

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

WILBUR I. WRIGHT SR.

*Interviewed by: Don Kienzle
Initial interview date: April 25, 1997
Copyright 2013 ADST*

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Wright.]

Q: Today is April 25, 1997. I am in the home of Mr. Wilbur Wright, and I have the great pleasure of interviewing him for the Labor Department Oral History Project. Thank you very much Wilbur for agreeing to participate in our project.

WRIGHT: Thank you, and it is a pleasure; and thank you for taking the trouble to come here.

Q: Can we begin with a little bit about your background, your family, and your education?

WRIGHT: Yes, I was born and raised in Detroit. I was the youngest of six children; I went to Detroit public schools. I had a technical high-school background in architecture, and I attended Highland Park Junior College for two years and spent one semester at Dennison University and then transferred to the University of Michigan. It was in junior college that I changed my career goal from architecture to political science. I was very active in student government in junior college, and in that role as a member of the student government, I met our United Nations Day speaker -- I was chairman of the UN Day program at the college. The speaker was a member of the US delegation to the UN at that time, a woman named Marie Colberger. I met her at the train station -- that's how people traveled in those days -- and drove her to the college. We talked along the way, and I took her to lunch, all prior to her giving the speech to the student body. In the course of it she asked me about myself and what my plans and intentions were. I told her that I was getting out of architecture and was looking at political science because that's where my interests lay. I had been active in a lot of civic organizations. Among other things, I had been president of something called the High School International Club which had been sponsored by the United Automobile Workers and the Detroit Public Libraries. I had been a participant in panels on Youth Looks at Books, and the High School International had been in a number of programs. It was not a very big program, but for me it was very influential in my thinking. The books we were assigned to read and then the panel discussion on WDET, which, at that time, was owned by the United Automobile Workers Union. There is a bumper sticker from WDET, the radio station, 101.9 in Detroit. This shows what a small world this is. A young man who is now working at that station in Detroit sent that bumper sticker to my daughter. My father had been a farmer but also a

businessman in Augusta, Georgia, whose business had been wiped out by infestation of the boll weevil. He was secretary of something called the Penny Savings Bank of Augusta, Georgia, and the bank held the mortgage on his dairy farm. He occupied himself running the farm and preparing the milk and delivering it to residents in Augusta. Interestingly, apparently his clientele were both black and white. I've never quite understood that being back in the 20's. There was an infestation of boll weevils that wiped out the cotton crop and, of course, a bank like that certainly the overwhelming majority of its investments were in cotton crops. When the cotton crops were eaten up, it had to liquidate.

Q: Small shareholders.

WRIGHT: Yes, small farmers. When they liquidated they held the mortgage on his farm, so they sold his farm. He went to Detroit and got a job in the Ford factory. As it happened, he went to Detroit in '29 and was hired in April or May and was laid off about November or December after the stock market failure. He didn't go back to work until I think about 1936. He was a man with five children. As the song says, the rich get rich, and the poor get children; so I was born.

Q: You were the last.

WRIGHT: Yes, I was born in 1932. He worked in the Ford factory from 1936 until he was retired in about '57-'58, something like that.

Q: Was he a member of The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) or active in the union?

WRIGHT: He was. He was kind of a dissident. They wanted him to be a committeeman. I think he might have been briefly a shop steward. He couldn't reconcile; here was a man who had been trained in business and had been a businessman with a concept of order. He had great difficulty reconciling himself to the discipline of the UAW. I can recall a group of men coming to the house to meet with my father. I asked my mother what this was about. Oh, they want to talk to him about running for committeeman in the union. I thought that was great, but they couldn't come to an agreement; so he didn't run.

Q: He did favor the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) side over the AFL (American Federation of Labor) side in the early struggles in the 30's?

WRIGHT: Well, yes, that's where he came down. I don't think he had any appreciation for the AFL. He, I think, felt a lot of differences with the Reuthers. I was very young; I think he felt that Reuther's control or influence was too great and not enough devolved upon the workers. It's my impression that was the crux of the difficulty. I think my father was more conservative than the CIO, the leadership of the UAW. My impressions derived from his having been in business. He had difficulty in seeing how much voice the worker should have in planning and running a company. He was a lifelong member of the UAW. Years later I became a member of the UAW. I worked first at a DeSoto plant.

Q: Was this before you graduated from the University of Michigan?

WRIGHT: Yes, while I was in college. In the summer of 1954 I worked at the DeSoto factory of the Chrysler Corporation. It's kind of funny to tell people I worked in a DeSoto plant because DeSotos are not made anymore. I became a union member. I think I was making \$1.65 an hour. The minimum wage at that time was about \$.65. A \$1.65 was fantastic. I recall there was the threat of a strike that summer. I remember being on lunch break, I worked on the afternoon shift. I was sitting in a part of the plant with another guy whom I really didn't know, but he worked near me. He was sitting there, and I asked him what he thought about the strike that was coming up. He really didn't want to talk about it. Well \$1.65 an hour really looks pretty good to me, why do you think they are pressing for more money? He said, "How long have you been here," and I told him. He said, "What did you do before you came?" I said, "I'm a student." He said, "How would you like to do this the rest of your life?"

Q: Ah. Bells ring and things fall into place.

WRIGHT: Scales fell from my eyes. The following summer I worked at the Lincoln Mercury plant in Wayne, Michigan. I also had a very close friend who is a friend to this day whose father was a committeeman at Chrysler. My friend and I used to sometimes listen in to conversations that his father had with other union people. That was a very useful education in addition to the things I was able to pick up through contact with the UAW. There was a commentator, one of the best I think of American life ever, named Guy Nunn who used to do radio broadcasts on WDET for the UAW. There was also an Edward P. Morgan. Guy Nunn, I don't know if he ever went national or broadcast outside of Detroit, but he did some really incisive commentary and also some investigative reporting. That's what we call it now. I can recall his talking about the repeated difficulties at the Hanford, Washington plant. This is back in the 50's, and saying that these are problems that are going to build up and be there forever.

Q: He was prophetic.

WRIGHT: He was. In a way with the information he had, it took a great insight to see and a great deal of courage to talk about it.

Q: Few people did back in those days. That was one of the hidden issues in America. There was all kinds of information, things to find, PR, things to worry about nuclear safety. Everything's under control.

WRIGHT: I remember him talking particularly about the problem with the water and the water supply and the threat. In fact, more than a threat, he alleged then that they were releasing polluted water into the public waterways. In effect, listening to Guy Nunn was an education in labor relations and labor policy.

Q: He got into the social issues that were relevant to working people.

WRIGHT: Exactly. This was a turning point in American labor life. It is interesting because it looks to me like many of those principles are under assault now. This was the time when Reuther was pressing for what he called then the guaranteed annual wage. He didn't get it of course. The pension plan was introduced into industry for the first time on a broad scale. Many people thought that was ridiculous. Pensions were for salaried, white-collar people, but the working man, the blue-collar worker, wasn't supposed to have a pension. It is like giving a miner a piece of paper to work with; it just isn't appropriate. Of course, they got that through, but a number of things that are taken for granted now were pioneered by the UAW.

Q: Did they pioneer the Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) back then?

WRIGHT: Yes, the cost of living. Again, that was thought to be outrageous; there was no basis for this whatsoever. I came to be a great admirer of the Reuthers. My father and I didn't agree about it.

Q: Unfortunately, Walter Reuther's life was cut short.

WRIGHT: Remember that there were two assassination attempts on Walter Reuther's life. It is interesting that these are forgotten and seem not to be a part of current thinking. Both were gun assaults. Someone shot through a window and missed him entirely. Quite by chance he happened to move just before the shot was fired. The second time I don't recall where he was, but it was a shotgun, and they hit him and they hit his brother Victor also. I don't know if you have met Victor.

Q: I know Victor Reuther quite well.

WRIGHT: He has one eye missing. That is from a shotgun pellet. Walter's arm was hit and disabled. In a way it is rather like Robert Dole. He always carried it a little bit cramped because of the damage to the muscle tissue and nerves to that arm. I was astounded -- digressing for just a moment, I visited Victor about two years ago -- I was astounded to hear him say that his nephew, one of Walter's daughters I believe it was, one of his children anyway was researching his death. This is what astounded me, Victor added that he was never satisfied that crash was accidental.

