on to, but they didn't last very long. They were no longer a threat. Martin, when he finally threw in the sponge and Washburn took over, became a representative of Ford Motor Company, handling small chemical contracts. They gave him a home somewhere. Harry Bennett, in the book that somebody ghosted with him, was quite frank about it.

WEISZ: They never called him "Henry?"

REUTHER: Yes, that's right. He was quite frank in admitting to---Old Henry felt a little sorry that Homer didn't get a fair shake and they thought they ought to take care of him, so they did.

WEISZ: In this adventure I had for that one full day with Harry Bennett, he knew that you people were going to win the election. He told us that they realized that they would have to sign up because of that lousy decision of the Supreme Court, giving validity to the Wagner Act. He took it like the old man who was willing to do that and that was it, just waiting for the election returns and then they get assigned a contract. That's what he did.

REUTHER: Yes, but typical of the mobster mentality, if you can't lick them, you join them. Harry Bennett had other plans in his mind. After the recognition of the UAW, they

gave us a contract such as we had never had before, including the union label. He had plans for handpicking every shop steward and committee man who would be from his Ford service department staff. He would run the biggest local in the UAW. It was no easy matter to frustrate that. That took the building of some very courageous loyalists inside the plant.

I must say that the black leadership inside the plant that came to the front after recognition was great. The earlier black leadership was much more loyal to Harry Bennett understandably. Good God, he hired more blacks than Chrysler and General Motors put together. They became part of Harry Bennett's---Harry Bennett became a big shot with every black preacher, too, and a force in the community. That was understandable. We had a hell of a job reaching the blacks at first. I used to go out with Walter White. Every time Walter White would come to Detroit, he and I would go out in a sound truck. At the change of shifts, we would talk to the workers, but boy it was tough going. It wasn't until the record of the UAW was made very clear. It began with the Kelsey strike, the victory, and what we did to get General Motors and Chrysler to increase the number of blacks who were hired. The war came along, which made that a little easier. The manner in which the UAW faced up to early tensions inside the shops over racial issues---I remember, we had a grievance with Kelsey Wheel not long after the first settlement. It was when the first few blacks started to exercise their seniority to go on the production line. We had a union shop steward and a foreman, both of whom blackened their face with burnt cork and engaged in pretty sleazy racial byplay. It God damned near created a riot in there. I got the foreman fired and we removed that shop steward.

Walter gave the meeting of the shop stewards and officers a dressing down such as they really deserved. This could be repeated in shop after shop. We had to earn our way with the blacks and it's no wonder. With the increasing black membership in the UAW it was necessary to make certain that the white members who were there first and felt they had a unique status understood that blacks and women had rights, too. I think that throughout the history of the UAW, the basic educational work we have done has been of enormous support to the efforts of the community at large to win the fuller measure of social justice and civil rights.

WEISZ: The UAW was one of the leading organizations in that effort, but it was fortunate that, at that time, the total labor opportunity was increasing, whereas now we have---

REUTHER: Yes, defense expansion, wartime, and so on. As we got deeper into the defense effort, I began spending much more time working with the War Manpower Commission, the War Production Board, as Walter's alternate because he was a full member. I got involved in-

WEISZ: Did you physically locate here then? As I recall---

REUTHER: No, I operated out of Detroit still and commuted in for all those meetings. That was kind of rough on family life. I would come in also for some radio broadcasts for the Voice of America. I think there was a special term that was used during that period for the overseas broadcasts.

WEISZ: OWI, Office of War Information.

REUTHER: Quite right. I made ever so many broadcasts to the French underground and the underground in Germany. I recall some of them; I was able to speak directly in German to them. I don't know; the Office of War Information was most generous in getting reports back to me about the effect of some of these broadcasts, which pleased me enormously. I was emotionally very involved in the wartime preparation. When war finally broke out, I was emotionally involved. I knew they were dropping bombs on the village where my mother and relatives lived, and that the day would come when I would have to explain to them why. I was prepared to do it. I did at the end of the war on my first trip there. I had no difficulty either.

WEISZ: You must have come in so frequently I thought you actually moved here.

REUTHER: No, I did not move to Washington until after my European assignment.

WEISZ: That's interesting.

REUTHER: Yes, all during the years of mobilization for the war, I was commuting-

WEISZ: And the activity in the War Production Board?

REUTHER: Yes, that's right. I was commuting from Detroit.

WEISZ: Roy, however, lived there for a while.

REUTHER: Roy did, yes, during the period he worked for the War Production Board. He expected to be accepted into military service and then didn't pass the physical. He took an assignment on the West Coast. Maybe it's because his wife Fania was out there. I don't know.

WEISZ: Then they did some terrible things to him in the military, which affected---He did not want to get that deferment.

REUTHER: No.

WEISZ: That was unfortunate because he was entitled to it. Didn't it destroy him

physically?

REUTHER: Of course it did. It had a very negative effect on his health. Walter was deferred because of his membership on the War Production Board and his close association with Sidney Hillman and General Anderson.

WEISZ: Well, it wasn't the association. It was the fact that he was doing---

REUTHER: He was deeply involved with the arms program. I had family deferment at that time. I reached the point where I fully expected that I was---I was close to being called up for military service despite the family status. Roy felt especially vulnerable and didn't want deferment. That affected him. Of course, he had had that heart problem. He wasn't fully aware of the extent of his vulnerability, and neither were we. That certainly came out later and it led to his early demise.

I became very excited, not only in helping Walter with his work with the War Production Board and War Manpower, but the things I did on my own with the Office of War Information, the shortwave broadcasts, and the volunteer work I did with refugee groups. Bill Kensley and I worked with German refugees in getting care packages over quite early. It was during that period when many exiles were here that I came to know people like Hokan Lee and others.

WEISZ: Toni Sender, did you know him?

REUTHER: You bet I knew Toni. I saw her frequently.

WEISZ: Angelica Bolabonoff, did you know her?

REUTHER: I had one meeting with her, but it was brief. I didn't get to know her very well.

WEISZ: Later in Europe you did, didn't you?

REUTHER: No, not really.

WEISZ: She was a guest at my house.

REUTHER: Just before we went abroad, there was this question of people going (some of it was because jobs were available.) to the War Production Board and then to Europe. If you didn't have a job and the war was over, this was an opportunity to, if you had international interests---but I want to get to the point of the West Coast, where I knew that Roy and Irving---

(end of tape)

KIENZLE: May 14, 1997. I'm here at the Collington Center with Bruce Millen and Maury Weisz. We have the great honor today of continuing an interview that Maury started three years ago with Victor Reuther. Victor, we're very happy to have you here this morning and that you are willing to give us an interview.

REUTHER: I'm very pleased to be here.

KIENZLE: Can we start by answering the question at the end of Maury's interview three years ago when he asked about the work of your brother, Roy, and of Irving Brown on the West Coast for the Price administration.

REUTHER: Actually, I think it was for the War Production Board. If I'm not mistaken, both Roy and Irving were in rather low-level positions with the War Production Board, but assigned to the West Coast. What is your specific question about that relationship?

WEISZ: I had in mind bringing out the fact that with whatever disagreements existed in Detroit in the pre-war years, the fight against Martin and things like that, there was a community interest between those two in carrying on the work of the War Production Board. I wouldn't say they were low-level jobs. Irving Brown was designated (this is my opinion) by Lovestone to take care of the UAW-AF of L out in Detroit. In the course of that, he was the deputy to Keenen in the War Production Office.

There were two offices, one under Clint Golden, which was called something else. His was War Production. Joe did this wonderful job just promising the administration that there would be absolutely no question on part of the building trades about designating the Hanford Plan as the first choice among the variety of claims against the rare materials and rare manpower that were available. He went through that very well. Roy was the person, with all due respect, that Joe Keenan felt he could work with because of their work, and certainly later on also in the political field.

None of the carryover of the Michigan disagreements that existed between you and Walter on the one hand and the UAW-AF of L on the other surfaced. Roy, as the youngest son, but also as a person who worked closely with the AF of L through his relationship with Joe Keenan, was out of that dispute. What I was interested in getting from you at this point is how you evaluated the bias that I have in that direction, and whether or not you have some comments about why it was, not only his youth, but also the connection with the AF of L. Roy seemed to have gotten along very well with Joe.

REUTHER: Let me start by correcting you on one small but important point. Roy was not the youngest of the Reuther brothers. He was the third. I was the youngest. There was a lapse of 11 years and then came the package surprise of our sister, Christine.

Getting to your question about the relationship of Roy and Irving. Roy, far more than Walter or I, was by nature a conciliator. He tried to see beyond the day-by-day struggles that we were in the midst of then with the AF of L chartering a small segment of UAW membership. This created divisions in the ranks of the UAW and had a destructive impact on the collective bargaining relationship with major employers. After the great victories of the Flint sit down strike and the incredible impetus this gave unionization across the country, Roy was oriented towards the war effort as he certainly should have been. Walter was deeply committed to it also with his 500 planes a day proposal, which surfaced soon thereafter.

It was good that Roy stuck to his knitting. I don't think he was quite as aware in his day-by-day relationship with Irving of Irving's orientation towards international affairs, and his association with Jay Lovestone and Meany later on. That was early in my experience because I hadn't at that point returned to Europe as the CIO's representative. I came into more open conflict with Irving and Jay Lovestone and the Meany practices. I think Roy's experience there paved the way not only for his relationship with Joe Keenan, but eventually with George Meany. Roy was the one Reuther that Meany was prepared to tolerate in any capacity during the period of merger.

My conflicts were perhaps the sharpest, even sharper than Walter's, because of my European experience and my very, very sharp disagreement with the Jay Lovestone-Irving Brown policies and their close dependency not only upon Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for financing their activities, but for what I considered a very divisive view of a Europe that was trying desperately to get beyond the divisions of the war. Anything that kept democratic forces separated and divided, I felt, was a great disservice to our search for peace and to the hopes and aspirations not only of the U.S. administration, but what I had hoped were the aspirations of the trade union forces in the United States.

