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ROBERT SENSER

Interviewed by: Don R. Kienzle
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Senser.]

Q: I have the pleasure this morning of interviewing Robert Senser, who, for many years, was a Labor Attaché and in more recent years has worked for the Asian/American Free Labor Institute of the AFL/CIO.

Bob, you want to begin by giving us some background on your family, where you grew up, your education, and some of your employment experience before you joined the Foreign Service?

SENSER: Okay. I was born in Chicago. Spent almost all my life in Chicago before I entered the Foreign Service in late '61, except for -- always exceptions -- 22 months in military service, and six months in Denver as a reporter for a newspaper there. But otherwise I was always in Chicago. I was the first and only person in my family to go to college; and I did that on the GI Bill, or else I wouldn't have gone to college. My father was a shoe repairman. He was born in Europe. Came here, I guess, as a teenager. My mother was born in Chicago but from an immigrant family.

Q: Were your parents involved in the labor movement at all?

SENSER: My father was a member of a shoe repair union. I wrote an article about his experience. I had written it anonymously. He was fired by his union agent. So he was involved, but he kept loyal to the labor movement. He rejoined the union later and got his job back too. But he was a rank and file worker and a rank and file member, although he was active in his union for a period of time. Whether he was a steward or not, I don't remember. What else?

Q: When did you go to college?

SENSER: I went to Loyola University, evening school, late afternoon and evening, while I was working in Chicago on a paper called "Work," which was published by the Catholic Labor Alliance, which later became known as the Council on Working Life. So, except for my time in the Army, all my career, all my work before the Foreign Service was in non-government life. I joined the Foreign Service late. I came in as a Foreign Service

Reserve Officer. My life was not typical for a Foreign Service Officer because I came in late and my experience was in non-governmental activities and I didn't come from one government agency, for example, to another. But I did come in as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer and I lateraled in, as they called it, I guess while I was in Vietnam. I got the blessing.

Q: How did you get involved in labor matters yourself? Did you work for the newspaper labor?

SENSER: Well, for some reason, I don't know if it was because my father or my education, or whatever, or by accident, I was always interested in labor issues. When I worked in Harvard, Illinois, on a weekly paper there, I made an effort, for some reason, to try to cover labor events. I remember an organizing drive that I found out about in town. I wrote a long story. The editor took it, but he shortened it and reduced the headline. I don't think he changed the substance. So it's been somewhere in my blood or in something all along. It wasn't grafted on in the Foreign Service or elsewhere.

Q: What years were you in the military?

SENSER: I was in the military from '42 to '45. December of '45 is when I got out. They had a highfalutin name for us at first, a cryptographer, but finally they realized we were basically cipher clerks.

Q: Then in 1961 you joined the Foreign Service? How did you decide to join?

SENSER: You know, you get in a rut; you want to move on. I kept thinking maybe I ought to join the government. One day, on my desk in Chicago, I ran across probably about the fifth carbon copy of a notice by the Labor Department, which was sent to our office and probably everywhere, saying the Administration wanted to get people with some labor background as trade unionists, labor journalists, economic, somebody who knew something about work and workers in labor, and who would be willing to work in developing countries. So three years later, I wound up in Belgium.

Q: Belgium, a developing country?

SENSER: As Assistant Labor Attaché.

Q: Go ahead, tell them.

SENSER: My first wife was held against me because, being black, there was objection from somebody within the State Department that we could not serve in India, which was the post I was assigned to, so that was squelched. I heard about it indirectly from somebody who picked up the conversation in the Labor Department. I was furious, so I wrote a letter to Art Goldberg, whom I knew. After Kennedy won, this came to a head that I was not going to go in. I wrote a letter, finally, to Art Goldberg and then I got a call

from Jim Taylor, whom you know. I had made a contact to him by phone. He said, "You should resubmit your application because it's reopened." I was fed up with all the paperwork. I said, "Hey, you've got my application. Do something with it." And he did. I was supposed to be assigned to Dusseldorf. I had a ticket from Chicago to Dusseldorf. I was supposed to be assigned as Assistant Labor Attaché to Bonn. And that job, after the paperwork was all done, I arrived in Washington, supposedly bound for Dusseldorf, and that job was abolished.

Q: In Dusseldorf or in Bonn?

SENSER: In Bonn. Jim asked me where else I wanted to serve. Anyway, that's when the job in Brussels opened up. Assistant Labor Attaché in Brussels. I took Jack Crowley's place at that time. Jack moved up to a full-time political job.

Q: Did you protest the cancellation of your assignment in India then?

SENSER: The only thing I did, I protested by writing this letter to Art Goldberg.

Q: He was at that point?

SENSER: I think by that time, he was the Labor Secretary.

Q: Did he act on it at all?

SENSER: Yeah. He and maybe one or two other people acted on it. So I finally went to Brussels.

Q: So you arrived in 1961 as the Assistant Labor Attaché?

SENSER: Actually, I had to take French. So I only arrived there in '62. It was quite an agony for me to study French. But I worked on it and finally was able to use a little bit in Belgium; a little more in Algeria; and a little more in Vietnam.

Q: Did you have German?

SENSER: Yeah. My first language was German at home. When I went to grade school, kids taunted me as a heinie because my accent was not all that good in English. My knowledge of English must not have been as good. Southside of Chicago.

Q: Southside of Chicago in the German area?

SENSER: We called it Chi-cago. When I entered the Foreign Service, I learned somewhere, maybe I learned it in the military, you don't pronounce it that way. We always said Chi-cago.

Q: So then you arrived in Brussels as the Assistant Labor Attaché?

SENSER: I covered Luxembourg. Douglas MacArthur III was the Ambassador. I wrote an anti-labor report on Luxembourg. He surprised people at the meeting by having read it and saying it was a good report.

Q: Did you cover Belgium as well?

SENSER: Yeah. I got involved in the ICMT right off the bat. Either people were in the States or Arnie Zempel -- there was a period when he was transferred to Washington -- and Graham McKelvey (he was the Labor Attaché), was not, how shall I say, turf conscious. So there was some aspect of it I was interested in like in Africa. I kept in contact with some people there.

Q: The Labor Attaché, then, when you arrived was?

SENSER: Arnold Zempel.

Q: Arnold Zempel. He was replaced?

SENSER: Right. He was replaced by Graham McKelvey.

Q: What were the main issues you followed in Belgium? Issues of substance?

SENSER: Belgium had a high level of union membership percentage. There were some incentives to joining. It wasn't exactly compulsory. It was a class feeling that made people join, that persuaded people to join. But there were also some monetary incentives. The system allowed certain monetary preferences if you were a union member, which is not permissible in the United States. It's illegal in the United States. So that, in part, explains it. So that sticks in my mind. The other stuff was fairly routine. There was a lot of tension with the ICFTU. The AFL/CIO, George Meany at that time, was very unhappy with the ICFTU for good reason. I don't know whether I followed that or not.

Q: But you were interested in what the ICFTU was doing at that point?

SENSER: To show you my own predilection was because of my background. I also was interested in youth activities. I don't know if I did that much reporting on it, but I went over to the World Assembly of Youth, the (inaudible) headquarters. That's where I met David Gombard, who was one of the assistant people. No one told me to do it or anything. It wasn't in my job description or anything, but it seemed a natural thing to do for somebody in the Embassy. Although we were in the Embassy at that time, we were responsible, unlike now, for the international scene. Part of the international scene, to my mind, was also keeping up some kind of contact with this major youth organization -- the World Assembly of Youth.

Q: Were the ethnic divisions a problem at that time?

SENSER: They sure were, but the Political Section had that pretty -- to the extent anybody had that in hand -- they were following it. I got to know the trade union leaders. It was not tense in the labor movement, at that time. It became worse later. They split up.

Q: Then Luxembourg. Did you follow the issues in the coal and steel authority there?

SENSER: No. The NEC wanted me to keep track of the domestic things. I could get over there only every four or five months. Once in a while they'd invite me over to do a memcon for the Ambassador. I'd say, "Why don't you invite me over?" Then it would dawn on me. They wanted me to do a memcon. It wasn't any major enterprise. But that was not a part of -- it should have been -- but it wasn't part of my concerns at that time. I probably didn't know very much about it. Remember, the mission was already there, so the coverage of coal and steel would be with the U.S. Mission and the European Community. They used to call it the EEC. They dropped one of the E's later. So it was not normal for the Embassy to be concerned about the international thing, except for labor -- the ICFTU. That job was later switched over to what became known as USEC(?). So you had this funny split. It gave us a little amount of freedom, too, because the definition wasn't as rigid.

Q: Did you have three labor officers at that time?

SENSER: Jack Myerson was the USEC officer, but he was nominally the Labor person, so he was mostly into -- there they called it Social Affairs -- and a lot of other things. Very active. Gung Ho. So he was involved in a lot of things. He was so busy. I don't think he was called Labor Attaché or anything like that. He may have been.

Q: *The ICFTU responsibility was with the Labor Attaché at the Embassy?*

SENSER: The Embassy, yeah.

Q: Were there major problems then?

SENSER: I was there only two years and it was too short. No major problems.

Q: After Brussels, where did you go?

SENSER: I went to Algeria for two years. This was a period even before my marriage was in trauma. So my wife stayed with me in Algeria, but then for many reasons, went back to Chicago. While I was there, Algeria was a place where I was the last known Labor Attaché.

Q: Dick Hare wasn't?

SENSER: Was Hare there afterwards?

Q: He's listed on the sheet here. I don't know what the real circumstances were.

SENSER: Yeah, he was there. They were going to shut the place down, but they must have changed their minds because it was so difficult. The union movement was not only anti-U.S., they were suspicious of the AFL/CIO. They didn't want to have anything to do with the Embassy, so it was very difficult to even visit the union headquarters. I remember one time I found a better way of establishing rapport with the trade union leadership by going to the (inaudible) conference. There were 65 perhaps. There was a suggestion to Washington that I be sent to the ILO that year for that purpose. The two-fold answer came back. One was that it was too late to assign somebody to that, to add somebody to the delegation; two, given the circumstances, how would you like to be transferred to Addis Ababa? (Laughter) I did not embrace the idea. I should have.