Q: Is that right? Oh wow, I didn't know that.

WRIGHT: Well, getting back to my own adventures, I took a labor economics course at the University of Michigan; Charles Levinson I think was the professor. A very good course, it gave a good solid economics basis. I carried economics as a minor through college. The course in labor economics gave a good, solid economic base to my political thinking about labor issues. One issue, even the term seems to have come back into vogue that I haven't heard for 40-50 years, is social cost.

Q: Social cost. I thought you were going to say collective bargaining. I haven't heard

much about that either.

WRIGHT: This is a very strange turn of events. Anyway, I remained in contact with Marie Cole-Berger and corresponded with her. The focus was really international affairs.

Q: The lady from the UN.

WRIGHT: Yes. She had left the UN delegation and was here in Washington at various points in the foreign affairs community. We corresponded over the years. I drove down to Washington in '54 to meet with her face to face and talk about my career plans and get her advice. Her recommendation was that I should go to SAIS, the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. For financial reasons mainly, but also for some other considerations, I, on graduating from the University of Michigan in '55, did not. I applied to Johns Hopkins, but I also looked around at other things like taking an advanced degree in economics, but I didn't have money for it. I went back to work for the City of Detroit in the summers of '53, '54, and '55; I worked for the City of Detroit in a full time job, which is why it was convenient to have the job at DeSoto in the afternoons. I worked two full time jobs in the summers of '54 and '55. I got laid off from DeSoto in mid-summer which was about time. Two full time jobs was a little bit wearing. But, as things unfolded in '55, the best paying job that I could find was working for the forestry division of the City of Detroit which was mainly trimming trees, but trimming, spraying, removing trees. Detroit, at that time, had a lot of residential trees, all American elm, and they were very well maintained. They served the city well because Detroit was mostly small clapboard houses, very modest to say the least. They had neat little lawns and spiraea bushes and so forth. They were pretty well maintained. It contributed greatly to the whole atmosphere, the trees. You don't appreciate it until the trees have died and are removed. That is what has happened.

Q: Dutch elm blight?

WRIGHT: Dutch elm disease, yes. We were fighting it then. Periodically, we would find an area. We were going through the city routinely according to a plan, according to a schedule, I should say. We would find a block of trees that were infested, so we would remove those trees. They were taken out and burned. On graduating from Michigan, I went back to that job and continued working at Lincoln-Mercury until I got laid off from there and went back to the University of Michigan in January of '56 to do some graduate work in economics. At the time, I was beginning to think about getting married which proved to be a long-term decision. That was '55, and I didn't get married until '58. I was also, of course, facing the draft. I hadn't yet made a commitment to going to the State Department or to going to Johns Hopkins. In June of '56, having completed a semester of work in economics, I reopened my application to Johns Hopkins and looked around for a job to make some money. I took the Federal Service Entrance Exam and was picked up by the Social Security Administration. I became a claims examiner trainee in the downtown Detroit Claims Office, which gave an interesting reality to what had been substantially theoretical. I was living the life of a worker's son in the home of a worker. Everybody I knew practically worked in one or another of the factories. The particular

part of town I grew up in was substantially Ford employees, but there were a smidgen of Chrysler employees.

Q: Was there a sense of what company people worked for in different parts of the city? I didn't know that.

WRIGHT: Sure. Well, public transportation was not the greatest anyway. I suppose about as good as it was anywhere in the country. Workers went to work in carpools because it was the best way, sometimes the only way, to get to a particular plant on a person's schedule. Frequently in the morning, you see cars come by and pull up with two or three guys in it, and two more get in, and they go off.

Q: There was the Chrysler part of town and this was the Ford part of town, and there was GM (General Motors) out there.

WRIGHT: Yes there was a group of territories, and they tended to be predominant. I think that the recruiting practice of the companies contributed to that because people got a job at a plant and wrote to cousins, uncles, nieces, nephews, other people, and a lot of this, I think, was done through churches. Those churches tended to be geographically centered. People in those days tended to attend a church near their home. When someone new came to town, typically, he would look for a place to live near the person who had recruited him or told him about the good job. You tended to get a clustering of people with interest in the employment, church, consequently in that community, schools and everything else that went with it.

Q: Was there a sense that they had come from a particular part of the country to Detroit? So these were the folks from...

WRIGHT: Southeastern Georgia. I think a lot could be said about that. I recently made a list of the people that came out of this community that I grew up in. I grouped two elementary schools, Wingert and Sampson Elementary Schools, and I was astonished. Out of these two elementary schools on the west side of Detroit, there was an Olympic gold medal winner, Eddie Tolan, in the 1932 Olympics. There is a Congressional Medal of Honor winner, one of the very few blacks to win a Congressional Medal of Honor, one of the very few blacks to be a combat officer in World War II, a fellow named Charles Thomas. There is a member of Congress, Congressman John Conyers, comes out of that community. A vice president of Ford Motor Company, Tommy Hall, comes out of that community. An assistant secretary of HEW (Health, Education and Welfare, now Health and Human Services), Edward Sylvester, comes out of that community. The Broadway director, Lloyd Richards, came out of that community. James Frazier, who was the first African-American to become the conductor of an internationally known symphony in Bogotá and later became music director for the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra was out of that community. There was a list of very remarkable, accomplished people, from that neighborhood.

Q: That is fascinating. That is worth a book.

WRIGHT: Yes. Well, I made the list, and I would like to develop it into something.

Q: Well, an article like a major monthly like Atlantic Monthly would be interested in that type of thing.

WRIGHT: I looked to see, I talked with some other people about it and first of all this looks like a significant accomplishment for a limited number of people in a limited period of time. I'm talking about from 1930 until 1960. That is a 30-year period in a geographic area that I don't know the name, I've been trying to find out what the subdivisions' names are. I guess I'll have to go to the city to get that.

Q: Did you attend one of these elementary schools?

WRIGHT: Yes, I went to Samson. I think all of these people, nearly all of them, went to Northwestern High School. I went to a technical school downtown, but Northwestern was my neighborhood school. A few went to Chadsey High School, but by and large we are talking about people who are Northwestern High School graduates, like Lloyd Richards, and James Grainger, and John Conyers; Nathan Conyers who was his brother. Charles Thomas was Northwestern High School ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). He had to fight as an African American to get into the ROTC program. My own brother who was a jet engine engineer with quite a reputation in that field, started with NACA (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics), which was a precursor for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). He left there because aircraft corporations would not hire African Americans during World War II, so he went to work for National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics, which was folded into the national Aeronautics and Space Administration in the space age.

Q: Is he still with NASA?

WRIGHT: No, He ended his career with NASA. As it happened he left NACA and went to General Electric after World War II. Over his career he worked for General Electric (GE) Jet Engine and for a company in California which was a subsidiary of the Sigma Corporation. Then he went to Pratt & Whitney.

Q: Quite a career.

WRIGHT: Then back to GE. Then he retired from GE and went to work for NASA. He ended his career as deputy director for propulsion. In fact, acting director for propulsion research because the director suddenly resigned without explanation, and he was senior deputy, so he was acting director for propulsion for NASA.

Q: When you were with the Social Security Administration, did that help you understand the communities in Detroit? What were your experiences there?

WRIGHT: Yes. Interesting insight. As a downtown office, we drew from many parts of

the city. Many people didn't know there were two branch offices in the city; one in Dearborn and one in Highland Park. People from all over the metropolitan area came to downtown Detroit. You could go to the days when downtown was important. It was interesting to see the ethnic mix that made up Detroit. Again, you had this clustering; you had interesting clustering. You had Ukrainians in one part of town, Serbs in one part of town, Italians in a certain part of town, Greeks in a certain section.

Q: Like Chicago or Cleveland..

WRIGHT: Yes. I would guess that industrial towns tend to be that way and I think the patterns were the same. My impression was that the companies liked to recruit people who were involved with churches. They worked through the church administration to get workers. Then, the workers wrote to their friends, family saying there are good jobs here. They came and settled in the same community and attended the same church and worked in the same factory. That pattern seemed to be what I observed as a claims examiner in the Social Security Administration. Many of the problems of the workers came to the surface. I was really surprised, I hesitate to say shocked, at how many workers died within six months of retirement.

Q: Is that right? They just sort of had no reason for being.