KIENZLE: Victor, can we turn to your personal narrative and the end of World War II to show how you got involved in the international field?

REUTHER: I was no stranger, as you know, to Europe. I had contacts that reached back to the early 30s when Walter and I spent a good part of the year cycling from country to country. Some of those contacts survived the war: My Bevin and his wife, Jenny Lee, in Britain, and earlier contacts in Austria and Germany. Some survived the war, some didn't. During the war and for a while after the war and, I was deeply involved in shortwave broadcasts in German, done by the U.S. military forces in an effort to reach people behind the lines in Germany and Austria and in France and Italy. I participated regularly in these broadcasts. I was pleased that there were favorable reports being received about my broadcasts. Very soon after the end of---

KIENZLE: Victor, one quick reminder. Could you give us the years that you were broadcasting, from '43 to when?

REUTHER: It was during all of the war years really until the very end. At the end of the war when there was first movement, and this took some time because Harry Truman and his then-Secretary of the Treasury, Morganthal, were obsessed by the dangers of a resurgent Germany. They wanted to dismantle as much of the heavy equipment that might be used for military purposes. That was understandable. It took some time for even the US administration to catch up with what the feeling was in Europe at the end of the war. This was even shared by the British, who were probably more on the Soviet side of dismantling every damn thing the Germans still had, than any other forces in Europe. Yet, it was with the British that I began my first on-the-scene post war work through the Anglo-American Council on productivity. That awaited change on the part of the U.S. administration. Finally with the okay of getting the Marshall Plan underway and the appointment of McLoy in Germany steps were taken and so on. There was an announcement that there would be an end to permitting the Russians to come in and just take every damn bit of machinery they could.

Walter and I had been protesting this (the exclusion of Germany) in written memoirs to the President and to contacts in the War Production Board and others, cautioning that if we were really going to rebuild Europe, we couldn't do it without Germany. Also, all the reports that we got indicated that the trains that were loaded with heavy equipment from Germany and shipped east to Russia were still sitting on sidecars or outside somewhere where they were just rusting. They weren't being put to use, even though Russia had been an ally in the victorious effort. Nor was it a contribution to rebuilding Europe and establishing some hopes for peace. We were early participants in the campaign to end that further dismantlement of German equipment. We were relieved when the announcement finally came with the inauguration of Marshall aid, and created as part of the instrumentality the Anglo-American Council on Productivity. The Council was a tripartite body unique in that it included direct representatives of the British government and the U.S. government, employer associations from both sides, and British trade union leaders as well as those from the U.S. I was privileged to be included among them and became vice-chairman along with Phillip Reed of General Electric from the U.S. side of the Anglo-American Council.

This gave me not only an opportunity to see first-hand that impact of the Marshall Plan, where it was perhaps least needed, but nonetheless appreciated in Britain. It provided me with frequent travel to London. There was never an occasion when I would fly to London that I didn't figure out a good reason to fly over to Paris or especially Frankfurt, Germany. I would fly in on the airlift for meetings with General Clay and with Ertz Shanovsky, the leader of the independent trade unions in Berlin, which still were not reaffiliated with the DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund-German Trade Union

Confederation). I went to make my very first acquaintance with that remarkable figure, Hans Reuter, who became governing mayor of the city of Berlin.

I'm going on long-windedly. It's a Reuther practice, but you feel free to interrupt.

KIENZLE: Could you tell us some of the other labor members of the Anglo-American Council and when roughly it was first established?

REUTHER: Yes. As I recall (It may be a little difficult to recall all of them) there was the leader of the Miner's Federation, Will Lager. There was the head of the Transport and General Workers Union. I'll come to his name a little later. Sir Vincent Tusson, who became general secretary of the TUC (Trade Unions Congress). They were all key figures in the Anglo-American Council. This was not an entirely new experience for me, coming at the war's end, because it was only during the war that U.S. trade unionists had any kind of association with tripartite bodies at home in the war effort. In Great Britain it was a practice established over a much longer period and not just because of wartime emergency, but rather the remarkable role that trade unions played in Britain in national life.

WEISZ: Let me just mention something from my days on the War Production Board. It was easy because of the cooperation in the War Production Board to shift over to the international field. That's how Irving Brown on one hand and you on the other---

REUTHER: And Joe Keenan's role.

WEISZ: It's about Joe that I want to ask this question. The impression I got from other interviews, especially Paul Porter's, was that Irving was quite active in "turning Joe." I can give you a copy if you wish. Originally, Joe said, "What's wrong with this idea of having trade unions organize at the plant level. That's the way we do it in the United States." Irving gives himself credit and there is some evidence from other interviews that Irving was sent over by Lovestone to turn Joe around; certainly, he was active. Originally, Joe was sort of sympathetic to that idea and it was with the help of Irving that he changed. Is that giving him too much credit?

REUTHER: Paul Porter was much closer to the situation on a continuing basis than I was. My contacts were tied in with the dates of the Anglo-American Council and when I was able to get into Berlin. I would also make this distinction. Joe was much more of a pragmatic unionist than Irving Brown ever was. Hence, he thought organizationally. From his own lifetime experience, it is normal and natural that he felt strongly about that. What was in Irving's favor, if indeed he was the one who turned Joe around, was that to achieve the Brown-Lovestone goal and objective, they couldn't go the normal long route of local organization. They had to be able to manipulate things at a much higher level, create new federations out of nothingness. It took sizable commitments of finances in

order to get Leon Johol to pull himself out of the ranks of the communist controlled confederation in France and set up a new structure called "Force Ouvrière (Work Force)." It took the highest level of discussion to convince the Christians to follow a Lovestone in Italy. Whether Irving was the key person in bringing Joe around, the important thing was that you had the weight of the AF of L leadership and its commitment to anti-communism and its ties with financial support from the agency that was crucial. Joe's personal attitude became less important.

WEISZ: I don't want to give the impression that Irving was the person who did it, but that was an impact that he could have with others. What was the name of this wonderful German trade unionist or political figure?

REUTHER: In Berlin?

WEISZ: No, not in Berlin. Reuter was in Berlin. It was a one-armed guy, who had people from the pre-war period in the BGB (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch-Civil Code). We'll get that in because it's---

REUTHER: I remember Beckler, the first president of the Miner's Federation. I remember him very well. And Sharnvosky in Berlin. They were certainly key people during that period but go on with your questions.

KIENZLE: You mentioned that the Anglo-American Council was the first tripartite body. There was also the ILO (International Labor Organization) that had been a tripartite body. Did you or the CIO have much involvement with the---

REUTHER: Not with the ILO, no. For some reason, I never considered that basic to my assignment in Europe. I was much more concerned with establishing direct contact with trade union organizations in countries that had been occupied and trade union resources taken over during the war years. I was concerned about helping the trade unions reestablish their position, getting access to their previous properties, and helping them to become a voice again in their own respective societies. While I appreciated the work that the ILO was doing, it appeared at a level beyond what I could personally influence from my small operation headquartered in Paris.

KIENZLE: Secondly, you mentioned the Anglo-American Council on Productivity. Could you perhaps describe the role of CIO in various exchange activities and how the folks back here interfaced with the labor leaders there?

REUTHER: One of the things which the Council developed was a series of exchange visits in which key British unionists from strategic unions (and the metal industry unions were certainly crucial in this whole development and, hence, I felt very close to these exchanges). We would bring them to the States and bring them into contact with our

activists. They would see how we operate. They would come to understand the problems we were experiencing with industry and to what extent federal policies assisted or hindered the trade unions in our efforts. One of the things that impressed me and left a lasting imprint on me about my British experiences was how much the British had to learn from themselves. I was appalled at the degree to which the most modern technology existed side by side with the most antiquated methods still protected by the corporate structure and the cartel structure that existed in Britain.

MILLEN: The colonial structure, too.

REUTHER: Quite right, Bruce. I think the visits that we organized for secondary leadership of British trade unions, bringing them to the States for some weeks of exposure and training and so on, helped them very much. They could see their own shortcomings and how productivity could be enormously enhanced if they began to apply the more advanced technology which already existed within British industry on a broader scale. The existence of the Council helped enormously, not only the British, but also us. It gave us better insight into some of the other problems that we would run up against on the continent. I think it helped us pull the British from their post war isolation, especially on international matters where they didn't want to mess around too much on the continent and were a little too cozy with the soviets for too long. It underscored the fact that we were going to be confronted in many strategic European countries at the end of the war with the political problem of trying to reach rank and file workers who had come under considerable communist indoctrination. They felt a loyalty to this wartime partner in the struggle against nazism. That became a very serious problem in France and Italy, less of a problem in Austria and Germany, where returning prisoners told another story, another side, of the soviet experience.

KIENZLE: You were physically located in Washington at this time?

REUTHER: I was still physically located in Detroit. I did not shift to Washington until I returned from the overseas assignment in Paris for the national CIO. That was when Walter succeeded Phillip Murray as president and asked me to give up the European assignment and return as one of his assistants at the national CIO. Then I assumed the dual responsibility of being director of International Affairs both for the CIO at the Washington level and for the UAW.

KIENZLE: Could you go through the chronology of your personal history after the War Production Board? In doing that---was my recollection wrong that you actually lived during the War Production Board period in Washington for a while?

REUTHER: No, I would be overnight for certain meetings at the hotel, but Detroit remained my headquarters until I accepted Phillip Murray's assignment. Before Phillip Murray invited me to become the European representative succeeding a chap from the

Steel Workers---

KIENZLE: That would have been in what year?

REUTHER: That was in '51.

KIENZLE: Succeeding Elmer Cope?