Q: How about Paris instead?

SENSER: There was a coup d'état in Algeria. Ben Bella was tossed out by the military. So that was a pretty exciting time.

Q: What was the impact on the labor movement by the coup?

SENSER: Everything was even worse. My tour was drifting to the end anyway. Somewhere along the line my wife had gone back to Chicago, I wrote somebody in Washington a letter -- Zempel -- who was then in FIO. I said, "Put my name in the hopper for Vietnam." My rank was lower, so I followed John Comden into Saigon.

Q: Who had also been your predecessor in Algeria.

SENSER: Right. So people made jokes about that -- following in John's footsteps. He was a tough act to follow because people worshiped the ground he walked on.

Q: Is that right? In Algeria as well as Vietnam?

SENSER: John was a very active person. He made enormous contacts -- far out of the labor field. So he was valued for his ability to make contacts all over the place. And he did that subsequently in Paris.

Q: So to wrap up the Algerian experience, the labor movement was pretty much under wraps under Ben Bella, and then got worse with the coup? How would you characterize the conditions?

SENSER: Of course, the labor movement was part of the party -- Ben Bella's party -- so it didn't get better for them or for us to try and have contact with them. They became more frigid. There were a few people in the movement who wanted to see Irving Brown

because he'd helped them in the early days, but even Irving was not welcome.

Q: The AFL/CIO and Irving Brown had been very supportive, hadn't they, during the independence drive, and Irving had developed personal contact with the Algerian leadership and basically opposed the U.S. Government's position of supporting French.

SENSER: Right. And therefore he did not please the French either. I remember stopping in Paris on the way to Algeria and stopped to see Irving. But he himself did not visit Algeria in my time there.

Q: Was he not welcome by the leadership in Algeria or did he have other reasons for not going there?

SENSER: There were different kinds of leaders. They were political, so he was not welcome.

Q: Even though he had gone out of his way to offend the French on the issues at an earlier stage?

SENSER: That's right. The railroad union was one he spoke of. It was very tricky who they dealt with. It was an authoritarian regime.

Q: And the AFL/CIO did not have any ongoing contacts with the labor movement during your time there?

SENSER: No. I'm trying to think if there was an ITS that moved in and out of there. It was very frozen and therefore non-productive. I remember defending a French guy who knew what was going on. I became a friend of a Frenchman who was plugged in, but probably not that much. Anyway, he became a valued source for the Embassy, to this point that it was mentioned in my Personnel report that I supplied the Embassy with this information. It was very sparse. I remember once I asked for an appointment, not with the Labor Minister, but with one of his top people. It was arranged and I walked in and I sat down with somebody who said almost nothing. Course, my fractured French probably didn't help any. But he was very cold. Suddenly it dawned on me that it was the Labor Minister. (Laughter)

Q: And he was Algerian?

SENSER: Algerian, yeah. So it was a very odd situation. Who knows what was going on in the background. I don't know. This was before the coup.

Q: Then you left Algeria in 1966, roughly?

SENSER: Right. Went on to Vietnam.

Q: Went directly to Vietnam? Did you have any training in between?

SENSER: No. You mean in Vietnamese?

Q: In Vietnamese?

SENSER: No. I went to Washington, I'm sure. No, I went directly to Saigon. But I got no information. Let's see, did I get a short language course at that time? No, I don't think so.

Q: What was your position?

SENSER: Labor Attaché. We had an Assistant Labor Attaché. Somebody should write up the whole Vietnam experience, not just Labor Attaché. But the role of the Embassy was like no other Embassy, at least at that time. Basically, it was a parallel government in Vietnam. The Embassy was a part of a parallel government; it included most of the military. So the role of a Labor Attaché was partly that of a manager. The Labor Attaché always had a role in what is called the Civilian Manpower Committee. The United States at that time employed a lot of Vietnamese in the military and various components, so there were always policy issues. Should there be a wage increase? Terms of employment. I served either as Secretary or Chairman at different times, of that committee. The Ambassador would have to approve that. But usually it was well cleared so that, it was not just the United States as direct hire, but it was mostly the contractors, really. The contractors like RMK-BRJ.

Q: Could you specify those?

SENSER: Well, that was the name of the company -- RMK-BRJ. It was Raymond International, Morrison-Knudsen, Brown & Root, and J.A. Jones Construction. Fragments of it still exist, I notice, in the paper. Not the whole case. It was a Texas deal LBJ supported. They had close ties. So those were big issues.

Now related to that, though it was not really on the agenda of what was called the Civilian Manpower Committee, was the right of workers in American-owned enterprises to join unions. I remember I was invited to give a speech. I went to a meeting of their organizing committee in one of the towns -- probably Da Nang. I simply gave a supportive speech; essentially a pro-union speech. The contractor was really mad. Didn't say it to me, but talked to Phil Habib about it. Phil was very understanding. He said, "Why don't you talk to him?" I talked to them, but you know, nothing ever came of it. I don't think they organized either, probably because it was stomped out. That issue came up again with the Shell Company. A union guy who was a friend of mine called me and told me that the workers were on strike at Shell. Again, I got burned. Not burned, but criticized because I tried to get the steering guy to make a phone call to Da Nang to call off the strike. Their only communication was through the company. The company wouldn't let them call. They were suspicious of them. But anyway, at my level, that provoked a letter. I wish I'd kept my report on it and Phil's. By that time, Phil was

Assistant Secretary of State and saw a copy in Washington. I wish I'd kept that because it was quite an episode.

Q: These were American employees who wanted to organize?

SENSER: No, Vietnamese.

Q: These were Vietnamese who wanted to organize a local

SENSER: They had a union in (inaudible). It was a good union, although there were some people who were suspect in some way. But the issue became sensitive when they had a strike.

Q: And they were striking primarily for higher wages and better benefits?

SENSER: It was a wage strike. The union leadership in the federation (this was one affiliate) were supportive and yet they thought the technique was wrong, and they wanted to moderate it. But this effort to communicate with their own people was not looked on very kindly. Especially since I drove this guy to the company's grounds in my car, and we drove away together, and that was the complicity of

Q: That was perceived as supporting the strike?

SENSER: Um Um.

Q: What was the outcome? The strike was broken by Shell?

SENSER: I think the strike ended normally. It was one of those things where there's a flare and it's no longer a big issue. The union survived and was always very active and probably had some of the better leaders in the country.

Q: Did you have contacts with trade unionists in Vietnam?

SENSER: Oh yeah.

Q: Were you able to travel around the country? You were there from '66 to '70, roughly?

SENSER: Yeah, I was there on two Labor Attaché tours. I was there also with AID in (inaudible). Of course, there were parts of the country that were battlefields or occupied or in control of the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese combined. But we traveled. We used Air America. So there was quite a bit of movement.

Q: Was there very much effort to assist the Vietnamese trade unions in building stronger organizations?

SENSER: Oh, yeah!

Q: How'd that work? Did you have an assistance role as well as a reporting role?

SENSER: Well, one of AID's trade union development programs was with the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor. They gave tremendous assistance in terms of projects, staff and so on. There was a realization that you need a peoples' movement too; so the United States Government, in various arms, was supporting political parties and so on.

Q: Did you work directly with the trade unions to support democratic trade unions?

SENSER: Yeah, but because AID had its own office. You had to have money. I didn't have any money. Once in a while, I could get a trip for somebody to the United States and a few other things, but the resources were with AID.

Q: Did they have labor specialists? Who were they?

SENSER: They had an Assistant Director for Labor Affairs. He had an assistant. Emil Lindal later became a Labor Attaché -- served in that role with AID for a while. So it was quite an extensive operation.

Q: Emil succeeded you as Labor Attaché later on? At least that's what the list says.

SENSER: He did. I'm trying to think of the sequence. I was a Labor Attaché there for a tour at the Embassy, I had an AID detail there which was both in Saigon and Da Nang, and a third tour which was an Embassy tour when we came back as an Embassy.

Q: Could you put dates on those?

SENSER: That's one of the things I wanted to look up, but the dates are roughly there. Although, since they're annual, they don't give a full picture.

Q: Were you surprised by Secretary McNamara's recent book on

SENSER: I didn't read the book. I read some of the reviews. Surprised? No.

Q: He portrays the basic failure in intelligence saying, in effect, that at the time we assumed that the Vietcong represented an extended threat from the Soviets and the Chinese, while in reality it was closer to a parallel with the Yugoslav situation where there was a great deal of autonomy.

SENSER: Well, there are a lot of things to be said about the Vietnam War. I don't have any stomach for reading his book, for a number of reasons. My own thinking -- even while I was there, what tour was that, certainly by my second Embassy tour, I felt a sense

of -- there are several issues. Should the United States have been there? That's one issue. The other issue, which is not seriously discussed or analyzed, is does the U.S. have the capability, the confidence, the perseverance, the ingenuity, to run a parallel government? One of the two or three indicators that say "no," how can you run a government and a war when you have tours of duty in the military that are actually, in effect, six months? Actually, they are longer, but basically they would switch people every six months.

Q: It didn't provide the continuity or kind of contacts that you needed.

SENSER: Continuity. In terms of contacts, also the will, because it requires a will and a sacrifice. To me, it's sort of obvious, the United States' commitment. Whether it should have been a commitment, is, as I say, a separate issue. But what was the nature of the commitment? Was it always considered, really, beyond the pale? It's not considered terrible that American bodies are buried in the Philippines, or in France, or many other places in the world, but right from the start it was not acceptable to have American bodies buried in Vietnam. How much does that prove? To me, it's one of those indicators. There is a difference about it. About dying and sacrificing in Vietnam than in sacrificing to defend France, let us say. It's not a question of whether we were there. There should have been commitment, but whether the commitment was of a nature that could be sustained. I'm not interested in revisiting that whole thing. That was my feeling at that time and the reflection from time to time about it since then.