WRIGHT: They would say that, yes. For a long time I remember the name of one particular fellow who had worked in the Ford foundry. He drove one of those cranes that runs across the ceiling. He was of East European origin. In fact, he had come to the United States as a child himself. He was just inconsolable. I tried to talk with him and joke with him a bit about golf and retirement. Obviously, he was not a golfer, most certainly not, but I'd say we are going to play some golf now. He didn't take the intended joke at all. He just shook his head. I said, "You know you are going to get together with your friends." Incidentally, another institution of those workers' communities that we didn't talk much about is bars. A friend of mine, Ray Mosley, a UPI (United Press International) guy I met in Cairo; when I told him I was from Detroit, he did not like Detroit. After we'd gotten to know each other a bit, he said, "I'll tell you what Detroit means to me is an ethnic bar on a summer afternoon with a Detroit Tigers baseball game on." That's how he pictured Detroit. There was a lot of that.

Q: What about the churches? Did they help people to the transition to retirement through volunteer hospitality?

WRIGHT: Not much, I don't think. Churches are, of course, conservative institutions, and I think they tended to reinforce the conservatism of the parishioners. John Chizmadia -- that was his name -- was just inconsolable. I think it was about 12-13 weeks later, I got his death certificate. He just died.

Q: That must have been a real shock for a young man working in Social Security to realize these people had nothing after they retired.

WRIGHT: No lives outside of the plant. Even then the plants had the practice of trying to avoid hiring more people by working the people they had to the maximum. So these guys, especially in some of these skilled jobs, were working 9, 10, 11 hour days; so they had no life outside of their work despite the strides that had been made by the union. They were making a lot of money, but they didn't have lives for most of them.

Q: They would be highly skilled under those circumstances. Well, can we get you into the Foreign Service from Social Security to your next job?

WRIGHT: Yes. I was drafted out of the Social Security Administration, trained at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and assigned to Yokohama, Japan. I returned from there and went back to work in the Social Security Administration for about a year when I resigned and went to graduate school at Johns Hopkins here in Washington, and from there I went to the Labor Department.

Q: How long did you study at Johns Hopkins? Did you complete your masters program?

WRIGHT: Yes, a two-year program in Middle Eastern Area studies. What Marie Cole-Berger and I reasoned was that it would be the most appropriate.

Q: So Marie Cole-Berger was really sort of a mentor in the Foreign Service that helped you along. That's really remarkable in and of itself.

WRIGHT: Exactly. She was very far in advance. She would come out of the University of Chicago and was a forward-thinking, very progressive-thinking person. I guess I met her in 1952. She thought there would be a need for diversity in the Foreign Service. I went to work in the international bureau. I'm not sure how personal these stories get. I mentioned the long engagement, the long period. The reason for the extended reflection and thought on the subject was the girl I was thinking of marrying was white, and, of course, I'm black. We discussed and thought about the complications and problems that would be involved and did we want to embark on a marriage relationship with that added stress. In the end, we decided to do that after I had come out of the service. The reaction of the supervisors in the Social Security office in Detroit was very negative. When they learned that my wife was white, they began a program of harassment that had surprisingly far reaching consequences that I didn't anticipate. I had a reserve obligation as a draftee, and I managed to get myself into the Air Force Reserve out of the Army.

Q: You went from the Army to the Air Force Reserve? That's a clever move.

WRIGHT: That was easy. Anyway, when I did my two weeks reserve and I came back, all of my files, I had just an amazing secretary, a young girl only 17 years old but a whiz on the typewriter and bright, sharp, alert, and quite ready to work. I asked her for my files, and she had nothing, and she wouldn't talk to me. Previously, when I went away, she had been friendly and helpful. She said, "No." I said, "What about my tickle dates, Cathy?" She was evasive and about an hour after opening the office, and I wasn't given any interviews. I hadn't expected any at first because I had expected to spend my time

catching up on my files, but then I went to the desk, and I wasn't scheduled to get any calls. Then I was called to the manager's office, and they had a stack of files about 30 inches high. They said, "You've made a mess of this. This is terrible. You don't understand the interview process; you don't understand the procedures", which was remarkable, because before I had gone into the service -- very fortunately in this instance -- I had completed about three and a half months working in that office and a training program here in Baltimore. I had been written up as an outstanding employee. At the local level two years later the very people who were describing me as incompetent, had described me as brilliant. But even that, I believed then and now, was part of a system of harassment of other employees. In that office there were 16 claims examiners. There were four Jewish claims examiners and two African American ones. All of them were harassed and abused. It cost all of them. The reason, I think, for treating me differently was to provide a shining example of their non-discriminatory behavior. I was new, and they could always point to this guy and say, "See, we didn't give him difficulty, so these people are lying. Their problems are because of incompetence and other deficiencies." Two years later, when I got married, they felt betrayed, and they wrote up this report on this meeting in which they had said I hadn't processed these claims. They had set up this office with a long table and the manager, assistant manager, supervisor, and assistant supervisor sat at one end and told me to sit at the other end.

Q: Like the Inquisition.

WRIGHT: Yes. They opened a pile and said this is the case of John Smith. You took a C-1 application; you should have taken a C-2. They closed it, and threw it down the table. It came sliding down, and I caught it. I opened it, and before I could really look at it, they said, "This one, you didn't take a statement from the employee." I said if I could read this, perhaps I could explain why I did what I did. "That's another thing about you; you want to argue about everything." It went on like that for about fifteen minutes with about 20 files being thrown down the table at me. I would bend down to pick up papers off the floor and put them back together. Then they wrote a memorandum on that meeting which turned out to be significant. This was in about June or July. I had been planning to resign in September, and I had been planning to tell them, but as this problem developed, I learned there was a civil service lawyer whose job it was to advise employees when they had difficulties. I told him what my plans were, and he said, "Well, you are required to give a 30-day notice. I suggest you give them that notice, but don't give them a clue as to what your intentions are. Try to stay out of trouble, and if you have any leave, use it." I told him about the memorandum, and he said, "Well, they didn't follow civil-service procedure, so that memorandum has no standing; so when you resign, and I suggest that you resign instead of asking for a leave-of-absence as you had planned because you'd be hired back at the same grade anyway, so you should just resign. When they send your records to the Federal Records Center, the memorandum will be thrown away because it is not part of the official record because they did not follow procedure." That's what I did. Well, it turned out that in 1961 when I graduated from Johns Hopkins and was ready to go back to work for the Federal Government, the memorandum hadn't been destroyed; it was in the file. "Just one job after another they'd said you're great. We are ready to hire you. Just let us get your records from the Federal records Center, and we'll hire you. In

fact, you are entitled to a promotion because you have gotten an advanced degree since then.” But then I wouldn't hear from them. I'd go back and couldn't get anyone to talk to me. In some cases they were evasive; I couldn't get an answer. I talked to the AFL-CIO. I talked to Mike Ross, who was a CIO director.

Q: Director of research, wasn't he?

WRIGHT: He was in the international department. The CIO international department, and, of course, Jay Lovestone was with the AFL. And Mavis Springer, who was working with Mike Ross. They had very advanced plans to open a labor training center in Dakar, Senegal. They had the idea that they would send out an advanced someone like Mavis Springer initially. First bring me into the AFL-CIO. I would work in headquarters there for a period of time, do some traveling around the United States, become more familiar with it. Over a period of six to twelve months, they would, in effect, prepare me to be executive director for this labor training center they were going to open in Dakar. There were two rival international federations of African unions on the continent. One was Soviet influenced; the other was ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) influenced; the other WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions) influenced. The WFTU managed to railroad just about everybody into an all-African trade union conference under the guise of African unity. Of course, the conference was packed with left unions. They passed a resolution that there be no bi-lateral assistance or no unilateral assistance; so, in effect, no one country could establish a training center. Every training facility would have to be internationally sponsored. That killed the AFL-CIO labor training center for Dakar and with it my job.

Q: So you were already tentatively slotted to go there. Were you on the AFL payroll?

WRIGHT: No. In fact, I was within about a week of going on the payroll when that conference was held. When they learned the conference was going to come up, they thought they should just hold on and see how this conference was going to come out.

Q: This would have been about 1960.