REUTHER: Yes, Elmer Cope was his name. Phillip Murray authorized---Quite soon after the attempt on my life. I still had not fully recovered, and was still weak, but chafing at the bit to get away from the presence of bodyguards even at my home. This had a terrible emotional impact on the family. I was so eager to retreat to Europe, whether it was stepping up my work with the Anglo-American Council, or some other involvement. When Phillip Murray set up a three-man committee to make the rounds of key trade union centers in Europe and Britain and update what role the CIO played or could play at that moment, we were still involved as CIO in the WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions). Jim Carrey had come into open conflict with them. I think Elmer Cope's role had become considerably diminished by all these changes that were taking place. It was quite unclear at the time as to what, if anything the national CIO could do in that early post-war period in Europe. I was named as one of the three members. We spent---

KIENZLE: Who were the other two?

REUTHER: There was an Italian from the Garment Union. I wish I could remember those names, but they're in my book. I detailed that whole experience because it made me realize that there were many things that a national CIO could do. I also was very aware that we were a little late in coming on the scene, so to speak, even though there was a rather low-key operation that Elmer was operating. The AF of L was quite prominent in its on-the-scene work in many European countries. That challenged me, although I was not at that early point as aware as I later became of all the challenges that would be involved. We returned with a report to Phillip Murray and the CIO executives. They accepted the report. Phillip Murray very soon thereafter, to my surprise, invited me to succeed Elmer in a revitalized CIO operation in Europe.

KIENZLE: Located in---

REUTHER: ---In Paris. Elmer had sort of co-opted the AF of L approach and set up an office in what I considered a rather swanky part of Paris. I shifted that very quickly to a place only a couple of blocks from Les Halles, the marketplace in the slum area of Paris, where I thought---

KIENZLE: Was this at 15, rue du Temple?

REUTHER: Rue du Temple, *c'est ca*. (That's it.)

KIENZLE: This would have been about 1952 roughly?

REUTHER: No, this was in '51 that I went. I was a full year in recovery. Actually, as a matter of fact, I think the trip that we made with the three was still in '51. It was late '51 that I took the family and moved to Paris.

MILLEN: Who was that third member? You identified an Italian.

KIENZLE: Victor, was it the Wheel guy or a UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro, Italian Labor Union)?

(Inaudible speech among several people)

KIENZLE: Oh, the garment industry, okay.

REUTHER: I'm sorry.

KIENZLE: Arthur Meany?

REUTHER: No. It's detailed clearly in my book.

MILLEN: This was the book, The Brothers Reuther.

REUTHER: That's right. I'm sorry, I haven't had occasion to recall their names in many years.

KIENZLE: (Inaudible)?

REUTHER: No.

MILLEN: What were the main recommendations that the three-person study group made? I'd just like to characterize it.

REUTHER: There was only one really that had enormous significance. That was that the CIO committed itself to being a bridge to help bring together divergent democratic trade union forces in European countries. This was in sharp contrast to what had been and remained the established policy of the AF of L (American Federation of Labor) of picking a single group in each country and setting up a new trade union federation through them, as they did in France with Force Ouvrière. This was essentially a split away of a small coterie of democratic socialist trade unionists, splitting them away from the dominant communist controlled confederation. While they took with them the titular

leader, the general secretary Johol, Johol learned very quickly that he brought very through with him. They isolated themselves not only from the Christian Democrats in France, who numerically were not terribly large, but were so politically significant that they could not be isolated.

With the formation of Force Ouvrière in France, the Christians felt even more dependent on an occasional compromise with the communist controlled Major Federation. They would participate with them in certain joint demonstrations and hence were further isolated and separated from the group that should have been their natural allies. Then there were scattered independent groups of skilled workers who were not included in the Force Ouvrière organization. I felt this was a tragic mistake and I felt even more determined that in Italy an enormous tragedy had been made by putting all of our eggs in one basket, the Christian Democratic trade union forces. This was also a reflection of State Department policy of working only with the Christian Democrats when there was an enormous latent force still identified with the CGIL (Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro; General Confederation of Italian Workers), the communist trade union federation, which were the Meany socialists. Fortunately, Walter and I had personal ties that went back to Pietro Meany in the '30s when we first met him at the Second International Conference in Paris in 1933.

I immediately reestablished direct contacts with the Meany forces inside the communist union. While there was a small split away of socialist trade unionists, not unlike Force Ouvrière in France, who formed the UIL it was easy for me to meet with them. I knew the great bulk of democratic socialists were still locked in with the communists and most were unhappy and frustrated. I had strong support as the CIO representative in my efforts to establish contacts with these still distant democratic socialist forces who were locked inside a communist controlled confederation.

The German metal workers were extremely helpful in this, but they had to do it surreptitiously with me. There was a Rudy Falpole of the machinist union sitting on the executive of the International Metal Workers. We couldn't involve the International Metal Workers officially in what they wanted to do because the pro-Meany forces would have bitterly resisted any contact with Meany's people. I can tell you that we organized seminars undercover inside Switzerland near the German border to which we brought pro-Meany forces and UIL forces and some Christian Democratic people. Also, without letting my friends (like Rudy Falpole) from the machinist union know we had some involvement with officials of the International Metal Workers. We wanted them to know what we were doing. We had no secrets. We wanted to lay the foundation for bringing all of those pro-democratic forces into a unified federation in Italy and bring them in as full members of the International Metal Workers Federation.

It would be quite a few years before that would be achieved, but I'm proud that we laid the groundwork for it. I can tell that it was not successful until John F. Kennedy became President. I had a meeting with Arthur Schlesinger, in which I begged him to have the

President extend his visit to Rome to include a personal meeting with Pietro Meany. I had prepared the way for the Meany people, with Arthur's help. Unfortunately, some people from CIA broke the damn story falsely the day after we had a meeting in which both Walter and I outlined our reasons for wanting to pull Meany the hell out of the Communist Confederation and open the door to a multi-party government in Italy of pro-democratic forces involving Democratic Socialists and Christians.

Q: You know, about that time, one of the chief editors of Anti came to the United States.

REUTHER: Yes.

Q: It was under this kind of an arrangement that Victor is talking about. I met him at the Brookings Institution at that time.

REUTHER: There were high level pressures to block Kennedy's efforts, but Kennedy met with Meany, and had a very good meeting with him. Meany pulled his forces out very soon after the meeting with President Kennedy.

KIENZLE: This would have been around '62?

REUTHER: That's right. It took some years, but I can tell you that the day I arrived as the CIO's representative in Europe, I began to anticipate that that day had to come. I knew that there were strong forces to try to prevent it, including some U.S. labor forces in the AF of L.

KIENZLE: You said the CIA broke it?

REUTHER: Yes, they broke it. It appeared in Victor Rizelle's column. They slipped the word to him. Victor Rizelle reported that Walter and I had asked for a special fund of a million dollars in order to help finance this, which was a lot of crap, a lot of utter nonsense. We did not propose any role for ourselves in this. We just said that the President should show friendship to Meany and give him some assurance that, if he took that bold step, it would be understood and supported by not only the U.S., but by western European powers. It did work. I can tell you I celebrated the day when Pietro Meany left the CDIL. Italy has had much more stable governments than they had immediately after the war.

KIENZLE: In the seminars that you conducted in Switzerland, were they all funded out of CIO funds?

REUTHER: Yes.

KIENZLE: There was no money coming from any other sources?

REUTHER: No, that was money that Tom Braden slipped surreptitiously that was intended

for me. It went to the La Brevière training center, which I helped set up in France quite soon after I arrived, thanks to Arnie Ayer and the Swedes making the facility of La Brevière available. I was able to organize in France special seminars for trade unionists from transport and from the metal working industries. We brought not only Force Ouvrière types, but Christian trade unionists to La Brevière for joint sessions. It helped lay the foundation for the final affiliation of Christian unions and Force Ouvrière unions with the International Metal Workers. What we had looked forward to down the road a ways in Italy occurred much earlier in France thanks to these seminars.

KIENZLE: Did you say the funding came from Braden or from the CIO?

REUTHER: The funding was primarily from the CIO. The $50,000 which Braden surreptitiously got to me (and it took me some time to realize the source of it) was to reduce the costs of these training sessions. Even a close colleague of mine and Walter's, like Jack Conway, who understood who Braden was, did not comprehend the problems that would arise with me. I was by then fully aware of Irving and Jay's activities and where they got their support. I had to keep my nose clean on that. That was a very crucial moment when I learned the truth, I can tell you.

KIENZLE: Was that the only time that you know of that anybody from the CIA actually came?

REUTHER: Absolutely the only time. I know of no single instance where other funds came. I'll make a slight correction. Quite soon after my trip through Europe prior to being named as the European representative, after I returned---

KIENZLE: This was in 1955?

REUTHER: Yes. I was working at national headquarters as one of Walter's representatives. Michael Ross was no longer identified with the International Affairs Department, but there was a former secretary of Michael's who became Jay's secretary.

Q: That was Rose?

REUTHER: Rosey Ruann. A very close friend of mine, the head of the CIO council in the state of Michigan, August Scholl, was invited to go to Germany for a series of meetings with trade unionists. I had urged him over some time to go. He had a fairly good command of the German language, enough to get on quite well in personal conversation with workers. He had a great interest in going. I urged him to go. He arrived in Washington and received some modest briefing, I guess, mostly from Rosemary. She reached into a safe deposit box or a locked safe (I don't know which) and handed him an envelope with a sizable amount of money to cover his entire trip. He was quite surprised by the way the whole transaction was handled, that they didn't give him an airplane trip and some modest *per diem* and so on. The

whole thing was handled by cash. He was quite surprised and reported this to me. It didn't take me very long to put two and two together that there were still some separate funds being funneled into the operation.

KIENZLE: This was after the merger though.

REUTHER: This was after the merger, yes, that's right. I know of no other incident that ever was called to my attention. It was given considerable publicity so that good friends from the CIO side and some who weren't good friends on the other side knew about it and were much more cautious than they had been previously.

Q: I think this is interesting because when I was in Italy at one stage of the game, I got a call from UIL. Chip Levenson was in town and he came to see me. UIL had been visited by some stranger who claimed he represented the CIO. He left $5,000 for UIL. They had never had any money from that source. They wanted to know what the hell to do with it. That's how money gets into the stream of things.