Q: You were there from 1966 to roughly 1972? Is that right?

SENSER: Yeah.

Q: With the tour in CORDS in between.

SENSER: Yeah, short tour. Even the Embassy tours -- people wanted to skip out. So you had to have a whole new relearning. People who had not studied Vietnamese; probably did not even know French. I used French quite a bit because the leadership that I (inaudible) were still very comfortable in French.

Q: Did the French develop a trade union infrastructure there?

SENSER: There was a trade union person there in French times; in fact, even we, even Americans, the State Department referred to it "The Vietnamese Confederation of Labor," CVT. So we never used the English translation or the Vietnamese translation. We were using the French. It was known everywhere by that, throughout the world, historically. It kept being used that way, so it was never transferred over. The old French symbols were retained.

Q: Had the Vietnamese labor leadership been trained in France?

SENSER: Some of them.

Q: Which unions or confederations were they affiliated with?

SENSER: They had long ties and support with the Christian Trade Union Movement out of Brussels, which later became the World Confederation of Labor, WCL. But the AFL/CIO became more involved AAFLI (Asian American Free Labor Institute) was established. The first office of AAFLI was in Saigon.

Q: Is that right? Who was the first Office Director for it?

SENSER: He's long gone. There were a whole succession of people who stayed only a short time. I don't remember who was the first.

Q: What did AAFLI try to achieve?

SENSER: Really was trying to continue the program that AID had started. The feeling was that why should AID do this program?

Q: What about the affiliation with the Belgian Christians?

SENSER: Remember, it was called the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions. The initials could be transposed with the ICFDU and it was the IFCTU. That is always a typographical problem. A problem with scanning it. But then they changed it, not for that reason, to the World Confederation of Labor, because they wanted to have a broader -- and they did have -- a broader scope than just Christians. They had contacts in Indonesia and many other parts of Asia long before, when the ICFTU had some or none. This is true in Vietnam. Then later the CVT, the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, acquired dual membership. It became a member of the ICFTU, too.

Q: Is that right? That sounds very unusual.

SENSER: It was very unusual. It took a little bit of persuading the ICFTU. I guess the United States -- the AFL/CIO did it. But anyway, it was done. The CVT was determined not to disown the people who gave them their support over these years, so they insisted on keeping that. Of course, it was beneficial to them, too, because there was a regional organization at that time called The Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unions -- BATU. The CVT shared that. Tran Quoc Buu was President. It gave him broader prestige and gave Vietnam broader prestige because he would explain the problem of democracy and freedom into a broader audience.

Q: Did the CVT have any special relationship with the French confederations?

SENSER: It did. I remember they came for some delegations. They went through evolutions too and I forget what the initials were. There was a Christian trade union federation. Not the CGT, of course.

Q: Or the socialists.

SENSER: Right. I think the FO -- is that what you mean?

Q: Inaudible.

SENSER: The FO came there too.

Q: Did they?

SENSER: Towards the -- several times came there and issued statements in support of the trade union movement and the hard times it was having, and got them some refugee assistance; stuff like that.

Q: But they didn't have any trade union assistance programs comparable to AAFLI?

SENSER: Well, not comparable because AAFLI's was (inaudible) manager, but I think there were trips to Europe and stuff like that. Less expensive operations. They probably handled small projects.

Q: Any specific things you'd like to comment on about the trade union movement or your activities in Vietnam?

SENSER: I think I did some papers on it at the time. I gave a speech once at a Labor Attaché Conference about the activist role of the Trade Union. Because mostly the feeling is you're a reporting officer and there is a different role there and I tried to conceptualize that. That's an important issue, especially in a country where we don't have parallel government that I know of anywhere. When you have a large U.S. stake in a country, the role of the embassy changes and so does the role of whoever covers labor.

Q: Was the Embassy sending clear signals that it wanted an effective trade union movement?

SENSER: Oh yeah.

Q: Even though these trade unions might want to negotiate with some of the contractors that were there?

SENSER: Yeah, but you see, that wasn't a big issue because the CVT -- the left would say it was housebroken -- in a sense that they realized there was a war on. They would keep their efforts within the context of the existing situation, so they were not wild, except this sort of thing would happen occasionally. The Air America employees organized and the manager refused to meet with them. There was a Mission Council meeting on this and I was doing the job of settling the strike.

Q: How'd you do it?

SENSER: Well, it was really very simple. I said, "You guys should meet with 'em." The CIA, who was in charge of the airline, some of their people there who were mad at me, pissed off at me, but he did and the strike ended.

Q: Did you reach settlement?

SENSER: Very often it's recognition. One of the things you learn, from my experience in the field, is very often money is almost a side issue. It becomes a symbol of something, but it's basically that somebody is there to talk with you to solve problems, which may include money, but often does not. Anyway, the crisis passed. They had some kind of working relationship. Whatever happened later, I'm not sure.

The interesting thing is, it sort of struck me, as part of the Embassy's relationship, it had different styles of management. Under Phil Habib, he was there for only a short time during my time, maybe seven months. During that period, I appeared four or five times before the Mission council to brief them; to make a recommendation on something or other, like give the employees severance pay that later became, that was not the issue at that time. Phil would have me do their job. After he left, I never appeared. (Laughter) It was just a different style of managers.

Q: Who succeeded?

SENSER: Oh, I forget. There were a whole bunch of them. Calhoun. But it was just a different style of manager. I remember Phil: basically if he had trust in you, he never looked at drafts. He didn't have time to look at drafts. What you did, you prepared a final message and you took it up to Phil, and he might be on the telephone. He would glance at it and he'd sign off while he was talking. So he had confidence in you to do your job. Probably a lot of other embassy managers have too much time on their hands. Therefore, they take over the jobs of their underlings. But Phil had a completely different management style. One of the things that made him a great leader.

Q: He was generally pro-labor too, wasn't he?

SENSER: Yeah. And it showed. He understood the working world. I remember (inaudible) "they're using (inaudible) on the picket line." Phil would say, "Listen, whenever you have a strike, there's going to be some pushing around!" It just undercut the whole thing. The issue was not real in the first place and plus, he understood it. It was not on the table any more. It's a question of looking at the real world, as opposed to being pro-labor or anti-something. So he understood the real world.

Q: Did you feel you had a good sense of the grassroots issues in Vietnam?

SENSER: Well, it's pretty hard. There's just so much time you had to, I could say "yes," but the true answer is "no."

Q: Were there other leaders there like Phil Habib who seemed to understand the importance of labor relations?

SENSER: Well, Phil stands out. Of course, he was there with

Q: Ellsworth Bunker?

SENSER: No. The New Englander.

Q: Lodge. Henry Cabot Lodge.

SENSER: He was there with Henry Cabot Lodge. So you had a different kind of ballgame. On the other hand, he ran a different ballgame, too. You can't just say it's because he had Lodge as Ambassador. So I think it would be interesting to -- if someone wanted to write about it, as opposed to just collecting a lot of data -- look at the American experience in Vietnam, not from the point of view of whether they were for it or against it, without any political blinders, but just say, "Well, how did it function?" And to try to do an objective analysis. Of course, the Labor Attaché function was only a small part of that, but it's the question of the <u>whole</u> thing.

Q: The effectiveness of the effort.

SENSER: To look at it as a management issue. A structural thing. You know, how did we attempt to cope with this challenge. Leave aside whether it was worthwhile coping, although that would have to be somewhere (inaudible) because the skepticism was built in, careerism that was built into that whole system. You have to take that into account.

Q: How so careerism?

SENSER: Because you got your ticket punched in Vietnam. One lure that was held out to me in coming back to Vietnam was that I would qualify as being an Ambassador. I kind of laughed at that. And some of them did, of course.

Q: Did it work out?

SENSER: Yeah, sure. (Laughter) Careerism is one of the sicknesses of the Foreign Service. Where you're always kissing ass because you want to move up. That's done in subtle ways, obviously. But it certainly was true of the military. It was one sign of lack of commitment to the goal, which again whether it was worthwhile or not is a separate question.

Q: So you're really talking about the incentive system within the Career Service.

SENSER: Yeah, and the aspirations of people. This is one of the problems all over the world. No, I think it's peculiar to the United States because there are so many opportunities here. My college teacher would say, "There's this tremendous push for vertical development, to climb up, upward mobility." There's a great emphasis on the pyramid system in the Foreign Service, which is one of its problems. He'd say, "What about horizontal development? Where you basically develop your skills and experience in a certain way." As they do in corporations, generally. You don't have the system, I don't think, in General Motors, General Electric, too, have up and out, which is an upward mobility designed system. So it's a system which is designed for, I'd say, careers. Basically, the primary incentive is not so much service, although I'm not saying people don't have that motivation, but it is to improve your lot in the Foreign Service.

Q: Who made these promises? Were these promises made by Personnel officials or within the Labor Attaché program?

SENSER: It's the sort of thing you know. It was made by a senior official. I forget his name. It was just a casual conversation. The sort of thing thrown in. This was not, I guess I may have used the term "lure." That was not a big factor in our conversation in my desire to return. At that time, I was already divorced or almost divorced, so I wanted to break away from the normal path anyway.

Q: Any other observations you'd like to make about your experience in Vietnam?

SENSER: No.

Q: *After Vietnam, where were you assigned?*

SENSER: One of the reasons my tour seemed so long in Vietnam, between my tours there I was also Regional Labor Advisor. Between one of those tours, I forget which one, in Washington.

Q: You were stationed in Washington.

SENSER: I was stationed in Washington and I once took a tour around which included a stop in Vietnam. So when I left Vietnam the last time (you have it for '73 and I think that's right), I went back to the region. In fact, I was in the Regional Labor Advisor job three times.

Q: This was for the Far East.