WRIGHT: 1961. I don't recall whether I had already applied at the labor department or not, but I went over there and interviewed with Arnold Steinbach. In fact, I also talked to the people in the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and then Arnold Steinbach. Steinbach got that material also. He said he had read it, and he didn't think much of it, but just on the chance that I might have some difficulty and to cover himself, he asked me to take a one-grade reduction instead of a one-grade increase; so I took a cut in pay.

Q: Then you did join.

WRIGHT: Yes, I went to the International Labor Affairs Bureau in the Trade Union Research Division.

Q: Arnold Steinbach was the head of that division.

WRIGHT: That's right.

Q: That was separate from the foreign area advisors at that point?

WRIGHT: That's right. Foreign area advisors, I think, were in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They had an international division in the BLS. That's where Harold Davies was working. He was not in the international bureau. The international bureau was quite small; it came under an assistant secretary. In fact, George Lodge was still Assistant Secretary when I started, and George Weaver was Special Assistant because George Lodge was chairman of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conference that summer; so Weaver waited until he had served his time at the ILO conference that summer, and then he became Assistant Secretary. What I went in there for was international trade union research and other duties, as assigned.

Q: Did you have an area of specialty?

WRIGHT: In effect, yes. There was interest in exploiting or utilizing my Middle Eastern degree specialty. I had studied Arabic and the culture and religions of the Arabs; pretty much the Arab, Persian, Turkish background, not much on Israel. In the real world, that is in the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB); in fact, I knew the history of Israel. One cannot study the Arabs without becoming well aware of the history of Israel. But Histadrut drew large as a factor in American labor international politics. I got very much involved in that. The Arab trade unions were something else we were very much interested in keeping ourselves well informed on and influencing them to the extent we were able. A number of labor delegations came over. In the '61-'64 period that I was in ILAB two delegations came from Egypt. One with a man named Anwar Salama who, at the time he came, was president of the Egyptian confederation of labor. Then he went back and I guess within a year was made labor minister.

Q: Did he hold both offices simultaneously?

WRIGHT: No. I'm pretty sure he did not. He left one. He was succeeded as head of the Egyptian confederation of labor by a man named Ahmed Fahim who in short order came to the United States, and I met him. As it happened, I struck a good relationship with both, in large measure because I spoke to them in Arabic. They were astonished and very pleased to hear their own language. To a certain extent, I spoke already with an Egyptian accent. There are certain distinctions and characteristics to Egyptian Arabic. There is a letter in Arabic that in most of the Arabic world is pronounced "ajeem", but in Egyptian Arabic it is pronounced "Agim". Sort of a difference between a "J" and "G". Gamal Abdul Nasser would be Jamal Abdul Nasser. There are a couple of other letters like that, so that people could quickly discern whether yours is an Egyptian accent or otherwise. They were very pleased. As it happened, my last instructor at SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies – Johns Hopkins University) was a Professor Wilson Bashai who was an Egyptian, a Coptic Christian.

Q: Not only did you speak Arabic, but you spoke Egyptian Arabic, which must have really surprised them. And in the Labor Department too.

WRIGHT: It thrilled them, yes. There is a little bit of history behind my going to Cairo.

Q: We haven't gotten you into the Foreign Service yet.

WRIGHT: This leads to that. In about 1962 or '63, I don't remember which now, there was something called the Cleopatra incident in which the guy who headed the dock workers' union in New York at the time held a press conference and declared that he had found the solution to the Middle East problem, that is the Arab-Israeli controversy. His workers were not going to unload any Arab cargoes until the Arab countries agreed to recognize Israel. This came out of the blue. Over a period of about three days in a unique demonstration of Arab labor solidarity, one union after another throughout the Middle East announced they were not going to load or unload, which is a little different from what he had said, any American cargoes. My recollections at first, were what does that matter. We can stand that. What do we get from the Middle East? We get skins, spices, herbs olive oil. Wait a minute, oil! It took a day or two for it to register with people in the State Department. I'm not sure it was seized upon immediately by Labor Department people because what was happening out there in the field wasn't being reported fully. We only had Harold Snell in Beirut. While his network was pretty good, it wasn't instantaneous. It took about two or three days for people to realize that American oil cargoes, while not much at that time, were coming directly to the United States, it was American cargo. They started shutting down most terminals on the Persian Gulf, and then we started to hear about it in Washington. Dean Rusk and Arthur Goldberg went to New York over a weekend and met with the representatives of selected Arab States and worked out a climb down for this whole thing. By Monday they had it all resolved for everybody to climb down.

Q: It worked too. That's remarkable.

WRIGHT: Out of this, I understood that Goldberg said to Rusk, "Well this is why we need better labor reporting. We need to have better communication in the labor field so American unions better understand the problems out there and Arab unions better understand what is going on in America. One position we would very much like to have restored is the labor attaché position in Cairo." It was a position which had been canceled about 1952 when Cliff Finch, who had been Labor Attaché, had been beaten up. In one of the books on the Middle East, I don't remember which one, there is a fascinating reportage on the repercussions of that Cliff Finch beating. Kermit Roosevelt flew into Cairo when Henry Byroade was Ambassador there. It is reported in that story that Byroade resented Roosevelt coming without telling him what he was coming for. He didn't get any background, any briefing, no papers, nothing. Nasser gave a dinner at a Pyramids villa for Roosevelt. Roosevelt arrived early; Byroade arrived late. Roosevelt and Nasser were having a wonderful chat, laughing, enjoying each other's company. By way of introducing Byroade to the conversation they said we are having a chat about Egyptian culture. Byroade exploded. Egyptian culture! People, I think it was in

Alexandria although I'm not clear which port it was, beat my labor attaché within an inch of his life. We had to air-evacuate him to Germany. I don't think much of a culture that does that. He said something about uncivilized. Nasser walked out. Roosevelt never got to complete his mission. Some people trace the breakdown of the Aswan High Dam negotiations to that point, the Egyptians trying to get us to finance the High Dam. I digress on that, but anyway, that's how the job got canceled. After Cliff Finch got beat up, they never replaced him. They left a... So it was in '63, I think, that after the Cleopatra incident, there was an appeal to restore the labor attaché position in Cairo. There was a lot of resistance to that. They worked out an arrangement by which I would go out as labor officer in the political section. I was going out on a four-year assignment. After two years they would review performance and results and make a decision about recreating the labor attaché position.

Q: One question here on the historical list that the Department of Labor has prepared, they have someone here named Raymond Barrett in between Cliff Finch and you. Does that ring a bell?

WRIGHT: I know the name. I don't recall him being... Ray Barrett. I think he had served in Cairo before me, but I don't remember having any record. Of course, Cliff Finch's records were long gone when I got there. I went out in '64. The Finch incident must have been about '52 or '53. The revolution was in '52, so it couldn't have been then. It must have been about '54 or '55. It preceded the High Dam. 1956 is when the invasion took place. The High Dam led to the breakdown in relations and also the Ali Sabri mission to Washington. He didn't get any weapons. He came to buy American weapons. He got what he regarded as the run-around. In fact, it was the run-around; so they bought weapons from the Russians. They did it secretly, and it was Finch's visit to the docks where they were unloading Russian arms that caused him to be beat up. It was my understanding that it was supposed to be Anwar Salama who was to escort him in the dock area, in fact was escorting him in the dock area, when he was set upon by these thugs and beaten up. It was reported that when Finch was taken to the hospital, he was saying they beat him, they kicked him, they knocked him down, and took his watch. It was reported that Salama said in Arabic, they weren't supposed to take his watch. That was reported. I don't know if that's true or not.

Q: You entered then the Foreign Service at that point?

WRIGHT: Yes, to go as labor officer in the political section. I had a number of advantages. One was the Middle Eastern background but also labor experience that I actually had done as a worker. I had worked in automobile factories. I decided to pursue a relationship with the Egyptian automobile workers. They were building Fiats in Egypt.

Q: Those were the Italian Fiats. You also had the advantage of knowing the head of the labor movement, the minister of labor in Egypt.

WRIGHT: Yes, and Arnold Steinbach to help give me a launch bought a Steuben crystal vase.

Q: Vase! If it is over fifty bucks, it is a vase.

WRIGHT: It was crystal. For me to present to Anwar Salama. He perceived that Salama might not be ready to receive me because of the chill in Egyptian-American relations. It worked. It got me in to see Salama. It was very astute thinking on Steinbach's part. That made it possible for everybody down below Salama to not only see me but to welcome me.