Q: Was this Augustanoni?

REUTHER: Augustanoni and the President, Brenanazi and so forth. You never know where the stream begins as it empties out at your desk. In Italy, unlike the Force Ouvrière operation in France, Avillionese had his close ties to industrial groups, too. I think he received some rather generous contributions from industrial sources and the fact that the agency may have dropped an occasional $5,000 check there does not come as a surprise to me.

Q: It obviously wasn't occasionally because this had startled them. They ran over saying to me, "Who is this fellow?" We finally discovered that he was certainly not tied to the CIO in any respect.

KIENZLE: It was disinformation in effect.

Q: Yes. Lane knew about the contribution. He never admitted it.

KIENZLE: This is Tom Lane?

Q: Yes.

KIENZLE: In Brussels also we found a case where suddenly there appears an assistant labor attaché to our very competent labor attaché from an original CIO background and AF of L also, Oliver Peterson. Oliver Peterson tells me that suddenly he has an assistant. The assistant is going all around him and feeding money to various terrible groups. He too found out what it was and it was very difficult for him because he couldn't stop it. Here is

his own assistant carrying on these activities. The Ambassador just shook it off. He couldn't do anything or didn't want to do anything about it. Terrible.

REUTHER: I can assure you that as I traveled throughout West European countries during my period as CIO representative, I would hear all kinds of stories about secret slush funds. This was true much more in France and Italy than in Germany or Austria. Rarely did I hear about anything in Great Britain and certainly not in Scandinavia. I was in no position to police any of that anyway. I was operating with a very small staff and a very modest budget and tried to do what I could to build bridges of understanding between still separated democratic groups, whether they were christian or democratic socialist. While no miracles were performed during my stay in Europe, I think we laid the basis for what became a matter of fact. It took some years in Italy. To this day, it isn't fully cleared up. In France, you've had a diminution of total trade union strength and influence, which has more adversely affected the communists, I think, than the presumable democratic socialist oriented or christian oriented unionists.

KIENZLE: Did you feel that the CIO was at a disadvantage because the AF of L was accepting the CIA money and channeling it to---

REUTHER: Yes and no. We were certainly at a disadvantage in underwriting massive training programs that I would like to have duplicated, like the ones at La Brevière. While we did a modest amount of this in Germany through Helmut Jokul, who served as my staff member and liaison person in Germany, I felt disadvantaged in terms of resources and access to financial matters. On the other hand, I felt that what we were advocating, which was great unity among the pro democratic forces, and a complete separation of democratic socialists from membership in still communist dominated unions, was well received by the working population. We were on the side of the trade union leadership in Germany and Austria and those that we could rely upon in Italy and France. I felt we were with the wave of the future and with the wave of the future in terms of U.S. government policy also, which had to undergo as drastic a change. The AF of L never changed, but the U.S. government did change its policy more in line with what the CIO was advocating.

KIENZLE: Were you shocked in any way by the revelations of the Braden article in 1967?

REUTHER: Yes, of course. I had gotten wind of it before it appeared in print, but I was shocked by it. Normally, the agency doesn't go public, doesn't have anything to say. I think they were so wedded to this hard anti-communist line (everything they did really pointed in that direction) that they felt they had to nip in the bud our efforts to change that.

KIENZLE: Victor, yesterday in a telephone conversation, Ted Morgan asked to be remembered. He has finished the first draft, which is too long, of his Lovestone book, and we look forward to seeing it as soon as he can reduce it to the size that they want. The reason I mention this now is that I'm conducting an effort to try to get hold of those portions

of the book that he has to cut down in order to have that available to us.

Q: What ever happened to the Irving Brown book?

KIENZLE: I have that on my desk.

Q: Is it actually in print?

Q: I saw one review.

KIENZLE: It is a terrible book, which I have written a commentary on and I'm trying to get it into the Weekly Forward.

Q: That's where I read the review.

KIENZLE: It was a terrible review because---

Q: Was it published in Britain first?

KIENZLE: The book was published in Britain. That's why we can't get a copy here. It belongs to our friend Rebhan and I'll give it back to him as soon as I get a chance.

Q: Getting back to the Braden article, do you view that as something that was authorized by the CIA?

REUTHER: Oh, definitely.

Q: They wanted that on the public record?

REUTHER: No. I don't think Braden was such a low and irresponsible official of Central Intelligence that he would have dared break ranks and go out on his own. No, no, no. He was certainly directed to. There's nothing in my whole relationship with Braden, whom I used to occasionally see when I called on the labor attaché in Paris. He would ask me all kinds of questions about what I was doing, what my reaction was to this, that, and the other thing. I didn't know who he was at first. I thought he was with State Department, but I didn't know he was with the agency. I was always quite open. I didn't have any secrets as to what the hell I was doing and gladly shared it with the labor attaché in Paris, as well as with Braden on those occasional meetings. There's nothing in my past relationship with Braden that gave me any inkling that he would bear down on me this way in a public article. I'm convinced he was ordered to do it. It became---

KIENZLE: Did he say things that were untrue about your role in Europe?

REUTHER: I don't recall the exact language of it, but I was deeply offended by it, yes.

KIENZLE: You cover that in the book, too?

REUTHER: Yes, that is covered in the book, as much as I knew at the time. I felt I let down my friends at Solidarity House, who couldn't have been fully briefed on what the hell was going on in Europe. The conflict was growing daily between myself and Irving and Jay and the position of George Meany. It was difficult for me to keep them up to date on everything. I think they genuinely thought, "What the hell?" We'd come out of a whole wartime atmosphere where there was quite an appreciation of labor's role in the war effort and in post war Europe. To have this gesture of assistance to what the kid brother was doing in Paris was probably looked upon quite innocently as a positive gesture.

KIENZLE: You mentioned Jack Conway, but actually, there was another person there, a broadcaster, Guy Nunn. He had had a long history at the NLRB where we first knew him. His objectivity was in question at that time.

REUTHER: Yes, but I don't know that Guy was informed about the receipt of that money and the transfer of it to me. I doubt it. Guy became involved later on in international activities again when he played a key role in Walter's visit to India and later to Yugoslavia, where he met Tito. Guy, of course, was identified as a prisoner of war in that area. He was a very useful staff person to help Walter and me in organizing that visit. I don't think he was aware of that Braden incident at all. I think, from what I know of Guy, he would have expressed some caution at that point.

KIENZLE: Could you describe briefly how you opposed the AF of L covert activities? What manifestation was there of your disagreement, other than dealing with the other democratic groups that the AF of L wasn't dealing with? Was there a public debate going on in Europe in some way?

REUTHER: To a degree later on I did not think it would help my objective while I was stationed there as the European representative to engage in open conflict with the older branch of the U.S. trade union movement, which had more of a footing in post war Europe than the CIO had. I didn't think it would help me at all. I was in very low key on that. Actually, I kept to a minimum any open conflict inside the International Metal Workers Federation (IMWF), where I continued to have very close contacts from the day I returned to Europe and for many years thereafter. It came to a head more in the meetings of the ICFTU in Brussels than elsewhere. It's awfully hard once you have a meeting as large as those were and you have open conflict among members; it's awfully hard to keep it quiet. Word filters back to each of the trade union centers represented there. Meany's bitter opposition and resistance to our insistence on bringing the Italian UIL into the ICFTU and working with them provoked an open clash.

We were successful, yes, and quite frankly, I was amazed myself at how much more in harmony the CIO's outlook was to that of the major trade union centers in Western Europe at the end of the war. That was when they were thinking about recovery, rebuilding the trade unions and the kind of trade unions they wanted.

It is amazing that the German metal workers union that early in the post war period under the leadership of Otto Brenner gave so much time and thought to events in Italy, for instance. I was amazed. Their view on it---It wasn't just my democratic socialist background. It was their realization that, my God, we're up against an incredible potential enemy with the Soviets still trying to build a base inside Germany and Austria, as they successfully did in Italy and France. They were determined in Germany and Austria to resist it. They felt that the Meany/Lovestone/Brown approach was preventing the kind of common front among potential democratic trade union elements in both Italy and France.

In Germany and Austria, this problem didn't exist. The Austrians moved very quickly at the end of the war to invite them into a cooperative relationship with them. They felt so goddamned isolated and they were so willing to bend over and make all kinds of concessions, but they weren't willing to make concessions to the Soviets. That was reassuring. Everything that I did during the two years that I was there seemed useful, in my mind at least, and I was gratified by the response that I got from the major trade union centers, to stay in there. They were embarrassed about the divisions with U.S. labor.

KIENZLE: With respect to Austria, how did Rudy Falco deal with the problem? Was he favorably disposed toward the attitude of the Austrians?

REUTHER: You may think that Rudy had a closer relationship with the Austrians because his family hailed from an area that Austria controlled and dominated.

KIENZLE: He spoke Hungarian.

REUTHER: Yes, he spoke Hungarian. The truth of the matter is he spent more time, I think, trying to ingratiate himself with the German trade unionists than with the Austrians. He quickly accepted the fact that the Austrians were not sympathetic to the Meany/Lovestone view.

I had the great advantage in Austria of having a figure who almost became a father figure to me. He looked upon me as the son he didn't have. That's Karl Myzle. I knew Myzle from the day he got out of six years of Buchenwald. He was skin and bones. He resumed his leadership in the Austrian metal workers union. It is incredible I didn't meet him in the '30s because Walter and I hiked the Vienna woods with young socialists and trade unionists and Karl Myzle was leading group after group in those days, building support for the tragedy that was in the offing. Myzle was imprisoned for six years in Buchenwald, gets out, resumes his trade union functions at the end of his imprisonment. In one of my very first visits to

Austria at the end of the war, the head of the Austria trade union federation introduced me to this bag of skin and bones. I became so attached to him. I learned that he was a lover of music. I loved the Austrian folk music and the political music which the Austrian youth used as they marched through the Vienna Woods. His name was Karl Myzle.