SENSER: For East Asia. By that time, I think it was called the East Asia Bureau. For (inaudible) I was in that job and I returned to that job. Dale Good, who was not only Director of Labor Affairs for AID and also the SIL, needed somebody to work in the AID slot.

Q: Special Assistant to the Secretary for International Labor Affairs.

SENSER: At that time, there was an AID Labor Office. (Inaudible) All of 13 people in it.

Q: Is that right?

SENSER: Yeah. It was quite an operation.

Q: What were your main responsibilities as the AID person?

SENSER: To be honest about it, it was to ease out some people who were there too long and weren't doing anything. One guy used to come in in the morning -- I don't know whether he was 73 or 83 years old. He used to come into the office in the morning, close the door and read the New York Times until noon. Then he'd open his door and have some unspecified duties. So I figured I'd give him some work to do, and he quit. (Laughter)

Q: So that was your function -- helping to reduce the office gracefully.

SENSER: Well, it made me -- people looked at me with great suspicion. Later on, somebody else-AID -- killed off the whole office. But they had a lot of dead weight in it.

Q: This would have been around '75 or?

SENSER: That was after '73.

Q: After '73.

SENSER: That's right, because I was in the EARA job -- East Asia Regional Affairs Office. Then when this job opened up, they had me switched into AID again -- EAD detail. From that job is when I went to USEC for four years.

Q: I see. This would have been 19

SENSER: I had four years in Brussels again. The second time I was in Brussels. By this time, the job

Q: '76.

SENSER: It was already '76. Yeah.

Q: Until about 1980?

SENSER: Yeah. That makes sense.

Q: You want to describe your duties at USEC during that period? Late '70's?

SENSER: Again, it covered, you might say, two worlds. By that time, the ICFT job had moved into USEC. The international labor job, which included WSAIL(?) by the way. But you also had responsibility for the EC. Deane Hinton was the Ambassador. He was a tough taskmaster and his wife followed social affairs. I remember one of the issues with President Carter, he was interested in worker rights issues. So there was a delegation from the Labor Department. Howard Samuel was there. Brian Turner. So we tried to get some interest. As usual, as often happens in diplomatic circles, people don't really disagree with you, but you don't score anything.

Q: You get white(?) silence?

SENSER: Well, you get nominal support. The nice, friendly grunts.

Q: This was during the period when human rights were first considered major foreign policy issues.

SENSER: Right. Anyway, that was one of the issues that was on the horizon.

Q: The question was expanding human rights to worker rights.

SENSER: Yeah. At that time, it was called MILS -- Minimum International Labor Standards, I think. The acronyms have gone through something of an evolution.

So I followed that. I followed women's rights, what was happening with women. I wrote an airgram on that. A long airgram, which actually I still have upstairs, on women's rights in Europe as seen through the periscope of the EC. That was our filter. That was our channel. Luxembourg was another headquarters, so we had to go there occasionally.

One of the noteworthy things during that particular tour was the Canadian Labor Attaché -- I had a very good relationship with him, McNamara, Mike -- and the two of us, mostly him, but there were two of us to some extent. We kept a very close watch on issues. As a team, we traded information.

Q: This was during the time when there was quite a bit of interest in North/South issues in the Common Market?

SENSER: That was part of it. In general, there were three countries who had similar interests in what was going on. We were not a member and neither was Canada. But the three of us pooled our talent. We'd get together a lot. Oh yes, there was also a Norwegian, or Scandinavian country -- a woman. So there were four of us who had a great interest in what the EC was or was not doing in what they called social affairs, which means different things.

Q: You want to characterize the definition of social affairs in this context?

SENSER: It's not just "social affairs." Oh yeah, social partners. We don't use that in the United States. And, of course, since it is used in English language publications in Europe, if you are quoting you use that term. I don't know whether I used it somewhere in an article, but social partners are people who dance together. That's the image. If you had to think of it, a social partner is somebody who is dancing or has a date together. Those are social partners. Of course, in Europe, when you really pin it down -- the most important element is the relationship between workers and employers. And even more specifically, the relationship between the organization of the workers and the organization of employers. Not just the structure. Not just the bureaucracy, but that concept is very deeply ingrained in much of Europe. It may be eroding now for various reasons; maybe not, I don't know, but that is a tremendous difference from the United States, where if there is any partnership, it's either a former, a divorced relationship, or it never existed at all. It's considered illegitimate.

Q: But in the European context, it's considered the natural order of things.

SENSER: Yeah. Correct.

Q: There's no questioning whether there's legitimacy for the trade unions.

SENSER: Right. People wonder why there's such an adversarial relationship, employers will say, "Why is there such an adversarial relationship?" Because that's the way it is. George Meany used to say, "It takes two to tango," using the social partnership. If the other side doesn't want to tango, you can't tango.

Q: It takes two to fight as well.

SENSER: That's right. Where do you want to go from here?

Q: The EC. Were there other issues you followed besides the social affairs issues and the ICFTU?

SENSER: I'm a student of bureaucracy. I took a course or two on it, and what's interesting to me are all the perks the EC bureaucracy has gotten itself. I think it's true of other international organizations too. Individual governments would never give certain benefits to its own people; certain perks, salaries and so on, but somehow, when you get nine countries or a hundred countries together, their bureaucracies manage to swing deals with themselves that they couldn't in their own country. Or any of their own countries. Now they might be at this piece or that piece, but somehow all these pieces are added together. I think it helps create a distance, social and otherwise (using social in a different sense), between the people who make more of the decisions and the decisions for whom they are made. Anyway, that's sort of incidental. I was just amazed by how well off the

EC bureaucracy is. Is envy a part of this reaction or not? But it just was fabulous!

Q: It's the tax-free salaries that always got me.

SENSER: Yeah. Even the duty-free wine. The liquor and so on, which was even more accessible for the Embassy, and that was a terrible sin. (Laughter)

Q: So you were there, then till 1980?

SENSER: Yeah. And then I moved on to Germany.

Q: You became the Labor Counselor in Bonn in 1980?

SENSER: Right.

Q: And how long were you there in Bonn?

SENSER: For that I had to learn some German. There was a spell in there when I took 18 weeks, or whatever it was, of German. I had to become familiar with German because I had a -- obviously as a child, you're speaking a child language -- I didn't know the vocabulary and so on. So it took me quite a while to work on my German, even when I was there.

Q: But you still had a basis from your experience?

SENSER: I could handle German pronunciation much easier than someone who had to start from scratch, but I can't say that when I went to my first DG convention I understood everything that was going on. It's not true. A lot of vocabulary, a lot of speed. Anyway, we enjoyed our tour in Germany.

Q: What were the main issues that you followed while you were there?

SENSER: We tried to follow the labor/management, the whole question of employment. One big issue at the time, and it was something the Embassy had to cope with, but it was one of those dilemmas that I think arise in the modern world and the Foreign Service. This is a time of the replacement of the Pershing Missiles in Germany. I never got any instructions that it was my job to sell the DGB that this was a good idea. The DGB was against it. I fed it information and so on. But there were some people who came from out of nowhere, from out of Washington with an agenda. We were grilled on what are we doing to promote the placement of the missiles? I forget all the jargon that was connected with it and how urgent it was and so on. It was a big issue. The merits of it -- put that aside. It was one of those things that -- certainly at my level -- we were not prepared to cope with. We had no clear mandate, no training, no guidance. If there was any guidance, it was unspoken. So, that was one issue, but I didn't score any points.

Q: Did the trade unions raise it with you?

SENSER: No, they just had demonstrations against it.

Q: *And at their trade union conventions, they'd have resolutions against it?*

SENSER: I remember the demonstrations and the speeches and so on. So it was a lost cause with the trade unions. One of the guys I thought was being the most sympathetic with the American point of view, turned out later to have been an East German spy.

Q: Is that right? Who was that?

SENSER: Somebody on the DGB staff. Somebody told me he was an East German spy, and I wouldn't be surprised. I don't remember his name. It's somewhere in the record. They told me another guy that the Embassy over the years had this relationship with was a courier for the East Germans. This was true, by the way, (inaudible) the Economic Section loved him. He stayed on. He worked for the North Vietnamese cause he was one of them. But this gets back to a more general point that I think is worth covering because it is a theme you hear. The idea is that we have to have good relations, and it sometimes (inaudible) with governments. This came up after the Foreign Service again with Malaysia. I remember an Embassy employee saying, "My job here is to have good relationships, to build good relationships in Malaysia." Well, you could have good relationships with Hitler! That's not the issue! I mean, to be nice to them and them nice to you, okay fine, but that's not your purpose! So I think we get besieged by people who wear the nice clothes, and say the right things, and who knows who they're working for. Certainly I've run into cases where people were working for the enemy and they had the best contacts with them.

Q: They were cultivating you.

SENSER: They were trying to find out what I was up to and what the United States was up to. And this guy would distribute my material, come to think of it. We had a labor packet and so on. He would eat it up. It was USIA material that was sent out as a packet borrowed by the Labor Department. He would eat it up. He was sending it on to Berlin, I guess.

Q: East Berlin.

SENSER: Yeah, East Berlin. So I think if you venture -- people say you've got to have good relations with China. What do you mean -- kissing China's ass? I mean, China's doing whatever it wants and we're so nervous we want to have good relations with China. That is (inaudible) the superficiality of things. What do we want to have relations about and for what purpose? We're subsidizing China's army; it seems crazy to me.

Q: We subsidize China's Army?

SENSER: Of course.

Q: They're exporting approximately $35 billion, aren't they, to us?

SENSER: And how many military establishments that Garten, the Secretary of Commerce, had in his testimony of how many -- and I have it somewhere, I forget the number -- of how many military factories are producing for the United States? And high tech stuff; not shoe laces. Not sneakers.

Q: Not T-shirts.

SENSER: Maybe some T-shirts. But anyway, it's low value added stuff. But, you know, as long as it builds good will! (Inaudible) was ready to build up the German military, they're our aircraft industry. Of course, for good purposes.