Q: Could you say just a few words about Arnold Steinbach, as sort of a digression, before we go on to your Egyptian experience. His name appears and reappears.

WRIGHT: He was director of this international trade union division. He was Austrian born, had been; my impression was that he had been an Austrian socialist and had fled Austria before the Nazis but in the buildup of growing hostility to left-wing types. He had apparently been quite an activist. He knew well people who rose in the socialist movement in the post-war period, men?? who became prime minister of Austria. As a matter of fact, Franz -- I can't think of his name now. He became labor minister while I was working for Steinbach. Later he became prime minister. He was, I guess, three or four or five years younger than Arnold Steinbach, but he remembered him well as a figure who had helped him and worked with him and kind of nurtured him, so that he gave Steinbach, as a matter of fact, an Austrian award, a medal, when he was labor minister and he visited Washington. I was still working for Steinbach at that time. He was really a remarkable guy in many ways. He studied a great variety of Foreign Service reports. He maintained a lively correspondence with a number of labor attachés and some labor officers. He was really a catalyst in many ways, but also in many ways a player. People consulted him because he had a good deal of in-depth knowledge of situations. He had an extraordinary memory. He could remember dates and people and places and events and who had been present. He also had a very good relationship with people in the AFL-CIO, with both the AFL faction and the CIO faction because he steered a careful course of relationships with both. He somehow understood what to say and what not to say. It was a very tricky navigational task to maintain good relationships with both sides.

Q: Because the antipathy and hostility was still there in the early 60's.

WRIGHT: Oh, very much so. They were still bifurcated. As I meant to mention, Mike Ross and Jay Lovestone hardly talked. My impression was that they didn't speak at all; they communicated through other people.

Q: Were you identified at that time as a CIO person?

WRIGHT: As a matter of fact, I was. I had some difficulty because of that. There was an assumption coming in, in the wake of the Kennedy election, there were a lot of people from Detroit from the UAW coming in. Of course, I was African American and George Weaver starting up as Assistant Secretary of Labor.

Q: Who also was identified with the CIO, I believe.

WRIGHT: Yes, he was a CIO type. It was assumed that I was coming in his wake, that I was a partisan of these people. Initially, some people didn't want to talk to me or have anything to do with me because of that.

Q: Because of the CIO connection. But actually it was just happenstance, wasn't it? You didn't know George before that.

WRIGHT: In fact, I had never even heard of him. As it turned out, he had an assistant to whom I did have a connection that I discovered while working there after about a year. His Deputy Assistant Secretary, Edward Sylvester, was from Detroit. In fact, he is from that same community I was talking about. He had gone to Wayne University and studied engineering while my brother was at Wayne. My brother, Linwood Wright, was one of the early African Americans to study aeronautical engineering. Engineering was something that was not too well known. Probably the garden-variety person in the United States didn't know much about it; African Americans being farther back knew not a lot about things like engineering. My brother kind of stood out.

Q: Today is May 21, and I have the pleasure of continuing the interview with Wilbur Wright Wilbur, I think you were up to the point where you were assigned to Cairo and off to Egypt. You had mentioned that you had some very fortunate contacts with Egyptian labor leaders while you were at the Department of Labor and that kind of helped you with your adjustment there. Shall we go on with your arrival in Cairo and how your assignment went there?

WRIGHT: I meant to say that before I arrived in Cairo, I actually stopped in Geneva, on the way out, at the ILO conference and renewed the acquaintance with Ahmed Fahim, who was president of the Egyptian Confederation of Labor. I had met him twice in the United States before and had also met Ali Said Ali, who was head of the petroleum workers, who already was a key figure and Anwar Salama who had been head of the petroleum workers and head of the Confederation and the Arab confederation of petroleum workers and later became Minister of Labor. So, when I arrived, I already had met most of these people. I did want to mention that Arnold Steinbach went to great pains to purchase a crystal vase for me to present to Salama. All of those relationships proved to be very useful. Ali Said Ali, in addition to being head of the petroleum workers, was at that time head of the Arab Socialist Union, which was the only political party operating in Egypt at the time. Ahmed Fahim, in addition to being head of the Federation of Labor, was Vice President of the Parliament which proved later to be a very significant connection.

Q: What year did you arrive in Cairo?

WRIGHT: June, 1964. At the height of the Russian ascendancy. Nasser was probably at his peak although Egypt's economic situation was on the downward slope. It was going down very rapidly, and that became very significant in the overall outcome of things

during my time there. There were two really very significant things that I got involved in while in Egypt. I arrived June 26 actually. On October 21, an unarmed American transport plane was shot down over an area near Alexandria. The plane belonged to an American oil company which was doing research in Jordan. It was en route to either Libya or Tunisia, and it passed over a secure zone, a prohibited zone. Military prohibition existed for that area. It was shot down by fighter jets. There was no apology issued and no official communication from the Egyptian Government to the American Government about it. Internal political affairs was one of the things that I was covering in Egypt, but it didn't seem to have any particular relationship to anything I was doing at the time. Thanksgiving Day, which I think fell on November 24 in 1964 -- all of us were home for Thanksgiving -- a mob attacked the embassy and burned down to the ground the American Library and the Marine House. The American Embassy in Cairo, at that time, took up a small city block. There were about seven buildings on that block, mostly converted residences. Then on December 21, Nasser gave a speech in Port Said to commemorate Liberation Day. Not Liberation Day, Evacuation Day. It was the day the last British, French and Israeli troops withdrew from Egypt after the '56 invasion which Eisenhower refused to support and brought pressure and ultimately the three allies to leave Egypt. There was no mention of thanks for any role the United States played in that, but instead there was an allegation that Ambassador Lucius Battle had called on Supply Minister Kamal Ramzi Stino and according to Nasser told him, "If you don't do what we tell you to do, we will not feed you any longer." This was in relation to a three-year wheat agreement the United States had with Egypt, which was scheduled to expire December 31, 1964. One of the things that President John Kennedy was to have brought to American diplomacy was a change from the short-term food agreements to long-term agreements so that the countries wouldn't feel they were being blackmailed or pressured all the time. His Ambassador, John Badeau, negotiated shortly after his arrival, a three-year agreement which was just running out. Nasser claimed that Battle had said, "If you don't do what we tell you to do, we won't feed you." I, President Nasser, say to the Americans, "You can drink up the Red Sea, and if that's not enough, you can drink up the Mediterranean." He told us to hell with us.

Q: By that time, Johnson was President.

WRIGHT: That's correct.

Q: Were these allegations correct that Nasser was making?

WRIGHT: My impression, no. There had been a meeting. Ambassador Battle had called on Kamal Ramzi Stino, the only Christian incidentally in the Nasser Government. My impression, and I had seen not the unclassified but the gloss memcon on the meeting. They had talked about the food supply situation, but nothing like an ultimatum was delivered. Why Nasser chose to say that one can only speculate. Perhaps if one can get access to the Egyptian archives, we can find an answer there. That was a backdrop to a meeting that I had in January. Going back again to when I first arrived in June. Ambassador Badeau had departed; a new ambassador had not been named. The Deputy Chief of Mission, Bill Boswell, was preparing to leave and was practically phased out of