Q: Was he Jewish?

REUTHER: No. He married a Jewish widow after he was released from prison. His wife died while he was in prison.

KIENZLE: That's a good illustration of the fact that the people who were persecuted by the Hilterites were not exclusively Jews.

REUTHER: No, that's right. Many, many trade unionists were imprisoned in Buchenwald and other concentration camps. Myzle had a son from his first marriage who was very young when I first met him. His boy wanted to be as distant from his imprisoned father as possible. He showed no interest in social democracy or trade unionism. When I arrived on the scene, I would spend every free moment I had in the evening with Myzle and his new wife, who ran a leather goods store in several countries: Prague, as well as Vienna, and later in New York. She was a very successful businesswoman. Myzle was a great musician. He played the zither. For six years, while imprisoned, he couldn't play it. He became a concert player as well as a member of the Cabinet. He became Minister of Labor and more significantly, the head of the Arbeite Kommer, the Chamber of Labor, the tripartite body which ran schools and everything else. To the day of his death, he was almost a father figure to me. He influenced greatly my comprehension and understanding of the Austrian mind. There was no better teacher to have than him. I have as a prized possession, a gift he gave me on my last meeting with him. He invited me into his bedroom and said, "I have something I want you to take back with you." I said, "What is it?" He handed me a leather-bound case. I said, "What is this, Karl?" He said, "Open it." It was the zither he learned to play on as a boy. He now had a concert one. It was the zither he returned to when he was released from Buchenwald. I knew what it was immediately when I saw it and I said, "Karl, this should remain in your family." He smiled and he said, "That's why I want you to have it." It's another story about how I tried to learn it. I still have it and it will be returned to Austria someday.

KIENZLE: That's quite a story.

REUTHER: He impressed me enormously. Six years in Buchenwald must teach one all kinds of lessons. Certainly, one is that you don't draw a line between human beings, whatever their race or their ethnicity is. If you believe in democracy, you extend a hand to those who likewise want to move toward democracy, whether they are catholic or protestant. That division continued after the war in Austria. Myzle was one who could reach beyond those chasms. I loved him for it. He became not only an important political figure in

Austria in several cabinet positions he held, but he was a stalwart in the International Metal Workers Federation. He could say to Italians and Frenchmen things which I could not find words for myself because his experience taught him that time is passing. It is urgent we move together. We can't let old rivalries divide us. It was a voice of reason and of hope which was so urgently needed at that time.

KIENZLE: Didn't the Germans develop non-denominational unions after World War II? Wasn't that one of the lessons that the Germans did learn?

REUTHER: Yes, although the christian trade unions never developed a kind of toe hold within the trade union movement of Germany that the Austrians---

Q: Was there ever a formal agreement? I keep reading about an agreement of some sort that would keep a line between the Social Democratic Party and the unions and so forth.

REUTHER: The Austrians certainly formalized everything, but I don't recall that there was such a formal agreement. The coming of Konrad Adenauer (PM 1949-63) to power certainly eased the gut urge of many christian forces in Germany for a voice at the trade union level. They had someone at the height of government. That prevailed until the coalition.

KIENZLE: Whether there was a formal agreement or not, it's a fact or was a fact when I used to visit there that the Austrian socialist trade unionists would have social clubs and all of those things that were so separate from the conservative catholic groups, which also had social clubs and things like that.

REUTHER: (Also true in) own youth movements, mind you, also. When Myzle marched through the Vienna woods in the '30s, playing his zither and leading them in song, they were all young trade unionists of a social democratic orientation. They weren't christian. Myzle hadn't learned that lesson yet. He hadn't been to Buchenwald. He came out of Buchenwald, married a Jewish widow. He was a different human being. He was a political leader of enormous stature then. His life had so changed. Otto Brenner, for God's sake, was not the same as Otto Brenner before his imprisonment. Otto became a very, very significant force in events way beyond Germany and Austria. I've already mentioned his enormous personal role on events in Italy. The Germans had their own spot, full time personnel in Paris working closely with Force Ouvrière. The Germans were much more hesitant about taking initiatives in France about who should work with whom than they were in Italy. I presume it was because there were still very strong anti-German feelings in France at that time. I sensed it almost every day when I was with the French, while in Italy because they came through the fascist experience of their own with Mussolini, it was much easier for the Germans to be involved there.

KIENZLE: Was Otto Brenner your main point of contact with the German unions? Who were the others?

REUTHER: He was my main contact. Most of the work that I did I did in consultation with the German metal workers unions. I thought they were the most strategic. When I would move into a place like isolated Berlin before it was admitted back into the DGB, I worked more with public workers and others who were influenced by Ernst Scharnovsky. Hans Beckler, the first head of the DGB at the end of the war, was a coal miner. I had frequent meetings with him in which I discussed broader issues such as codetermination. I was deeply involved in their struggle and did much work in trying to counter some of the negative effects of the Manufacturers Association in the States to sabotage the move towards codetermination. I saw this as an essential part of the post war pro democracy sentiment in Central Europe. I thought that it was crucial that the German workers win that right. I thought that it had considerable interest that went beyond Germany and Britain. I was looking forward to the day when the wartime cooperation we had in the States might be extended into peacetime.

KIENZLE: Ludwig Rosenberg, how did he feel about his part in this?

REUTHER: Ludwig was a good personal friend, but I think he never felt secure in the position as head of the DGB, as Hans Beckler did. Beckler spoke from a position of considerable trade union strength and experience. Ludwig was a good PR (public relations) guy for the Germans at that time.

KIENZLE: He was defensive about being Jewish.

REUTHER: Yes. I think the Germans looked upon this as a nice gesture to the outer world. They had permitted a Jew to become the head of their whole trade union federation. Ludwig meant well, but he was very defensive about his position. I didn't turn to Ludwig for any important support on crucial issues. Otto Brenner became the linchpin and I saw him very frequently because he was a very important figure in the International Metal Workers Federation. Between Otto there and Arnie Yeyer in Stockholm and Myzle in Vienna, I had a coterie of very trustworthy and reliable friends in metal and probably leaned on them disproportionately. There were other unions that had similar backgrounds; I might have influenced them to a greater degree than I did.

KIENZLE: How about the Danish metal workers union?

REUTHER: The Danish metal workers unionists were important participants in the International Metal Workers Federation. They were less open minded about the course of post war Europe. The Danes, as closer neighbors and more frequent victims of nazism, were a little more hesitant about the return of powerful unions in Germany and Austria. The Danes were very good and reliable friends and participants in the International Metal Workers Federation. They were nowhere nearly as influential as the Swedes. The Norwegians, who were close friends of Willie Brunt, and Hawkan Lee. Lee was a

distinguished exile who returned and played a very important role---He understood the U.S. and U.S. trade unions and played a very important role for Norway in the post-war years. Still Stockholm was the center of Scandinavian influence as far as I was concerned.

Q: Stockholm had more money, too.

REUTHER: Yes, and a less nationalist outlook on what was required in post war Europe. It's not easy when you've gone through wartime experience to put all that behind you and embrace those who were former enemies. The personalities that emerged in Stockholm---Erlander and his then-deputy, Olaf Palme, who later became Prime Minister---were such close personal friends of Arnie Yeyer that there was never a time that Walter and I would make a side trip to Stockholm that Erlander or Palme were not houseguests for dinner with Arnie. Arnie was a very quiet guy who didn't dictate to the political figures. He was very sensitive to their needs and came forward to help them.

That friendship led to a remarkable exchange that I think has been lost in history. It grew out of a discussion that took place at the Swedish ambassador's residence when Erlander came and Arthur Goldberg was the U.S. Secretary of Labor. Arthur was in on the discussion. Walter and I were there. We started talking about problems of full employment and so on. We thought the Swedish experience was one that should be more widely shared. We suggested a series of meetings that might take place in Sweden. They began as Harpsund meetings at the summer residence of the Swedish Prime Minister. Who participated? Harold Wilson from Great Britain and several of the top British trade union leaders: Willie Brunt would come; the Prime Minister of Austria would be there; both German and Austrian trade union leaders. Employers weren't there. It was bipartisan. From the United States came Hubert Humphrey. Walter and I---These were weekend meetings in Harpsund. It began and lasted for about three years. Harold Wilson in his book pays tribute to the wonderful exchanges that took place there and what an impact they had upon his own decision to seek the Prime Ministership in Britain and to work with the trade unions. Those meetings, I think, had an impact that reached across Europe.

KIENZLE: These were exchange of ideas rather than---

REUTHER: Exchange of ideas. It was all very informal. There were no printed records kept of discussions. Each was free to write his own statement as to what it meant to him, as Harold Wilson did in his book. I know it had a profound impact on Willie Brandt and his decision to campaign for the Chancellorship and to offer, as an interim step, a joint government with Adenauer. The Swedes have a long history of not expecting the whole basket of apples in the first meeting. Like the Austrians, they are coming from much smaller countries, and they're willing to settle for less than everything at meeting number one. You make a little progress at a time. That kind of patience and ability to look forward to better opportunities down the road was very important for leaders in Central Europe who were eager to climb out of the rubble as fast as they could. That's understandable, but they didn't

always quite know how best to get out or what they would do once they had power.

KIENZLE: Did your relationship with the British TNC improve? You mentioned that during your earlier work on the Anglo American Committee, there had been a lot of differences in perspective. Was it better by 1951 and '52?

REUTHER: Yes, much better, but there was an emotional factor in this. The attempt on Walter's life and, then 11 months later, the attempt on my life gave both Walter and me a certain aura of martyrdom, which the British respected. They were much more deferential to the point of embarrassment for me in the months after my recovery. The British had just been in the States for a meeting of the Angle American Council shortly before I was shot.

KIENZLE: This would have been in '49?