Q: The point is that good will isn't enough. There has to be some purpose served, some principle observed in the process.

SENSER: Yeah. The trouble is we think that foreign policy is there as a, and everybody agrees on that, what is the U.S. interest? Like it's handed down from God or the President. It's not true. It's more complicated. That's why they have trouble coping with human rights issues because it doesn't fit into judicial mold. It doesn't promote good relations very well. That's a bigger issue, because the real issue that has concerned me is not just what is the purpose of the Labor Attaché, but what is the function of the Foreign Service? What is the nature of foreign policy and so on? And the "work" of the Labor Attaché or people like Labor? These are the bigger questions which interact elsewhere and with the Labor Attaché. Those, I think, are still very fuzzy. And I guess always will be because there is no final answer. But I think there are better answers. You saw the speech I gave. This was sort of the beginning (inaudible). There are some ideas in there that refer to this.

Q: Anyhow, on your Bonn assignment, when did you conclude?

SENSER: Well, the tour was over and

Q: About 1984 or something?

SENSER: '83. Early '83 because I was not promoted that year, so under the old up and out, I was the first out, and thank God I was.

Q: And you retired then in 1983?

SENSER: Yeah, I would have been booted out if I hadn't retired. But it was a blessing because I had some things -- on a steady job you have, you're a prisoner of certain

categories -- and this enabled me to grow and use some of the things I had learned.

Q: What did you do then after you retired from the Foreign Service? Did you start working then immediately at the Asian American Free Labor Institute?

SENSER: Yeah. When they looked at my background, at least in terms of foreign -- well, almost in anything -- what I knew about most was Asian labor. And also, it's useful to know the actors and the organizations. So, one time when I was on home leave, I got what I later realized was really an overture from Morris Paladino, the Executive Director of AAFLI. I think it was because someone else prompted him. They thought I could qualify for an opening. But anyway, it was a period when I had some kind of an undiagnosed illness. I was sort of low key. Like I had an infection, or something. Anyway, I didn't pick it up. I'm sorry I didn't. So I had this knowledge of AAFLI. I was in at the creation. I went with Reverend Brown to see the Prime Minister at that time, Marshall Kie, Vice Marshall, to get permission, with Ellsworth Bunker, to open AAFLI. So I had this background. I went to see Morris about getting a job. I talked to him. I put out a net. Inquiries and so on. Telephone calls and letters. The quickest response I got, even before I left formally -- you had a period where you could job search -- even before that period ended, I had a firm offer from AAFLI. I worked, actually, on visitor programs for a while. Then I graduated beyond that. At that time, they had a big visitor program. I arrived one day in the AAFLI office. It was a Thursday. They said, "We have a group of Japanese coming in on Monday. Could you handle the program?"

Q: This would have been in 198

SENSER: 1983.

Q: You worked for AAFLI from 1983 until the present?

SENSER: Yes and no. The first year, I was at AAFLI on a contract basis. I was not considered an employee, although I did everything as an employee except I didn't have the benefits of an employee. Then I became a formal employee. I forget whether it was after seven or eight years. I wanted to leave, and then I continued to be (inaudible, switching to new tape), sort of a transition into AAFLI. So it was natural to go into AAFLI.

So after seven or eight years, I again felt restless and wanted to do some other things. I went on a highly part-time basis, as a so-called consultant. Donahue, the Secretary of the Treasury, and Chuck Grey, who was by then the Executive Director, and or two other people were going to go to Hong Kong and Taiwan. I suggested to them -- I guess I was selling myself too, but it made sense -- "You've got to have an advance man. It's not like you're going to somebody who's there. You've got to have somebody to set up the appointment and so on." Then it occurred to me, "Hey, if I go overseas as a consultant, I have a completely different relationship." Anyway, the long and short of it was I was working for AAFLI there for a while, for quite a few weeks full-time.

Q: In Hong Kong.

SENSER: No, even before going to Hong Kong. Full-time. I said, "Hey, this doesn't make sense, especially since I'm going overseas for three weeks. I just want to have the same protection as an ordinary employee." So I went on the payroll. They completely said yes. Hobson(?) had periodically made jokes about how many times I'd retired from previous jobs, including AAFLI, and then went on the payroll. So I went on again and then by mutual consent, probably because of AAFLI's financial problems, I went on a three-day week consultancy and now I've gotten down to a minimal, depending on what I want to do and what they want me to do and so on. So it did turn out that it was quite useful for somebody to be the advance man in those countries because we had good visits in both places and good contacts. Another interesting thing -- one of the things that AAFLI has developed, probably because a number of people, including myself, is not just to look at national centers. Again, the whole idea of being a prisoner of a certain category inflicts every organization. But to go outside, especially for example, in Taiwan, to have contact with people outside the CFL -- the Confederation of Labor -- government supported. We had Donahue do that. Here he is, one of the top officials, having contacts with the opposition, "the non-official trade unions," and also NGO's. One of the things AAFLI has done over the years is gradually not just be trade union centered or even national trade union centered, but to reach out to (and they did this over a period of ten years) local unions who may or may not be in cahoots with the national leadership, but also people outside of the trade union movement. That took quite a bit of wrenching.

Q: When did this start?

SENSER: Oh, it sort of evolved. But it was the same kinds of things that the State Department has problems with. How do you deal with the opposition? How do you deal with the trade unions, say, in Korea, who are not with the FKTU? It's a big issue -- how you do it and how you don't do it. But anyway, in this particular case, the opposition, what is the CFO going to do if we do this? So I call them. I'm going to go and see one of these priests who was persona non grata, for a while he was in trouble with the government. So we don't see him. I'm going to tell them I'm going to see him. I'm not going to sneak around! That's what Donohue did, too. He didn't sneak around.

Q: This was the early '90's -- '91 and '92?

SENSER: Let's see, what year was it? It must have been '91. Yeah.

Q: Because that represents quite a departure from AAFLI's earlier with the accepted

SENSER: I figure it probably only happened for many other reasons, but I think this is a problem of every kind of organization. You become a prisoner of a certain concept more than a policy. Anyway, AAFLI, this happened for many reasons. Many good people in Hong Kong we had contact with. Talk about the State Department. When I traveled, I

often stopped in Hong Kong. People thought, "Oh, you're going to buy a suit." I'm not going to buy a suit. (Laughter) What I did, I had contact with some of the Christian groups there. They had headquarters in a building on Pekin Road; they didn't bow to Beijing the way we did. But they just kept it. This is the Hong Kong government.

Q: The late '90's.

SENSER: Right. So I had their address and I went there. A lot of those Hong Kong buildings have dinky elevators and the signs are vague. Anyway, I discovered this -- I located the headquarters of this Hong Kong group. There are about ten organizations, all of them clustered together within two floors. There is a women's group which is still there and so on. Anyway, somehow or other this came up, somehow the State Department found out about it and asked the Consulate there to do a report on this particular union. So they came back and they can't find it. I know they had a hard time finding it. First of all, they had to go across the river, take a ferry boat across the river. That can be a psychological barrier. I know that. Anyway, they're in the financial district and this is (inaudible). They couldn't find it. They said it didn't exist.

Q: This was a trade union for Hong Kong?

SENSER: Yeah, it was one of the organizations that was striving for life. Now, everybody knows them. Me Shuk Yan came out of that whole operation. He was there at that time when I was there. When I was there, he was out of the office. The Consulate knew nothing about it and when they asked Washington to find out something about it, they couldn't find it. Well, I know why you'd have difficulty finding it, because the signs are not that clear. You have to look very carefully. And I don't know if they had exactly the same name as their official name at that time.

Q: Was this in the human rights, worker rights context as well?

SENSER: It must have been.

Q: Did these groups have contact with mainline, mainstream

SENSER: I guess that must have been the thing because they were reporting things out of China. I don't remember the chain of circumstances that got the State Department interested. They had no contact with them earlier.

Q: Would you like to describe your special interest in worker rights and human rights issues and how that developed with AAFLI? I know you've spent a lot of your time on worker rights in China.

SENSER: Actually, I was interested in worker rights before I came to the State Department. In my work in Chicago in this organization -- the Catholic Labor Alliance -- I would deal with foreign visitors and others and write up articles. I had an article on the

president of Tanganyika?

Q: Tanganyika. Julius Nyerere?

SENSER: Julius Nyerere. We had him over for dinner. Anyway, I was involved in these kinds of things, including trade unions. Julius was not a trade unionist, but I was interested in the rights of people in other countries for a long time, so it was sort of a natural.

Q: This day is Friday, June 16, 1995. This is Part Two of an interview with Robert Senser. During our first part, we covered the chronological development of his career and we decided to do a second session on worker rights and human rights issues starting with the early influences and going up to his present work. Start with your early experiences in Chicago and with the Catholic newspaper you worked on.

SENSER: Oh, yeah.

Q: In an earlier part of the interview, you saw a development throughout your life that has focused on the worker rights issues. Some of the things that helped you in your understanding of the importance of human rights.

SENSER: In my reporting and editing there, I did have a lot of reason to concentrate on people. I think a problem about human rights is that it can become an abstraction; so both in that job and some previous ones, I basically was driven by myself and by others to try to understand the situation of real life people. Interviews with them, instead of having abstractions, say, on factory life. I conducted a series of interviews without a tape recorder, unfortunately, with men and women who worked in factories. At that time, there was a theory in Catholic circles -- some Catholic circles, small circles -- that factory work was intrinsically dehumanizing. My boss didn't want to say anything and asked me to talk to factory workers. Then we got a much more nuanced picture. Many problems in factory work, but with the union and with other situations, I found people who actually liked to work in a factory.

Q: This was the Catholic Workers' Alliance?