office operations. The political counselor, who would have been the third- ranking person was Don Bergus, had respiratory heart difficulty and had been medevaced to the United States. Owen Jones was the fourth-ranking guy and was, in effect, in charge. He, in addition to being economic counselor, was AID (Agency for International Development) Mission Director; so he had a full plate. The political section was being run by a man named Bernie Horrigan whose first section primary responsibility had been African Affairs. The other political officer, Pierce Bullen, was not there when I first arrived, so Bernie Horrigan was alone in the political section. Within two weeks of my arrival was the non-aligned summit, the conference in Cairo, which was followed in a matter of weeks by the African summit and the Arab summit. That was a very busy time. At the same time, Nasser was making a lot of contacts in Eastern Europe that culminated about nine or ten months later, if I remember correctly, in the visit of Walter Ulbricht to Cairo, which was the first break in the wall against recognition of East Germany that we had been supporting. In any case, shortly after I arrived with the political section in turmoil like this it was taking a while to get established and make contacts. I made contacts immediately on the labor side with the Arab Socialist Union, but getting my teeth into some other things was a little bit slow. Into this scene came Professor Morrill Burger from Princeton University whose book on the Arabs I had read and was very impressed with it. There was nobody for him to talk to. When I learned that he was there, I invited him to lunch.. We had a delightful afternoon. When we had finished, he thanked me profusely for the hospitality. He said I really would like to give you something. I wish there was something I could give you to repay because this has been helpful in many ways, to relax and to talk about the whole sweep of my visit to the Middle East. There is one thing I can give you and that's a name. He gave me the name of Said Maray. He hadn't been able to visit Maray during his visit to Egypt, but he, Said Maray is the only man to survive the revolution, the only politician. He is the only one who is active now that had been active before '52 while the British were still pretty much running things. I looked up Maray, his name was familiar to me. He was the other Vice President of the Parliament. There were two vice presidents of the Parliament. Ahmed Fahim was one whose other job was head of the Confederation. Said Maray's other job was, in effect, running the Central Bank of Egypt. The President of the Parliament, at that time, was Anwar Sadat who had written a biography which I had read. Maray was fairly busy and, in effect, I became very busy, so I didn't get around to even trying to call on him until January of 1965. At that time, Egyptian and American relations were pretty much locked because of the succession of events I just mentioned; the shooting down of the plane, the burning of the library, and the Nasser insult. I met with Maray at his office on a Sunday. I learned that it was very difficult to have any meaningful conversation with Egyptian officials during working hours. Usually there were from two to as many as ten different people in the room standing around the walls or bringing in coffee. Often they were there with petitions of some kind, for a job or some administrative actions to support them. The official himself would talk to each person in rotation, say a few words and then go to the next person, say a few words in exchange, get the question out without answering and then go on to the next one. So, I'd get caught up in this rotation, so it was fruitless.

Q: A strange way they do business, isn't it?

WRIGHT: For those who are really good at it, I suppose, it is a testament to their mental agility, but it doesn't really make for a very satisfactory conversation. So, I'd taken to going to offices on evenings and weekends. I called on him on a Sunday afternoon. I wanted to talk about the Parliament, see how it worked, get an idea of the procedures, because there was nothing written on what the Parliament did. I had visited the Parliament but had difficulty trying to discern what was really going on. He said that he wanted to know about Egyptian-American relations. There is no great mystery there. It seems to me we are locked in a situation created largely by Egypt. The plane had been shot down, no apology received. We hadn't been given access to the crash site. The bodies of the crewmen were still in Egyptian hands. We, in effect, had no official information about this. It was my understanding under international law that consular officers had access at least, and an apology was appropriate. The burning of the library was another clear situation which they owed us an apology. The allegation was that it was Congolese students who attacked the library; ostensibly, the reason for the attack and the burning of the library and Marine House was a protest against United States Air Force planes taking Belgian paratroopers to Stanleyville. This was the famous Stanleyville drop where Belgian paratroopers were taken to Stanleyville and dropped to rescue missionaries. The mob was seen by observers who saw there probably were some black Africans in that crowd. The preponderance didn't appear to have been Congolese. Regardless of who attacked, under international law and practice, they owed an apology and were responsible for the cost. We hadn't received either. We hadn't received invitations to go to the Foreign Ministry to open negotiations for compensation or anything. Nasser had been silent. Here he had insulted us on international radio and no contact with us. He said, "What do we have to do? That's not my area; I have no responsibility in that area to discuss with you. I'm sure our economic counselor or our new ambassador would be pleased to discuss this with you. I'd be happy to arrange an appointment for you, if you would like." He said he wanted to know what I thought. That would have no standing, and I really wanted to talk about the Parliament. He insisted, so I said, "We can talk about this on a private basis, on a personal basis. It has no official status, as examples of the kinds of things to improve relations between Egypt and the United States. First apologize. That is something you could do right away. Monday morning you could invite the ambassador to come in for the plane shooting down and the burning of the library and the Marine House and for the insult. That would be a logical first step." He said, "What else?" "These are things your Foreign Ministry must know; consult with them and they will tell you. In addition to the apology, we ought to be invited to get immediate access to the crash site so we can see the plane. We should be given a chance to view the bodies and to identify them and to take possession of them. All the technical information that ought to be exchanged, that ought to be done immediately. For the library, well compensation. It shouldn't be difficult to get an evaluation of what those two buildings cost. On that library, as a matter of fact, one thing that you could really creatively do is to offer us one of the sequestered mansions because the whole area of Garden City is populated by sequestered mansions, many of which I would think would make very suitable libraries." I had heard some conversations about some misgivings about the library being part of the embassy compound at meetings at the embassy before. USIA (United States Information Agency) really would have liked to have an independent site because many Egyptians felt they couldn't come to the library

because the library was being surveilled by intelligence officers. It would be noted that they had gone to the embassy; whereas, if they had the library at a more independent location, they could come and go they felt more freely. I didn't mention that background, but I suggested that one of the mansions in Garden City or perhaps anywhere in Garden City would make an appropriate library and that Nasser himself, as an indication of his change of heart or an indication of the mistake he made, ought to be there to open it, cut the ribbon. I mentioned that I had been in Idfu a few weeks before, a town in upper Egypt where there is a bagasse factory. Bagasse is a pulp made from sugar-cane pulp. You can make craft paper from it. I explained to him that this is a unique technology available in only two other plants in the world. This was a grant. It wasn't a loan or something that was being done on a commercial basis; the U.S. Government had funded it completely. The American engineers in Idfu that had put that plant on stream were still there a year after they had completed the task. The Egyptian Ministry of Industries had not accepted title and had not responded to our requests.

Q: Oh, my heavens. They were in effect hostages.

WRIGHT: Exactly. If the American people had any idea this was going on, any foreign aid or possible future foreign aid to Egypt would end. I don't know what it would do for the foreign-aid program worldwide if they thought we were being abused this way. They ought to immediately get Ministry-of-Industry officials up there and accept this. It would be a good idea for Nasser to get himself busy and go up there. There was sabotage going on. The workers had come to feel this was an American plant, and they were working for the Americans and so there was periodic sabotage. I was shown a big piece of iron that had been thrown into the plant. It wrecked machinery and sidelined it for about a month. They need a clear, strong national symbol to come up there and say thank you.

Q: So what was the outcome of his...

WRIGHT: I gave him five things, and he says, "Thank you." "Now, I want to talk about the Parliament." He wouldn't do it. He escorted me to the door.

Q: No quid pro quo there.

WRIGHT: None at all. As I was being pushed out the door, he said, "I will report your conditions to the President." To my efforts to protest, he just closed the door. I reported this to Don Bergus, who said we'd better talk this over with Ambassador Battle. Ambassador Battle came in Sunday afternoon.

Q: Was he understanding?

WRIGHT: Yes, he was, and so was Don Bergus. They geared the report to Washington on the meeting in really quite a tentative way because we really weren't sure what was going to happen. Bergus assured Ambassador Battle that Said Maray did have access to Nasser and when he said "the President", that is who he was talking about. So we sat tight. On Tuesday I got a call in the morning. A joyous call saying come right over to the

Central Bank. I went over to the Central Bank to see him. Instead of waiting and cooling my heels for a few minutes, his door was open, and I walked right in. I walked right past the secretary. and he took me into the office, gave me a big embrace and said, "The President accepts your conditions." Those were not conditions. That was not official; it was off the record, informal, personal. I went back from seeing him and reported to Ambassador Battle and Don Bergus, and we fired off messages. The calls came in that very day for Bob Bauer from the Foreign Ministry to receive the apology for the burning of the library and the Marine House. I think it was the air attaché, or perhaps Don Bergus, who got the call to receive the apology for the shooting down of the plane. AID Mission got a call to open discussions for the transmission of the bagasse factory.

Q: That was quite a coup for you personally. It broke the logjam.

WRIGHT: Broke the logjam. They took USIA people on a tour of selected villas in Garden City to pick one to be the new library. Within a matter of about a month they had selected one and remodeling work began. Within six to nine months they had that library up and operating. The Deputy Prime Minister came to open it, and libraries that Nasser personally donated from his private collection were put in the library.

Q: That is amazing.