REUTHER: This was '49. They just flooded my home and office with all kinds of telegrams and best wishes and so on and personal visits. Everyone that I had been associated with looked me up in Detroit during the period of recovery. It changed substantially and for the better. I don't know to what extent that emotional factor influenced it, but I think we always had a very open and direct exchange of ideas. (end of tape)

KIENZLE: We covered your relations in Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Scandinavia, and the U.K. Were there other countries where the CIO was active during that period that you were in Europe, in Greece, Spain, or Portugal?

REUTHER: Yes, obviously, being stationed in Europe and frequently attending International Metal Workers and ICFTU conferences, etc., I came into close contact with people who were active in Greece and in parts of North Africa, especially Tunisia and Algiers and so on. Down in Nairobi Tom Boyer became a very close personal friend. We would have as houseguest at our home, his lady friend from Nairobi who was studying at a school in Ohio. When she had vacation time, she would come and stay with us in Washington. If Tom was over for some meetings, he would come and visit at the same time. Tom Boyer became a close personal friend. In Tunisia, Ahmed Ben Salan, who was a key figure in the trade union movement and became number two under Habib Bourguiba until Bourguiba framed him and threw him in prison, even after he had been appointed a Cabinet member. It was a great tragedy. He had his brother come and his brother helped him escape. His brother took his place in prison and Ahmed fled the country and lived in exile for 12 years away from his family. The whole struggle in Tunisia became a matter of deep concern to me, not so much through CIO as through UAW.

We were able to provide some direct financial assistance to democratic elements in Greece, Tunisia and Guinea, Africa. I organized a trade union Peace Corps team to assist in the training of native Guinean technical personnel when the French pulled all their trained technicians out of Guinea. Secutore had been a contact that I had come to know through

ICFTU circles. The UAW was by that time in a financial position to help. We had earmarked all the interest earned on our well over a million dollar strike fund. It has grown enormously beyond that now. All the interest earned on the investment of the strike fund was earmarked for solidarity work. We were able to make substantial contributions, not only to democratic forces in Greece, but the forces of Ahmed Ben Salan in Tunisia and Guinea, and far off in Japan when the Japanese joined the International Metal Workers.

We helped establish a wage research center in Tokyo in conjunction with the university. It brought together the many scattered (excuse the expression) companies you'd use, which the Japanese had organized, employer by employer. We were trying to work out some kind of an understanding that would permit their affiliation with the International Metal Workers and to remove the incredible chaotic situation that existed in terms of wage payments. It was traditional for many years that the wages of a worker would be determined by his age, the amount of personal schooling he had, whether he was married, and how many children he had, and a host of other factors not directly related to the quality of work that he was doing. There was no rhyme nor reason in the wage structure. The Japanese themselves could not bring any rhyme or reason into it. In consultation with the International Metal Workers Federation---I want to underscore that never in our international work did we presume to get involved in projects with trade unions in other countries without advance conversation with the appropriate trade secretariat or international trade union body---so with the full understanding of the Metal Workers Federation in Geneva, we raised the money through UAW and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL/CIO. Walter was chair then and helped finance the formation for the Wage Research Center in Tokyo. The Center made a more useful contribution than just an alteration in the wage structure. It brought the unions themselves closer together. They began to learn from the structure of trade unions in other countries that they had to go beyond enterprise unionism and bring metal workers together. In Japan there were sharp divisions along political lines. There were those completely under the thumb of communists and trotskyites and others who were simple company unionists.

KIENZLE: This all took place a little later than when you were in Europe?

REUTHER: Oh, yes.

Q: This would have been the early '60s, wouldn't it?

REUTHER: Back home and it went way beyond a merger because you had the industrial union department with Walter chairing. My involvement in international work obviously continued until my retirement, which was a year after Walter's death.

KIENZLE: Which was in 1969?

REUTHER: Walter died in '70 and I retired, I think, either in late '71 or early '72. I forget which.

KIENZLE: To get the chronology on the record, you were in Paris from 1951-

REUTHER: Until the fall of '53.

KIENZLE: Then you came back and you headed the CIO?

REUTHER: That's right. I established residence in Washington and not Detroit.

KIENZLE: Then in 1955 at the merger, you shifted back to the UAW as head of the international---

REUTHER: That's right, exactly.

KIENZLE: That was also here in Washington, DC?

Q: You would have been director of the Washington office at that time?

REUTHER: I served as director of the Washington office, but with a large enough staff that I had ample time to work on international affairs, which continued as my major interest. I had someone who handled legislative matters for UAW at the Washington office, others who handled relations with federal agencies, whether it was Commerce or State Department or what---

KIENZLE: From 1955 on your official designation would have been head of the Washington office---

REUTHER: Plus assistant to the president.

KIENZLE: And assistant to the president.

REUTHER: That's right, and director of International Affairs of the UAW. I wore a number of hats, yes.

KIENZLE: Getting back to your European experience, you were both the European representative of the CIO and the UAW representative, I take it. Is that correct?

REUTHER: Until the merger.

KIENZLE: Until the merger. In your dealings, did you make any distinction when you went in to talk to people, say, "I'm here in my capacity as UAW representative" or "I'm here in my capacity---"

REUTHER: I had a separate staff who handled international affairs for national CIO. Among them was one Dan Benedict. I had come to know him because he handled matters for CARE in Europe during the period that I was stationed in Europe. He spoke many languages and knew Latin America. He joined the CIO portion of the staff for International Affairs---

KIENZLE: I see. This was in '53 roughly?

REUTHER: Yes. Handling Latin America. I had my own separate staff for International Affairs for UAW. Among them was the now Congressman, Stephen Tortus from California, who came up through the ranks of the UAW. He was born in Mexico and came as an immigrant to the States. He knew Latin America extremely well and did a remarkable job as our key person in Latin America. I had my own separate staff. If it was a matter solely related to the UAW, or perhaps to the International Metal Workers, if it was something that could be handled quite easily wearing a UAW hat, I would, despite the sharp differences with the AF of L, that led finally to a break. On a personal level, I always had a good relationship with Rudy Falpole, always did. I could always talk---

Q: I think that was easy to do.

REUTHER: It was very easy to do in the sense that it was probably something similar to what Roy had with Irving Brown in the early days, long before Roy became aware that there was a brouhaha in the making. I got on well with Rudy and I think it was only when the Federation really bore down on him and said, "Dammit, you have to do this and that" that I would notice Rudy would flare up on certain issues. I tried to take it in my stride. Personally, I got on very well with him, really.

KIENZLE: Can you go back to the personality of Dan Benedict?

REUTHER: Yes.

KIENZLE: We have two interviews in our collection, one with Dan Benedict and also one with Herman Rebhan. There is a discussion of the question of who would be head of the International Metal Workers Federation. Can you tell us what happened and what your view was on that?

REUTHER: I was very close to Dan on a personal basis. He joined the CIO staff. I got on very well with his whole family. When I retired, he was my assistant at the International Affairs Department. I saw no reason to question his succeeding me as Director of International Affairs. What I didn't realize was that Herman would become so ambitious as to want to give up the directorship of the UAW International Affairs and become General Secretary of the International Metal Workers. Herman began building his own ties to the AF of L to influence forces in the International Metal Workers Federation. Herman, coming out

of Germany as a refugee and speaking still quite good German, felt he had Egay Natal and the Germans in his vest pocket. They were certainly quite sympathetic to him. They would have found it rather embarrassing to turn their back on one who succeeded Victor Reuther and also who came out of Germany.

Herman was successful in building those kinds of bridges, but it meant that he had to slam the door shut on one who had served as assistant General Secretary to the Metal Workers Federation for quite a number of years and had established really quite good relations with the major affiliates. But not quite good enough. Herman squeezed out Dan's efforts to become General Secretary. This left a very bad taste in the mouths of many. It led to incredibly bitter personal feelings between Dan and Herman. I was caught many times in the middle of that controversy. I thought Herman moved too fast to seek the General Secretaryship of the International Metal Workers Federation (IMWF). I thought he should have permitted Dan to serve.

KIENZLE: Did you support Dan Benedict?

REUTHER: The truth of the matter is I tried to remain aloof from the controversy, although the UAW delegates who went were openly for Herman. Pat Greathouse was the key voice in that determination. Pat was noted for being more conservative than the Reuthers. He made that quite clear on a number of issues. To this day, there is a somewhat strained relationship. I wouldn't dream of inviting Herman and Dan Benedict to the same dinner and most certainly not their wives. The feud was bitterer between the women than the men.

Q: Did Levenson ever have objectives of being Secretary General of the IMWF?

REUTHER: No.

Q: In the '50s, he did give that impression.

REUTHER: No. I don't think so. I never got the impression that he was thinking of a career beyond that which he enjoyed while I was there. When it was clear the office was going to close, he began looking elsewhere. His major contacts Stateside were not with UAW or with steel or the machinists or even with the metal workers that he'd had closer contact with. He established contact with the teamsters and was finally employed. I sort of lost track of his career after we...

KIENZLE: (Inaudible)

Q: He went to head the trade secretariat of the Chemical Workers. He got himself quite a bit of publicity during that period.

REUTHER: It was short-lived though, wasn't it?

Q: I think five or six years maybe.

KIENZLE: Victor, once Herman became head of Metal Workers Federation, how was your working relationship with him? Did you find that he carried out (inaudible)?

REUTHER: When I retired I undertook what I knew was the heavy responsibility of doing the memoirs of the three brothers. I took that very seriously. I purchased the furniture that I was using in the Washington office from the UAW and shifted it to a vacant bedroom in my home. This gave me the milieu of work and I began the research which was very tedious for me. I began just to separate myself from what had occupied me for so many years. I was not about to second guess Herman Rebhan on every move that he made. I must say, however, I was quite shocked at the source of some of the support that he got in his race for the General Secretaryship. This concerned me, but I wasn't about to second guess his every decision. I discounted a lot of Dan's hurt feelings. He shifted quickly to Canada and became enmeshed in the activities of the Canadian Auto Workers. They both remain my friends. Dan is a closer and warmer friend than Herman is, but I guess it's just because I get more frequent telephone calls from Dan and his wife. They come and visit family more frequently than Herman, who isn't that kind of a social creature.