SENSER: No, it was called at that time the Catholic Labor Alliance. We published a newspaper, a monthly tabloid which helped with these kinds of issues. So, I got into the discussion of actual women and men who were in their own (inaudible) life situation. For example, when a black person was burned out of his home in Berwyn, I talked to him. Did an interview with him, and got an understanding of the actual situation he faced. It turned out that this guy was not as bitter as you'd expect to be. He said that this episode, of which he was a victim, actually some good came out of it because it made people in the suburbs aware of the problem of racism.

Q: This was clearly a racial incident?

SENSER: Oh, yeah. Sure. It was clearly one. It was in a town that was all white. As I recall, it was Berwyn, Illinois. This gave me a perspective not to confine myself to abstractions. Because I think that even the concept of human rights to go further down the pike today, is often such an abstraction that people turned against it and they don't know what it means. Whereas it means a lot of very specific things that happen to people; whether they're beaten out of a job for a minor offense or hit with baseball bats because they joined a union in Bangladesh, or Chicago, for that matter. This is the reality and the abstraction of, say, harassment or discrimination that does not come across to people except as an abstraction unless it has some flesh and blood. So I've tried to follow that method in various types of work. By talking to actual people who are in the thick of things, one gets an understanding that you can't get, say, just by reading the newspaper.

Q: What kinds of articles did you do for the Catholic Labor Alliance Newspaper?

SENSER: I handled every issue as a whole.

Q: (Inaudible) as a main theme?

SENSER: Oh no, no, no. I think if it had any main theme, it wasn't 50 percent of the main theme, but it was the theme that would come out maybe in 20 or 30 percent of an average issue. It would be the importance of organizations to advance and protect people's rights -- in this case, unions. I have interviews with union leaders. I went to conventions and talked to people at conventions. I was at the founding convention of the AFL/CIO in 1955, for example. Talked to Jimmy Hoffa on the convention floor. I went up to him -- in many ways I was still a kid -- and I said to him, "Mr. Hoffa, I'd like to interview you sometime." And he said, "About what?!" He said it in such an aggressive way that I backed off and didn't continue the conversation. (Laughter) He scared me.

Q: You were intimidated by him.

SENSER: To put it mildly. In this job, I also went to Mexico City and went to the founding convention of ORET(?) George Meany, who was then the Secretary/Treasurer of the AFL/CIO, was there and other miner workers' leaders and steel workers. Cubans were there packing guns, visibly poking out from their coat jackets. It enabled me to see various aspects of life, even before I got into the Foreign Service. I did an article, maybe more than one article, for work, but at that time I did a lot of freelancing too, so I did an article for the CIO News. I still have it upstairs. On the founding of the regional organizations of the ICFTU. I did one for the AFL weekly news service.

Q: Let's see, that would have been in the early '50's, right? 1952 or so?

SENSER: Yeah.

Q: Did you meet our Labor Attaché, Vince Lipanski, at that time?

SENSER: No, I didn't. I probably should have. He probably was around. But I wasn't plugged in enough to have the wisdom of doing that. I basically went as a reporter and met as many people as possible. This gave me a national perspective, too, an international perspective. So I had friends both in the AFL at that time and the CIO. I covered the SEAL strike. Interviewed Phil Murray and George Meany on various occasions, so I got a sense of these leaders. It was quite a privilege to see them in action and to interview them on various occasions.

Q: Was the Catholic Labor Alliance an organization under the Archdiocese of Chicago?

SENSER: Well, yes and no. It was pretty independent. We were listed in the Catholic Directory in order to have the organization not have to pay some of the taxes that were involved in a commercial enterprise. But it was pretty independent. Nobody looked over our shoulder.

Q: But it was sanctioned by the Church?

SENSER: Approved, yeah. But then there was a whole network of organizations at that time. Maybe still is, of organizations that were Catholic inspired but not, you know, it wasn't like an official arm like say the marriage court, or even the school system. The school system was directly a part of the apparatus. We were much more loose than that. We were sort of an umbrella, doing our own thing.

Q: But it was pro-Labor?

SENSER: Yes. At that time, there were quite a few labor schools. Catholic parishes ran labor schools. Bishop Shield had a school of social studies downtown. This was a large network of organizations that were interested in various social things -- race relations, housing. I forget whether I mentioned it last time, but a priest who was our chaplain wrote them, a whole series of articles which I was looking at the other day, criticizing the way that public housing was built in Chicago. Just lambasting what we call skyscraper housing, saying they were inhuman and so on. Now, they're finally getting around to thinking, to agreeing with the committee, the Housing Authority. Their rebuttal was, "Well, we've got to get the people some kind of housing." It was shortsighted and wasteful and dehumanizing. Belatedly, even long before this, the city is paying the price and people are paying the price. So that was the sort of thing we were involved in. We would argue in favor of some kind of public assistance in housing because the housing market itself, the private industries were not satisfying the need for housing for poor people. That was very evident at the time and is very evident now. If you look at the kind of housing being constructed, it is all in the suburban area which is basically for people who have two incomes. It's luxury housing. This house is a semi-luxury house compared to the income of a good part of the population. I don't know whether it's a third, but the housing is being built for the upper classes of people; the top 50 percent of the country. The housing for people in the upper ten percent is driving up the cost of the other. The

competition for that is driving it up. So those issues are still with us and are with us in a more dramatic form.

Q: Did the Catholic Church work through specific unions?

SENSER: No. Of course, in Europe there were Catholic unions. There was a Protestant group in Michigan that for a while was trying to organize their own Protestant unions, but never got anywhere. We argued against it. Just like if we ideologically opposed a Catholic party or any kind of a stratification of that sort. That certainly was true of unions. I'm not saying that the union structure in the United States is the only viable one. We know there are different variations of it, but it's inappropriate to divide the unions according to religion, that's for sure.

Q: Now, your worker rights/human rights focus. Did you take that, then, into the Foreign Service?

SENSER: Yeah. I didn't sit down and say to myself, "I've got this cause and I'm going to carry it through my career." It was sort of in my blood and that's one reason I was happy to work as a Labor Attaché. Because that was and is one of the functions of a Labor Attaché to do that, depending on the setting they're in. So I felt very much at home right off in the Foreign Service because of the work I had to do. It seemed to be an extension of the work I was already doing -- writing, editing, talking to workers, talking to business people too. Because in Chicago we interviewed business people too. So I was doing the same thing, and felt very much at home.

Q: And the workers' right focus, did you find that at your overseas assignments in places like Brussels?

SENSER: In Belgium, life was structured and is in a more advanced way for the rights of ordinary people than it was and is in the United States. It wasn't a question of trying to show how bad things were. You would if you went into a country where there were widespread human rights oppressions, but I think because I also tried to cover the ICFTU, and that's where a lot of the issues of worker rights came into the fore more than perhaps covering Belgium.

Q: What kinds of issues did you encounter in the ICFTU context?

SENSER: In the ICFTU when I was there, Africa was a big issue. So the trade union movement in Africa was an issue. I forget to what extent South Africa was already. In my two tours in Belgium, one at the Embassy and one at the Mission, one interesting international issue was because of the geo-political situation there (I'm talking like a Foreign Service Officer), because of the world of politics at that time, and the influence of the Soviet Union in international organizations. It was difficult at that time, as the General Secretary of the ICF told me, that the only human rights issue, the only countries that could be criticized for human rights were Chile and South Africa. Everything else

was off the table.

Q: Not even Eastern Europe?

SENSER: No! Hell, no! Especially not Eastern Europe because that was a different system. I mean, the ICFTU (I want to be careful not to exaggerate it) was crippled on human rights issues. Irving Brown and American labor -- in fact, that was one of the reasons -- why the AFL/CIO left for a while. So that was one of the tensions. The only worker right sins committed that were permitted to be criticized internationally were certain countries and they happened to be countries that had better relations with the United States than the Soviet Union. So there was always a lot of tension on that issue and that played itself out in different ways in the ILO and the ICFTU. I can't say that I was in any way a major player on that issue. The players on that issue would be the people like Irving Brown and George Meany and others -- Rudy Falcol -- who were active from the AFL/CIO -- had assignments -- in that area. They would operate in Geneva, Brussels, NATO, (inaudible).

Q: How about your tour in Algeria? That was a pretty tough regime at that time. Did you see any worker rights or human rights problems that you were involved in?

SENSER: The major problem there was to find out anything that was going on. The merest scrap of information. I had some contact with women's organizations. It was quite obvious -- I don't remember whether I reported on it or not -- the rights of women desperately needed upgrading. But my recollection is that simply to find out the barest bones of information about anything was tough because of the hostility of the regime.

Q: How about in Vietnam? Did you find human rights an issue there or worker rights? Or was the war situation a problem?

SENSER: One issue was the extent to which the United States Government and its contractors should rely on Koreans and Filipinos to work because we were wanting to have the support of the Korean government -- the South Korean government -- and the Philippines. We would make deals with them to hire their workers. That put them into competition with the Vietnamese. There were plenty of Vietnamese women and some men too, older men, who were in need of work, and were hired. So there was tension over what extent should we give more of a priority to the Vietnamese than we did to the Koreans. The wage issue came up.

Defoliation was an issue that I got involved in because, actually, it was a French rubber plantation owner who made a series of complaints. I recall going out with him, a military officer. There were some rules about how wide from the road you could destroy private property to make a secure passage. In other words, cut down rubber trees and other foliage. The military were a little over it, but they had followed the rules. But in general, I did get involved on the side of those people in the mission and within the military establishment who felt there was too much defoliation going on. When I left there I met

with one or two people and they asked me (inaudible). They said, "Any ideas on?" I said, "I think we're leaning too much on defoliation." It was Colby -- Ambassador Colby. He said, "Well, you're not the only one." So, I was involved in it, but I can't say -- except for certain issues -- we got involved in the whole issues of severance pay, for instance, for Vietnamese.

Q: But these were not worker rights so much as contracts, arbitration.

SENSER: Yeah, but when you fire people as we knew we had to at one point, the question was what is the decent thing when you're firing them? We got their severance pay up.

Q: Oh, really?