WRIGHT: So, I think that is one contribution to America's relations. The other one is also rather remarkable.

Q: Did you ever inform Professor Burger of the outcome and the role that he played?

WRIGHT: I never did. I always meant to, but I never did. That is a good question; it probably wouldn't be too late. When they write this up, I'll sent that to him. The other things kind of converged, and this whole series of events kind of fed into it. Incidentally, out of this what the Egyptians really wanted was a new wheat agreement. Our response to that was kind of a mixed blessing because they did get a new wheat agreement out of that, but it was six months. People didn't want to get strung out again the way they were before. That made the Egyptians very happy and very angry, all at the same time. They desperately needed the wheat, so they were glad to get the wheat, but they were bitter to get a six-month agreement.

Q: Did you ever get any insight as to why Nasser insulted us knowing it would have an impact on the wheat.

WRIGHT: No. There was some speculation around about that and no clear conclusion to my knowledge. I think that the conclusion was it was a series of miscommunications that Stino reported to Nasser. In that climate, being the only Coptic Christian in the administration probably had phrased his report in a way that put Battle in a bad light. Nasser, frustrated that the talks for a new agreement already hadn't started, put the most negative possible interpretation on it, exaggerated, and came up with this. Also he always liked to cast himself in the role of the courageous hero that was willing to slap the

Americans and kick the British or Americans in the shins. That was a kind of tentative interpretation of what had happened.

Q: Isn't there a tendency, especially in Egypt, to exaggerate?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes.

Q: Embellish and come up with clear alternatives where the things were usually gray?

WRIGHT: Where the solutions usually lie. That was, for awhile anyway, the working hypothesis of how we had come to that. Of many, Mike Sterner had really been doing part of the work. The labor work had really been divided between the economic section and the political section. Ali Ellison had been doing the economic part of it, and Sterner had been doing the political part of it. Sterner also had the internal political affairs -- the job I was stepping into -- and included in that was the coverage of the Parliament, which was the reason for my call on Said Maray. Sterner, before the meeting in July, had taken me over and introduced me to a man named Achmeer Zayed, who was Secretary General of the Parliament. Sterner had spent a good deal of the four years he had been there persuading USIA there ought to be some IVP (International Visitor Program) invitations for the political section, and he had finally gotten five. He introduced me to Zayed and said, "As soon as you get the documentation from USIA, this is the guy you need to talk to, to work out the visit for the parliamentarians", and then he departed. I got the notification from USIA, and I called on Zayed. As it happened, Zayed and I hit it off very well. We enjoyed the same kind of humor, talked about the same politics and the general situation, very amicable conversation. In the course of the conversation, I asked about the president of the Parliament heading the delegation. He was astonished. He said, "Would you invite him?" I said, "Would he go if we invited him?" So, we agreed that we would each research our respective questions and see if we could get an answer. We sent back a query to Washington with names including Anwar Sadat as head of the delegation. It came back with a rejection. They didn't want Sadat.

Q: Oh my word!

WRIGHT: Well history proved that we were wrong. They said he was a terrorist. Of course, he had written this autobiography which was in print, which I had read. He talked about throwing hand grenades at British soldiers in the Canal Zone, crawling through the sand, hiding in the dunes and throwing hand grenades. Then he talked at some length about his efforts to establish a link with Rommel and the German Army during WW II, even to organize an Egyptian army revolt to attack Montgomery from the rear as the battle of El Alamein was coming. He even got as far as he flew out to the Siwa oasis from which he was going to fly to Rommel's headquarters, but the plane wouldn't get off the ground, so he had to give it up. With all that background many people tend to feel that this guy was some kind of a kook, and at minimum, a terrorist. I suggested that this guy was an extreme nationalist, but not irrational, and from his point of view, what he wanted was his country liberated from foreign occupation in a way that compared to what the Americans had done when they wanted the British out of our country. We allied with the

French and the Prussians, and even in WW II we allied with the Communist Russians to fight the Nazis. The guy ought to be looked at for who he was and what he said he stood for. That was my rebuttal to the rejection. Don Bergus thought it should give me some leeway, so he drafted the response to that asking them to reverse themselves and was turned down a second time. If memory serves me right, it was Ambassador Battle who went back and said this is what we want really. With that, Washington assented and said OK if you want to invite him, go ahead and do it. It is going to fail and when it fails, I want you guys to remember whose idea this was.

Q: Did you find out who presented that point of view in Washington?

WRIGHT: It was my understanding that it was Sterner.

Q: Sterner? Oh man, going back.

WRIGHT: Look at the irony at the end of all this. I went to talk to Zayed, and Zayed had mentioned it to Sadat as an idea, and since I now had approval to invite him, he took me in to meet Sadat. Sadat talked about the idea, and he really warmed to the idea. He said this could really be important. This could be significant. He liked the idea. He said, "Now the five parliamentarians, me and, of course, Mr. Zayed here has to go, and we need an administrator type to take care of the bags and so on." I said, "Excuse me Mr. President, the invitation is for five." He said, "Yes, yes. Let's see how this works out." I went back to USIA and signaled could we have three more invitations? It's been five years since the political section had any. There was a big fight about that, and finally they assented to OK, but "you guys shouldn't expect any more invitations for a long time." Now one of the reasons, we had over fifty for the whole Embassy. That was a lot, but the reason was we had counterpart funds. TWA (Trans World Airlines?) at that time would accept Egyptian pounds in payment, so they agreed to eight. I thought this was a real accomplishment on my part that I persuaded them to come up with this. It took them about a week or two. I went and told Zayed, and again Zayed took me in to see Sadat. The more he thought about this thing, the more he felt this was really a great opportunity. He talked it over even with his wife. He felt that she definitely should go, and she wouldn't want to be the only woman so there ought to be at least another woman. I said, "Sir, we haven't selected the parliamentarians yet, and there are women in the Parliament." He glossed over that. In the end, he got us up to thirteen from five. USIA said "No!" Ambassador Battle, apparently catching the fever from Sadat, although he hadn't been in touch with him, thought, let's give it a try. You know you have these open invitations that you haven't assigned anybody else. So now we have thirteen. I went back, and this guy is talking about great improvement in Egyptian-American relations. He says there are a lot of things we need to do, and there are some important people who ought to be in this delegation. Could we get up to eighteen? From five you know. I went and mentioned this to Bower. No! This guy is playing games. We are not going to have people jerking us around. Forget it. The whole thing is canceled. It is over. I said would you hold on for thirteen? Yes, but not eighteen. That's a no go. I don't care who says. I said, "OK." I then went to see Jim Lipscomb from the Ford Foundation. He said, "We'd be delighted to put some money into this. It is a good opportunity, and who knows what it

could lead to, but we are at the end of our budget here, and we have a limited amount of money we can put into it." So, thank you very much. We'll take what we can get. Money is fungible. Then I went to see Bob Krueger at TWA. They said, "We'll give you as many transatlantic airfares as you need. We can't do much for your transportation inside the United States, but we can give you transatlantic fares for the whole delegation." Money is fungible, some money is fungible because a lot of it is counterpart funds. Then I went to see another guy who later became famous in his own right, Pete Butillio, who was head of the Hilton. He said he would give us as many nights as were needed where there were Hiltons in the United States, because they liked having good relations with the Egyptians also. I went to see American Friends in the Middle East and the Middle East Institute, and they came in for some meals in Washington. Out of this we had a package that could support 18. Then we had a lot of jerking around back and forth, but I worked out the schedule with them and the agenda and places they should go. Then about three days before he was to leave, Sadat had gotten into the habit of calling me up and sending over a car from the Parliament to pick me up. This is about six blocks away, and I rather liked the walk in Garden City. I would ride there in the car and then walk back to the Embassy. He sent for me about three days before departure. Normally, when I went to see him, he would be at his desk and would come and greet me at the door. We'd sit on the sofa near the door and chat. On this occasion, he stood behind his desk. He had a long fairly narrow office in the Parliament. I walked up to the desk, and as I approached the desk he said, "When will I see the President?" My first thought is that he could see Nasser anytime he wants to. He couldn't mean that he wants to see Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson in the middle of the Vietnam War! This is not possible. I said, "Well, Mr. President, because his title was President of the Parliament. Recall that we had been working on this for some weeks, in fact months. You have, in effect, two counterparts in the American government. House Speaker John McCormick, who is your equivalent, but also Vice President Humphrey is President of the Senate, and we have a request in for you to have lunch with him, and the luncheon is fixed with Speaker McCormick, a really powerful figure in American political life. You will be talking to the top echelon. He said, "I have to see the President." You recall that we have a conflict, you see from your own newspapers that President Johnson is very much involved with that, so it is very difficult to get an appointment. What we are really anxious to do is to see that you meet your counterpart. Then he said, "I cannot go unless I see the President." This is three days before departure.