Q: What I was getting into is: going back to the early post World War II days, the AF of L-CIO split on joining the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Could that have been done differently? Were there regrets in your mind, for example, of having gotten into the WFTU or was that something that you had to go through in the settling down process after the Second World War?

REUTHER: It's something we had to go through if we were serious about building common ground for all democratic trade unionists. This business of selecting out the approved ones and turning your back on a lot of others, who are numerically far greater, for one thing, is unacceptable to the WFTU. It would have cut us off, we would have cut ourselves off from British labor if we had refused. There's no question about that. Who are we to play God on that kind of an issue? We knew that not only in France and Italy was there enormous sentiment for the communist oriented trade unions, but in Great Britain, my God, there was a feeling there of "We've got to repay this wartime solidarity. We've got to demonstrate it." It would have been stupid, in my opinion, if we had cut ourselves off.

The best thing for American labor is that we at least had one foot in both camps at that time. It would have been tragic if the CIO had not stayed in with the WFTU for a while. We had to educate them. We had to teach them realities. Thank God, the Soviets helped us in that with some of their stupid actions. We had to bring British labor along with us as well. It made it a hell of a lot easier for the Germans and the Austrians, not to mention the Italians and the French, who were already sympathetic to us, to stay with them and bring them along

in the final decision to build a new democratic World Trade Union Center, the ICFTU, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

KIENZLE: The decision was made, I think, in 1947. By that time, the CIO had withdrawn. Who were the main decision makers on the CIO side that decided to withdraw in '47? Was that Phillip Murray primarily?

REUTHER: No, Jim Carrey was certainly a key figure. Jim was the person on the scene. Elmer Cope would attend and help Jim, but Jim was an official and titular member. Jim's reports were very sharp. If we had just left it to Jim, he would have antagonized our British colleagues. Jim was not noted for his diplomacy. Phillip Murray had basically proper instincts on this issue but relied heavily on Jim and on Walter. Walter's views were, thank God, greatly influenced by mine. Phillip Murray and Walter and Jim had some problems with some pro-communist elements still on the CIO executive council, but Murray's view was quite firm on it in supporting Carrey. So, there was no real backlash to the decision.

KIENZLE: Who opposed the decision on the executive council at that time, just for the record?

REUTHER: I'm not sure that I can name all of the individuals, but certainly the electrical workers.

KIENZLE: The UE people.

REUTHER: The UE people and not the IUE, which was Carrey's branch. The old UE. The New York Transport and General Workers Union, Mike Quill.

KIENZLE: Did the former communists like Quill and Curren, who were not openly anti-communist? They went into their records to prove that they had been following the communist line and were now---

REUTHER: Yes, that was quite a confession on their part. The communist elements within the CIO never really recovered from the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the stupidity of an overnight change on the part of Communist Party's policy. I will never forget the Dodge local in the UAW, which was completely under the communist influence at the time. They had passed one resolution to the effect that "We had to go all out in the war effort and give up overtime and so on. Then the Hitler Pact is signed and it suddenly becomes an imperialist war." Two resolutions were passed within the same month. They both appeared on the agenda of the Wayne County Council for debate. I remember being there. We urged the adoption of both to prove what stupid asses they were, how they were not making up their own minds, but were looking to someone else in a distant land to tell them what the hell our U.S. policy ought to be. The Michael Quills and the others never really recovered from that era.

KIENZLE: They had to make a choice between the trade unions and---

REUTHER: They had to make a choice and so on. They never really recovered from it. Phillip Murray, who was not terribly political, was a pragmatic coal miner. That kind of thing would leave a deep impression on him and he wouldn't forget it. There was a lot of snickering, you know.

KIENZLE: But there were people in the CIO group who were communist agents. An old fellow employee in the NLRB, Bernard Stern, a dear friend of mine, was a communist. He confessed it as much in the meetings we had in the Labor Department. There was a guy from one of the unions of Robinson or something like that. They did have some people who were communist. They had to make their choice to stay with the Party or stay with their trade union objectives.

How did they react then to the Marshall Plan? That's often cited as the cause for the break with the WFTU and the formation of the ICFTU. Did the CIO communist elements try to oppose the Marshall Plan?

REUTHER: They most certainly did, not only in discussions within the CIO, but they openly sabotaged the Marshall Plan in Europe with trade union centers. They were certainly guilty of pulling all kinds of disastrous wildcat strikes as we moved towards a defense effort. Before there was open war declared, but we were supporting Roosevelt's efforts to aid Britain and so on.? There were no secrets about the fact that the Party was doing everything it could to sabotage Marshall aid.

Despite this, it is remarkable that when General Marshall first put forward his ideas, he had the hope that the Soviets would be tempted to join. I think most Western powers were sort of hoping that they would be partners in this recovery program. It came as a great shock to the U.S. administration and certainly to many newly formed and still fragile democracies in Western Europe that this partner in victory would turn its back on this generous offer of support which would have meant a hell of a lot for the Soviets, too. That set the stage for the heating up of the Cold War. It made the Phillip Murrays have a hell of a lot more backbone in standing up against those elements inside the CIO. It gave those of us who were involved in assistance work in Europe enough courage to make the line sharper still. We were making it damn clear that the Soviets may have been an ally in the war against nazism, but they sure as hell were not allies in rebuilding a peaceful Europe. We had to face up to it. I think this made it easier to convince the British that the WFTU wasn't the route for them. It made it much easier for the Germans and Austrians, who were in ambivalent positions here---pressure from the East, pressure from the West. And in France and Italy the lines had been more shakily drawn thanks to Meany and Lovestone, but it made it more urgent that we broaden the coalition of democratic forces in both those countries.

KIENZLE: There was a TV interview the other day with Scargill, the Miners. He was a

communist who was using---

REUTHER: He was a hard-liner who remained a hard-liner to the bitter end.

KIENZLE: Right. I hope I'm not giving you too much credit, but I think never did you, in all that problems of trying to keep the British with us, compromise with guys like Scargill.

REUTHER: Not at all. One might have been tempted more in Britain than on the continent to have made some compromises of that kind because the whole TEC? was still lined up behind the WFTU. What the hell, we weren't about to turn our back on the whole TEC. We knew we had certain unions that were ready to carry on the fight. We had a Will Lauder who was willing to take on Scargill, you know, in the miner's union. Poor old Will---

KIENZLE: He had his problems.

REUTHER: He had his problems. You couldn't depend too much on him. There was Jack Tanner---that was the name I was trying to remember of Transport and General. He was a damned good ally. He was deeply involved in the British council that we had on productivity. Jack was a very reliable guy.

Q: From the CIO side, was there a decision to move out of the WFTU?

REUTHER: Oh, sure.

Q: It was a formal decision. It didn't just happen.

REUTHER: It was a formal decision. Jim Carrey took the lead in that and Walter and Murray supported it fully. I can't give you a detailed breakdown on how everyone voted, but there was a formal decision and withdrawal took place.

KIENZLE: You supported it as well?

REUTHER: Oh, good Heavens! I campaigned for it, yes. We knew that day was coming. We didn't want it to come before we had built some support inside Britain. We knew that the situation wouldn't be affected in France and Italy by this significantly, but in Germany, Austria, and Belgium, this was an important matter.

KIENZLE: Did you have any discussions at that time with the AF of L on the tactics for bringing these unions that were supporting the WFTU out of the WFTU?

REUTHER: I didn't personally and I doubt if Walter did. I certainly would have been the worst person to have talked with the AF of L about this. I was so far out on a limb in my work with them. I doubt if Walter did. Certainly Carrey must have had some contact with

them. I think that through labor friends in government circles there were full reports gotten back to the AF of L on these developments within the WFTU. Certainly, they were prepared to hail this as a great victory for them.

WEISZ: Vincent Tussen, who was the head of the British trade unions, was amenable to all sorts of compromises. One time, I think, it was Irving Brown who referred to him as "Sir Vincent Two Time" because he was on the fence. He had his own cohorts within the union whom he had to deal with, but he certainly was a fence sitter, really.

REUTHER: Sir Vincent had not been in office as General Secretary of the TUC terribly long when this occurred. I don't think he felt quite secure to make any lasting commitment to an Irving Brown or a Victor Reuther or anybody else. He didn't know what the hell was happening in his own ship. He had to check very carefully. There weren't that many Jack Tanners and Will Lauders, you know. The overwhelming majority was still firmly committed to the WFTU. It took a number of cataclysmic events, such as the Soviets turning their back on Marshall aid and beginning to openly sabotage Marshall aid where they could. It took this to open their eyes.

WEISZ: Was Sir Vincent a trade unionist or a political leader? I don't know what particular trade union he was. He must have been a nominal member.

REUTHER: He was a kind of an administrative intellectual, with not too much pragmatic trade union experience. I think he found it difficult even to converse with many of the British trade union leaders who were pretty rough and tumble in their language, in their threats and so on. I came up against many of them. George Meany was mild compared to some of them.

KIENZLE: Can we try to get some of the loose ends on your personal history? You went back to the U.S. in 1953, was it?

REUTHER: '53, yes.

KIENZLE: And then spent two years as head of the CIO International Department.

REUTHER: Until the merger.

KIENZLE: Were there major things that we should put on the record about those two years? Were there initiatives? Did someone take your place in Paris at that time?

REUTHER: No, we began to wind it down. Levenson remained on for a while, as did Lewis Carliner before he returned to the States. It was quite clear when I returned as an assistant to the president of the CIO, who was Walter, that we would begin winding down the operation in Paris. It had served its purpose, but I agreed. I thought it best that we begin to handle

those matters through international trade union channels, the Trade Secretariats and the ICFTU.

KIENZLE: You also had left in place a structure that was carrying on your work.

REUTHER: I thank you.