SENSER: The Economic Counselor -- I had his support -- Chuck Cooper. We gave people enough of a severance pay that even when they, the boat people, those Vietnamese who escaped either by boat or by air, could draw on that severance pay when they came to the United States.

Q: Oh, really?

SENSER: So it had an effect and it helped some of them make the transition in a better way than if they had to rely immediately on charity, which they had to anyway, or welfare or whatever. So those were sort of the pragmatic things.

Q: Back in Belgium or Germany were there worker rights issues?

SENSER: Germany has, and had then, a system of what they call co-determination. It's much different from the American model. The American model is built on confrontation and theirs is more of a spirit, built into the government, that we build into the society of cooperation between workers and respect for worker organizations and respect for manager organizations. So I did some reporting on that. It's a fascinating difference. For people who say in the United States, the American worker should cooperate more, I remember George Meany saying, "Well, it takes two to tango." In Germany, I was there only two years, but I did get into that issue.

The issue in Germany when I was there was the extent to which the Germans should support the United States attitude toward Poland and towards solidarity. Germans, however, were financially involved and the (inaudible) were involved financially with the existing order in Poland, so they were much less interested in putting a squeeze on the Polish government, Polish banks and so on because they had lent money to them. I remember Ambassador Burns and I had dinner with a Russian in his mansion, his house, with the head of the trade unions and the Ambassador brought this issue up. (Inaudible) said, "Well, you know, we've got to protect our investments over there."

Q: The head of the union said that?

SENSER: Right. So the conversation was in German. I thought I understood what he said in German, and I waited until Kristofferson, who was the International Affairs Director and (inaudible) interpreter, had it translated. We put that in a report and, of course, the DGB had a bank, and they had to act like bankers. Mysteriously, I got an $8,000 award before I left, from the Foreign Service. Maybe it was because of things like that. They gave out merit pay.

Where do we go from there?

Q: I think we're almost at the end of this tape, so we haven't talked about your AAFLI experiences which is.

SENSER: I think they haven't used their draconian laws to put people in jail simply on the word of the Prime Minister or the secret police. So it has elections. Politically it is in good shape. Economically, by economic growth, it's in good shape. And ordinary workers are increasing their income. But, in the plantation industry it has child labor. That has not been fully studied. The other area, which also is not studied, is the health and safety effects of the new chemicals and other modern processes in an industry like the electronics industry. There's a big mystery on this. In fact, even yesterday I was trying to get a report on the study of this, which I heard was made in California, about the effect on women and their rate of pregnancies and spontaneous abortions, because of the study on that I'm trying to get. Anyway, in Malaysia, there are not what I consider huge problems. There are a lot of mystery kinds of things, such as health and safety in modern industry. That's true in the United States and elsewhere too because there are so many new chemicals being introduced; we don't know their effect on health. The crucial issue in Malaysia was and is to what extent can a government intervene to prevent the workers from organizing in an industry like electronics. We documented by interviews with workers at the government and private employers and American employers (Motorola certainly is one of them, but they're not alone). It's hard to rank them, but two workers from Motorola came into the national union office (the MTUC) where I happened to be, and they wanted to get the union to organize the workers (inaudible). Why? "Well, we're being shortchanged in our pay." They're not starving, but they're not getting the kind of increases they're entitled to, and they wanted a union. Well, the MTUC, just like the AFL/CIO, does not as such, as a national headquarters, organize a union. The response of the union guys was, "Well, you guys gotta organize the union. You gotta set-up an organizing committee. You gotta join. You gotta organize yourself first. We can't go in there out of nowhere." They were staggered.

Q: There were no national unions in the electronics industry?

SENSER: That was forbidden.

Q: I see. They had only local unions?

SENSER: They permitted company unions. They call them in-house unions. If a union was organized in a plant, if it was not organized, let's say by the bookkeeper or by some other pre-arranged basis by the management, the executive would be fired. So these guys said very frankly and truthfully that if they did something like that, they'd be fired. The only answer to that was that's the risk they had to take. In some places, they had taken it and they paid the price. Some of them are still trying to get their jobs back. The best they could get when they were fired under Malaysian laws, which is a problem that transcends the union, the electronic industry, and exists throughout Asia and most countries and, to some extent, in the United States, is that if you get fired the best you can hope for is that you get an improved severance pay. But to get your job back in this situation, like these two guys, they knew the union could say, "Yeah, that's the way it is." Anyway, you could get a union started if there were enough of you, and then management becomes either pressured or convinced or persuaded, and the decent thing to do is to recognize the union. But under Malaysian law in practice and many other countries, including more and more places in the United States, management that wants to be "union free," is free to do whatever it wants to do.

Q: And there is no redress under the law?

SENSER: No. These guys to me dramatized the problem. They were scared. They said, "We can't risk everything." And that's true. They'd have to risk it. Some places, they're willing to risk everything. In Asia, some people are willing to die, and some people have died, been killed, because they were willing to risk everything. Usually it's people who don't have a family. But these guys had a family. So even in a situation of poverty, but quite a good deal of prosperity, people have found it impossible to do what they should have the right to do in a decent society which is to form an organization without basically economic capital punishment -- a loss of job. The other problem is, if they were fired for union activity, chances are they could not get a job elsewhere. They would be really punished. And that's what these guys felt. They couldn't pay that price. So there was no union organized. This is so because of a collaboration between foreign employers in the electronic industry and the government. It's a violation of human rights.

Q: As I recall, the AF of L pursued a GSP petition against the Malaysian government?

SENSER: Yeah, there were 12 or 13 petitions against the AFL/CIO and its affiliates and other human rights organizations that took this case and others to court and the long and short of it is that the court said the United States Government could do whatever it wants to do. On a GSP, the employers, the companies in effect, get a subsidy. They get duty free of these electronic products into the United States. Last year, the U.S. trade representatives told us -- I think it's written down somewhere -- that the employers benefitted throughout Asia and elsewhere to the tune of half a billion dollars in subsidies, which in the big picture doesn't amount to much, but the employers wanted it. And still want it, that kind of help. The people like Motorola and so on were the largest beneficiaries in the world of this kind of subsidy. And they wanted to retain it. The

AFL/CIO and others said that because of the violation of worker rights, including in the electronic industry, that subsidy should be withdrawn. That's supposed to improve the status of life in developing countries. Turns out they're going to now say, "Well, Malaysia is no longer a developing country." Its per capita income has reached high enough. They're saying they're going to take Malaysia off the list of beneficiary countries because of this economic status. But the lawsuit, and the normal bureaucratic procedure, they denied the AFL/CIO petition which asked the U.S. Trade Representative to withdraw this benefit, including for Japanese employers. Management got this benefit when they sent electronic goods and air conditioners into the United States.

Q: Made in Malaysia.

SENSER: Made in Malaysia. The lawsuit said the administration was not enforcing the law properly and, for one lawyer, it was a pro bono case because it's very expensive. It went up to District Court, too, and it went all of a sudden down. The courts decided, by a split majority, to allow the President to do whatever he wanted to do.

Q: This was after it had gone through the Executive Branch. I think there had been a time when we had pended Malaysia and did an investigation, and they promised to make changes that were withdrawn after the promises.

SENSER: At one point, they even had a cabinet meeting when the Prime Minister was out of town, in Australia or somewhere. They said the industry had profited enough, had developed enough, so they had nothing to fear from a union of electronic workers. They made this announcement publicly and the unions rejoiced. A few days later after the employers intervened, including American employers, they backed off.

Q: And after the GSP decision had been reached, as I recall.

SENSER: Yeah, I forget how the timing was. But Malaysia was off the hook. Well, it's just interesting to me that the general principle is that if you read the political rhetoric today and sometimes in the past, they say that we should get our snouts out of the Washington trough, and we should get Washington off our backs. The fact is when it comes to promoting American imports into the United States -- American companies and other companies -- that's being subsidized by the taxpayer, they are not following the market. They are getting subsidies from the taxpayer. When you do this work for a while and you know the facts, it gets rather discouraging because American corporate management wants to go into Vietnam, for example, or China, but they want the United States Government to ensure their risks. Well, wait a minute. This is supposed to be a market situation. Why should the U.S. Government ensure their risks?

Q: This would be under OPIC then?

SENSER: That also, in the law, has worker rights conditionality attached to it. And it has a separate procedure. So far they have not granted OPIC insurance to China or Vietnam,

but there are strong pressures to do that. So there's the insurance. They say this is self-financed. Well, then, privatize it! Why can't it be privatized? Get Washington off their backs! But oh, no, no, no, this shouldn't be privatized. They say it's self-financed, but I notice one of the proposals is to cut out a quarter billion dollar budget. Quarter billion dollars for OPIC! Well, wait a minute, I thought this was self-financed! I mean, there's the duplicity; the dishonesty that goes on is really staggering. So, if it's self-financed, the budget item is supposed to be cut.

Q: Do you want to go into some of your human rights, worker rights work with respect to China?

SENSER: Well, I was in China twice for several hours. I crossed over into Shenzhen Province with the Chinese language interpreter and I went to Lu Hei, which is another industrial area. All I can say was, yes, I was in China, but by and large the information we have on China is second hand. The startling thing about China is when you talk about civil society. It is very obvious the non-existence of a civil society in China. Not just trade unions, but churches are dominated by the party and so on. So, all I can say is, I've written about that in various ways. Written speeches about it for other people, wrote testimony about it.

Q: You also did a lot to develop the channels of communication from labor groups in China to Hong Kong.

SENSER: Yeah, to Hong Kong.

Q: I think that's of special interest.

SENSER: I think I've already said something about that, didn't I?

Q: I don't think we were on record at that time.

SENSER: Oh, really. I guess I ought to go to Indonesia. I stopped in Hong Kong and I had read in some obscure publication that there is a teacher's union. So I met (inaudible), who later became a member of Blenco, and through him met other people who were in the democratic movement but also were trying to support the establishment of trade unions in Vietnam. In my first trip there -- I forget the year -- I did a report on the fact that there were really two major trade unions at that time in Hong Kong. They were both highly political in this sense: one was pro-Taiwan and was funded by Taiwan and the other was the Federation of Trade Unions, which was pro-Beijing and which was really an arm of Beijing. There were people, including some Protestant group, funded in part, I think, by the World Council of Churches, which was trying to help workers get their rights established in Hong Kong. So Hong Kong is another of those places that has a free press and does not forbid trade unions, but in the real world that's not enough. Employers are still the most powerful force in economic life almost anywhere, you have to realize that. The workers will follow their employers for various reasons and will try not to

offend them. Hong Kong permitted trade unions to organize, but if you were fired there w*a*s no obligation on an employer to negotiate with the unions. If a union is allowed to exist without being given the support to function, it's meaningless. And this is the situation still in Hong Kong today. I don't think there is a single collective bargaining contract because employers don't have to.

Q: And the British didn't import any of their

SENSER: No, the British came down only in the last few on the political side. Were very slow in putting into some kind of practice, except for permitting freedom of the press and the worst violations, like torture and so on, did not go on. Even the TUC in Britain had almost no interest.

Q: And no contacts with the local

SENSER: Very little. (Inaudible) or make known in the labor community -- teacher's union and so on -- about it and gradually there's been growing interest in Hong Kong in the past few years. I've been back and forth from time to time, but nothing planned (inaudible). But Hong Kong is a very fascinating place. And the U.S. Congress is very much interested in the future of Hong Kong. I think what is understood now, more so than everything before, is that Hong Kong really cannot survive the way it is now. It's going to go downhill, except for those who make deals with the elite, unless it has the rule of law. And, finally, the rule of law is not just a question of laws or even of courts. It goes beyond that. The rule of law requires a civil society which creates pre-conditions of the law.

Q: Is that developing now in Hong Kong?

SENSER: Yeah, it is. I think the British, to some extent, have been trying to guarantee that. But, already, even the free press is being undermined. Gordoc and others are kowtowing to Beijing. The people who are in the position to make their deals with the new power structure after '97 will probably be okay, at least for a while; probably indefinitely. It's just like a speaker at our Heritage Foundation meeting Sunday. Somebody asked him, "Would you invest in China these days?" I forget the guy who spoke. He said, "Well, if you're a Fortune 500 entry company, fine, go ahead, because even if you lose, if you don't come out ahead in China, the company is in a strong enough position so you can take those losses. But you're probably safe because as a Fortune 500 company, you have enough clout in Washington so somebody's going to look out for your interest and pound the tables with the Ambassador or whatever and make sure. But if you're down in the pecking order, it's much riskier." I think that's an interesting analysis. I think that will apply in Hong Kong. For people who are not strong enough to weather a problem or who can't even prevent it because they don't have the political clout. From the outside, you can't protect the interests of thousands and thousands and thousands of entrepreneurs. The Chinese Australians were there, already in jail, and the Australian government is anxious enough -- there are two or three famous cases. They

have enough business interest of their own to promote that they're not going to risk those to get the Australian citizen out of jail. That is going to be the fate of people who are not properly connected.

Q: Are there other human rights issues in Asia you would like to mention?

SENSER: They're all over the place. I guess the fundamental one is that the situation in Asia is so integrated into the world economy now and into the American economy. The real issue is what can and what should the United States do when it's faced with human rights issues of various types, like Burma. That is a bad case. Where oil companies are involved already. What is the responsibility of the United States to say "no," to use its involvement, its clout, to change the situation? One answer you get is, "Well, the Japanese are doing it so why shouldn't we?" Now that doesn't rate very high in terms of a very principled response. That's, in effect, what many businesses -- and literally some businesses are saying. To me, they're using this standard of what the Japanese do in this case because it suits their interests. But for the Japanese the average worker's pay and the executive's pay is one to ten in Japan. And it's about 100 or even higher in the U.S.; it depends on who is measuring it. That standard does not apply. They don't want to follow the Japanese standard because that's not to their interest, but when it is in their interest, they want to use the Japanese as the model. Apart from the rationalizations and principles that are used, rightly or wrongly, it is an issue that can't be scoffed at. I think it's a question of build me an international consensus. A friend of mine works at NASA. He is impressed by how American initiative and resources were and are being mobilized to achieve certain objectives in outer space. Now there's a problem of cost, but at one time cost was no objective. So the question is are there certain issues in the world -- maybe child labor, it maybe some other issues, or it may be a certain country, whether it's Burma or China; I think it should be China because of the importance of China to the future of the world -- where there should not be a coalition, a mobilization of ideas. You say, well that's the way it is. The market should work this out and in the final analysis the economy of China will improve, and is improving gradually; at least it's improving for some people, and therefore over a period of time the invisible hand of the market will solve this problem for us. And that's the argument on the other side.

Q: The invisible hand will create human rights and worker rights?

SENSER: Right, gradually and over a period of time. I don't think that's true. Hitler used capitalism for his own purposes. Other dictators have used capitalism, the market, for their own purposes. It was not inevitable that Hitler would lose; it was very dicey for a while. Some people speculate, what would happen if Hitler had reached a compromise and they had been able to maintain a good chunk of Europe. Suppose they ran it the way they wanted it, which as a sovereign country they say they should, and they had perfected the manufacture of soap from concentration camps -- after all that's an internal affair -- but then they decided to trade on the world market? The super free traders say, "Well, over a period of time, maybe Germany might improve if they trade freely on the world market." That's kind of a gory example, I think. But in principle China is now exporting

the products -- and it's on video, and it's documented by their own document -- it's exporting forced labor products. People were condemned to prison with no court trial and they're forced to spend all or most of their lives in prison, sometimes it's for genuine crimes, but often it's not. But these products are going into the American market. That's an atrocity! So I would say China is worthwhile considering for mobilization of ideas -- resources, human, as going into outer space. Because, again, it's 1/4 of the world population and it's for their sake, and what they're going to do in China is going to affect all of Asia and even into the United States.

Q: How about Vietnam? Have you focused at all on worker rights in Vietnam in recent years?

SENSER: We did a report which was used by the Human Rights Commission on (inaudible) worker rights in Vietnam. Vietnam is sort of a little China in terms of its problems.

Q: Same kinds of problems?

SENSER: Same kinds of problems. Unfortunately, the press and human rights groups have not had the entry into Vietnam, except for what the Vietnamese want us to know. We don't have the same kind of documentation -- although on Sunday there's going to be a video on prison camps in Vietnam. It's possible to do it if you're willing to risk your life, as some people have in China, to enter prison camps and photograph people, you know, slave labor at work. So it's another case study of the challenge to U.S. foreign policy, which I think is drifting and is not being looked at the way it should be.

Q: Any other comments you'd like to make about the worker rights issues before we conclude?

SENSER: Well, one thing, it's not going to go away. Human rights issues, however you want to define it, are not going to go away, because first of all the abuses of human rights are going on and they're going to continue going on. Because it's in the interest of some regimes and some employers to permit them to go on, or to be actively involved in them or collaborating with them, so they're going on and they'll continue to go on. So the reality is out there. The other thing is there are many more means to know about the reality for various reasons, modern technology being one. Instantaneous communication of various types, so we know it's going on. Thirdly, there are people all over who will not accept the idea that. "The market is going to straighten all this out." There are human rights groups; there are refugees, as there were from the Soviet Union, who kept this issue alive, who arrived in the United States and said, "You cannot compromise on Poland, you cannot compromise on the Soviet Union," even when some people wanted to. There are enough people around -- maybe not enough -- who are saying the same thing, "We just can't accept Burma as a normal country. Or even China as a normal country. It's a rogue country. These are rogue countries. There may be an argument what we can do about it, but we've got to do something." So there is, you might say, a demand on the part of

refugees and others; human rights groups, people with different backgrounds. There are liberals and there are conservatives. I mean, if you look in the present Congress, a guy like Congressman Frank Wolf (R. Virginia) very articulate on China. So the communication makes an awareness among people. I don't think Wolf has any particular thing to gain personally. I don't think he has any relatives in China. But he's taken an active role on this issue He feels deeply about it because he knows it's a moral issue and it's an issue that he has a lot of facts on. So, I guess those are the three major reasons why it's not just going to go away. Worker rights and human rights are just so intermingled that they are really just one facet. The fourth reason, I'd say, the global economy is such that it's pulling us all together, not just in terms of instant communication -- the transfer of money and so on -- but we are involved. Even in Rwanda, we can say "Maybe we are giving them arms and we were involved by giving arms to both sides at one time in history, but basically we're not responsible for those hatreds and what is causing all that killing." What if we were supplying not only arms, but subsidizing the governments of both sides in one way or another, directly or indirectly by tariff subsidies and other things? What if we were giving them technical assistance in police work? You know, the whole bag of things that, the cooperation that's going on now with China. Military cooperation. I find that astounding. But let's say we were cooperating militarily with both sides -- sending military advisers. But in the global economy -- I think we're not doing that with Rwanda -- but we're doing that with other countries which are killing their own people and torturing their own people. Even in the days of the Soviet Union -- that's a thing I wanted to mention to you. I remember when I was with the State Department. I wasn't involved personally, but I read it in the New York Times. An American company was sending various types of police supplies to the KGB. Listening devices. I've been trying to find that. Motorola is supplying Chinese equipment to the KGB. It's what's in the (inaudible). They're embarrassed by it. They don't want to publicize it. Okay. But that's an involvement. You can't say, "Well, it's not our problem." So the global economy is getting us involved and we can't say we're not involved. We can say, "It makes no difference. We don't care as long as we're making a buck. Or somebody's making a buck." But there's a contradiction. So there's a lot of factors that are creating tensions where you no longer can say, "Well, that happened in Chin Sin Province and it has nothing to do with us." Well, it has something to do with us. We may be financing it. That's about it.

Q: Thank you very much, Bob, for the interview.

End of interview