KIENZLE: Within the OEC. You had all these people at the OEC like Mathofer and others, who were responsible for carrying on the work. This is where I remained and I was very happy that---

Q: These were International Metal Workers Federation officials, right?

KIENZLE: Some of them were Americans.

REUTHER: Yes, and I must say that one of the things that pleased me enormously while I was stationed in Europe as the CIO's European representative was the number of people directly out of the U.S. trade union movement, both AF of L and CIO, who were involved in Marshall aid assistance or directly with the State Department, who would gather periodically. We would have lunch together and share experiences and help sharpen certain ideas as to what might be done. I found these meetings extremely useful and helpful. When we closed the European operation, many of these good trade union types continued for some years in their positions in Europe.

KIENZLE: Bill Kinsley came out of the UAW.

REUTHER: ---who finally wound up on the staff of the ICFTU. Even Richard Deverall from the UAW, who became (inaudible) in Japan.

Q: He was out of the UAW? I didn't realize that.

REUTHER: Oh, yes.

Q: These were labor attaches?

KIENZLE: Was it the UAW-AF of L or the CIO?

REUTHER: No, he came out of the UAW-CIO.

KIENZLE: Did you want to just touch briefly on the CIO's role in designating or nominating labor attaches and how that process worked?

REUTHER: The Labor Department and the State Department were certainly most

cooperative with both the AF of L and the CIO in those days in having discussions about candidates for various positions in Europe and elsewhere, whether it was a labor attaché or technical staff on the Marshall Plan Agency. I remember frequent meetings with my counterpart from the AF of L side in those days in which we would both come with candidates and we would agree among ourselves. I never got into a heated battle about whether one more person was from the AF of L than was chosen from the CIO. It wasn't that easy to find qualified people who would agree to go overseas and take those kinds of posts. It was important that both branches of the labor movement were invited to participate in that. I think this was a unique contribution which the trade union movement made.

Today, the labor attaché program does not appear to be very significant. The truth of the matter is, at the end of the war, it was touch and go as to whether there would be a democratic post war Europe or one under the control of Moscow. No single segment of European society had so decisive a role to play in that decision as the trade unions. Hence, the people who were recruited out of the trade union movement to serve in official capacities in either Marshall aid or as labor attaches in the State Department were crucial. To have the U.S. government be able to speak through a trade unionist to German workers or Austrian workers or Italian or French or Scandinavian was terribly important. It gave an entirely different perspective to this great colossus, the U.S. I think it was an enormous contribution. I would like to see more trade union people in official government positions today, but I understand this was a unique set of circumstances. I'm delighted that the trade union movement was able to respond to it.

KIENZLE: Who was your counterpart in the AF of L?

REUTHER: I'm trying to think of... He was a rather low-key guy. I got on quite well with him.

Q: Phil Delaney?

REUTHER: Phil Delaney, thank you. He was a kind of Rudy Falpole.

Q: Phil Delaney was a counterpart really of Mike Ross, wasn't he? Or was he higher in the (hierarchy)?

REUTHER: Oh, no.

KIENZLE: He was in the government. Phil Delaney was a State Department (official).

Q: I know that. Later on. When I came in as an applicant, he was one of those I had to pass his approval. I think it was Mike Ross who pointed out that "We've got this deal where, if you're not really just kind of a nut, he'll approve my candidates and I'll approve his."

WEISZ: That's what I wanted to (know). There's an accusation that you and Phil sat down and divided the world up. When Lovestone tells me that, if I want a job in the Foreign Service, I've got to take a cut in salary, which I was unwilling to do, and he will nominate me to be the labor attaché (end of tape) in Australia. He did that for his own reasons. The guy who had been in Australia before did something terrible. Who the hell is he to nominate me for a position?

Q: I was always under the impression that there were certain spots that were picked. For example, India was considered to be a CIO spot. This kind of a breakdown informally was pretty much across the board. Whether it really was (inaudible) or not (inaudible) our answer.

REUTHER: Obviously, the arrangement between the AF of L and the CIO as to how they would handle and divide up the appointments, this was already established before I returned from Europe and became the head of the CIO's International Department out of Washington. Mike Ross was no longer responsible. I can say that, although the arrangement had been in effect before I came, I had no difficulty with Phil in reaching an understanding. I think we both had some difficulties in finding sufficient candidates who were willing to take this on and whom we felt were qualified to do it. So, there wasn't that much quibbling over who got what post.

KIENZLE: Was there an understanding, as Bruce mentioned, that certain posts were CIO posts and certain posts were AF of L posts?

REUTHER: I suppose it became difficult once Phil had his guy in a given spot to make a change there. I can't say that that was a hard and fast rule.

WEISZ: Phil's explanation to me about Brussels was that they, the CIO, had their man in and now it was his turn to get a guy into that important spot in Brussels because of the relations with the ICLU.

Q: Maury, at one time I was designated to go to Brussels. That was knocked out of the ballpark by, I presume, Lovestone.

KIENZLE: Victor, two questions. Who were some of the people that were CIO people in the labor attaché corps? Did you communicate with these people directly or did they communicate through the State Department channel with both the CIO and the AF of L?

REUTHER: There was Dave Burgess in India. There was our good friend here in Italy, Bruce.

WEISZ: Arnie Taylor from the UAW.

REUTHER: Yes, Arnie Taylor. There was Oliver Peterson. Who else was there?

WEISZ: Allen Strom.

REUTHER: Oh, Allen Strom in Greece, yes.

WEISZ: Gene Martinson. See, I knew him.

REUTHER: Gene Martinson in Scandinavian, yes, that's right.

WEISZ: And Israel.

REUTHER: Thank you, yes. To the extent that many of them were personal friends, I would periodically get a personal letter from them, especially if they ran into problems and they thought I could be helpful. There was in no sense a reporting to CIO by former CIO members who now had government posts. I would expect to be briefed if I met with Labor Department or State Department people on how the Attaché Program was going and so on. I never considered that someone who came out of the CIO and accepted a government post was responsible to the CIO while he held that government post. I would have found that quite inappropriate. I called on labor attaches occasionally for personal assistance, e.g., when I was robbed by an Italian. I went to Italy to try to recover what had been stolen by an Italian to whom we gave room and board. He retreated to Italy with valuable stuff from me. I called on Bruce to help me worm my way through that.

No, I never felt any bureaucratic urge that people had to be reporting to me because I represented CIO and they came out of CIO. If they were government officials, they reported to the government.

KIENZLE: Did you feel that you got equal treatment from former AF of L people?

REUTHER: I never had a serious problem with labor attaches or people working on Marshall fund programs who happened to come out of the AF of L side, unless they were pushed into doing something by Irving or Jay which I felt was obnoxious. Then I had to disagree with it, but those moments were rare. I tried not to involve them in what I considered was my personal feud with Irving and Jay and later George.

KIENZLE: After the merger and you became the head of the UAW office and International Department, did you work primarily through the trade secretariats in the international field or did you have any UAW representatives in the field dealing directly with foreign trade union movements?

REUTHER: On the UAW staff, we had Stephen Tortus in Latin America exclusively there. He worked with the IMF office in Latin America so that he was not free wheeling.

Occasionally, we would have a dramatic project like in the southern tip of Chile when, because of a terrible fire, a new central health clinic was burned to the ground. Stephan was scheduled to be in Chile and learned about it and reported back to me. We, as the UAW, had fortunately just organized a short time before that a center in Detroit where we used retired skilled workers to refurbish hospital equipment. We were shipping hospital equipment and mobile units into rural areas (The Philippines, South Asia, and countries, parts of the U.S. and Latin America) to bring health care through local trade union sponsors.

Q: You supplied a new hospital in India?

REUTHER: We did, yes, that's right, and in the Middle East we did, too, in the outskirts of Lebanon. I forget the city.

WEISZ: Stephan who?

REUTHER: Tortus. He was your Congressman. He was on our UAW staff. This was done without regard to International Metal Workers, although we were in close touch with them. Stephan notified the hemisphere office. We shipped three trainloads of medical equipment down there. Stephan supervised getting it through customs and so on. It made quite a splurge and we got incredible press coverage in all of Latin America for it. It caused us to stretch our limited resources. A separate project with the Japanese in the Wage and Research Center was done in close consultation with the International Metal Workers but financed solely by the UAW and the industrial department of the AFL-CIO, which Walter chaired. There were separate projects of that kind, but wherever it could be done under the aegis of the International Metal Workers and involved work outside the U.S., we were careful to---

WEISZ: You will have to excuse me, but Eddie and I are going to have to leave. I want to hand out some material. I do want to mention Tortus and Strone and a few others who by virtue of their personal abilities, irrespective of their trade union backgrounds (which were a given), went on to higher office within the AID agency or in Tortus' case with the UNESCO. That is a remarkable thing about the labor attaché corps. It became a source of much more advancement in posts beyond the labor field.

Q: Tortus became U.S. ambassador to UNESCO?

Q: Right. That's when I knew him in the '70s. You've got to give credit to the trade union movement. On the one hand, they did tend occasionally to nominate some broken down business agent, but we tried to limit that. On the other hand, as a source of personnel, the trade union movement was of great value to the U.S. government beyond that field. Allen Strom went on to be an international civil servant, etc. We have to make a list and as we go on with the list---

Q: Harold Snell, for example.

Q: Harold Snell. His ambassador wouldn't let him leave Beirut because of his contacts. Shawn Condinou became an ambassador.

REUTHER: Harold Snell was a key person in our project in south Lebanon.

KIENZLE: Can we give Victor an opportunity to mention other things that should be on the record?

WEISZ: I would say, yes, after I give out the material. We have to leave. That's the problem.

Q: Let me thank you very much, Victor.

REUTHER: I thank you for helping me probe my memory of a good many years ago. I can tell you, I've not always had a good life, but I've had a damned exciting one. Your interview helps me recall some very exciting moments in that life.

KIENZLE: Thank you very much for sharing this very important information with us.

REUTHER: Thank you.

End of interview