Q: Did you feel that you were being jerked around?

WRIGHT: Well, I didn't think he was being dishonest. My feeling was there was some kind of pressure on him. In retrospect I think that was correct. In fact, he had mentioned this probably to Nasser or to Mohieddin or one of the vice presidents of the country. He was feeling the increasing need to make this in to something. The highest ranking Egyptian up until that time to visit the United States had been Ali Sabri, who had the rank of one of several vice presidents, I think, at the time he went to the United States in the 50's. He came to the United States to do an arms deal. He had been lead to believe that he would be able to advance the purchase of some weapons from the United States. No one had made a decision on it. No one was anywhere near a decision on it. In fact, the

discussions in the U.S. Government, we now know, were that we aren't going to sell the Egyptians weapons, are you crazy? What would the Israelis say? I mean the Israelis are our allies, and we are going to sell weapons to their enemies? So there was no prospect of Sabri getting any weapons, but nobody would tell him that. Indeed, the people who spoke to him kept encouraging him to stay. So he was here nearly three weeks, and at the end of it, he got nothing. The Egyptians were burned. Of course, that led to the arms deal with the Soviets and set in process the Aswan High Dam, the whole collapse of Egyptian-American relations to a new and lower level.

Q: This would have been in the late 50's. So this led to the three day request to see President Johnson.

WRIGHT: He said -- he in effect kept restating this -- until he said, "I cannot go unless I have assurance that I'll see President Johnson. I responded to that, as he was talking; I was thinking, wait a minute, that's different. He needs an assurance. This was stoking my notion that he is under pressure from his colleagues. If he goes and it fails, he wants to be able to blame somebody. It then occurred to me to say, "Mr. President, I assure you that you will see the President." Because what he wanted was an assurance. I went back to the Embassy and reported that. For the next three days, we were on the line to Washington. Initially, they came back and said OK. Bergus said that's not real. That and a quarter will get you a cup of coffee. Don Bergus was our Political Counselor; he knew how Washington operates. We went back with another message saying No we really mean we want this. They came back and said OK, it is on the White House calendar. Battle had been Assistant Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs, so he understood how this thing works too. He looked at it and said, "No, wait a minute. Let me get into it." I believe he made a phone call to Washington and then followed up with a message. So they really did then make an effort to get him on the Presidential Calendar. He followed it up after they left. Battle went to the airport to see Sadat off. I think he went to a dinner party before they left. Of course, the visit was an enormous success. Sadat was delighted; he saw everything he wanted to, and he met with Johnson. He and Johnson loved each other. They each presented themselves as old farm boys that had done well. Humble origins and liked to go back, as indeed he did like to go back to al-Minufiyah, which was his town. He liked to go back and sit there and meet old friends, like Johnson liked to go back to Johnson City, Texas. They started a correspondence.

Q: Is that right. It may have been a real turning point in Egyptian relations.

WRIGHT: He told Ambassador Battle, when he came back, that he had a new understanding of the United States which is what I thought was possible, because in his background he had never been to a more democratic country. He had spent a lot of time in Russia. He had been to Paris, I think twice, for one-day visits, go and talk to somebody and fly out, and he'd been to London, I think, about three times, but again never for an extended stay.

Q: This is Sadat?

WRIGHT: Yes, Jehan Sadat was half British. In addition to that, his mother-in-law had lived with him, which I regarded as a very important fact. How could he be xenophobic or psychopathic about the British, as people seem to want to make him out to be, if he had this British woman living in his home. He told Ambassador Battle when he came back that he had changed completely his understanding of the United States and that he would always oppose American foreign policy when it was against the interest of Egypt, but that he would never again oppose America.

Q: What more could an IVP program do?

WRIGHT: That's right. A complete turnaround.

Q: That is an amazing and very important story.

WRIGHT: Battle took him over as a contact. I think important contributory roles in all of this; I mean Sadat really invested this relationship with me while it lasted with a lot of confidence. I believe that it stemmed from his two vice presidents, Ahmed Fahim the president of the Confederation of Labor, and Said Maray, head of the bank, both of whom I'd had a lot of contact with and the good relationship I had with Zayed. In 1967, of course, we had to evacuate because of the war.

Q: You were still at the Embassy at that time?

WRIGHT: Yes. We had flown out dependents in late '64, and I still had another year to do on that assignment. We had flown out dependents and non-essential personnel. I was still there, and I called on people in the government. In fact, I was received by people in the government during the war. I saw Ali Sabri at the Arab Socialist Union. I made a number of calls during the five days we had before we left. The Egyptian Government had picked up American civilians and had put them all in the Nile Hotel, not to be confused with the Nile Hilton. Among them was my very good friend, John Calhoun, who was the American Express manager. I went over to visit him the Friday night before we were to leave. Instead of allowing me to walk right in as I had before, they had up blackout curtains all through the hotel; I was stopped at the door and asked to wait. Then two soldiers came over and escorted me to the kitchen, which had been entirely cleared out. This was rather amusing in a way. There was a desk in the middle of the floor of this large ten-foot ceiling room and a long extension cord and a goose-neck lamp bent down and the blackout curtains. Everything was blacked out. The lamp pushed down over the desk caught big shadows. To me it looked like a comic reenactment of a Sydney Greenstreet movie. As I went into the room, the man stood up at the desk and said, "Ah, Mr. Wilbur Wright. I have read so much about you. Not in the newspapers." He said, "Yes, labor leaders, African students, Socialist leaders, combined units." This guy had been reading my dossier.

Q: The secret police.

WRIGHT: Yeah. These people who all of the time our security people are saying they

keep tabs on all of you guys, so watch what you do, watch what you say, was true. I would not have believed that they would have had a) that kind of interest in me, and b) the efficiency to funnel all that information into one place.

Q: It would be the efficiency that would be a surprise.

WRIGHT: Yes. The intelligence service really had it.

Q: Did they have any European technicians helping them?

WRIGHT: Yes. In fact, I met some of these European technicians.

Q: Were the Germans involved?

WRIGHT: I met Czechs. There were some East Germans there. I met Czechs, Bulgarians, and a number of Russians. They had reports on all of this, and apparently they knew who came to my house. They missed a few. One guy really gave me a start, a physician. I lived in a building owned by the landlord who lived on the top floor, Judge Mohammed Kamel Amin Malash. He was the Egyptian representative on the mixed courts at the time of the Revolution. People forget that the mixed courts were still operating in Egypt in 1952. The mixed courts were a relic of the capitulations that the Turks had granted, in which foreigners were tried by originally their own consuls. So, if a British citizen killed an Egyptian citizen in Egypt, he was tried by the British consul.

Q: Along with Egyptian judges?

WRIGHT: No, not originally. There had been protests and erosion of this, and the residual of that, in 1952 at the time of the Revolution, was what they called the mixed courts in which you had judges from five countries sitting on a panel to preside over cases in which foreigners were charged; but they were not charged in Egyptian courts in Egypt; they were charged before this mixed court. There was only one Egyptian on the court, so he was a minority. The Egyptian representative had been Mohammed Kamel Malash. The American representative, who was still there by the way -- he loved Egypt -- was a man named Brenton, a highly respected jurist who was published in American jurist publications and so on. Anyway, Judge Malash was my landlord. He had a daughter who had graduated from medical school; shortly after graduation had married a classmate who was also a physician. They had a big bash at the Hilton, and he invited my wife and me. At that affair, I met another physician who was a few years ahead of her. He said he would like to meet with me sometime and talk. I didn't know what it was about, but I'd be happy to meet with an upstanding citizen. I'm pretty sure I didn't see him again until about three months later. I was home one evening, and the doorbell rang. We had a glass door on this apartment, and the light was not on in the vestibule. I thought it was rather strange, so I went to the door and opened it and looked out. There was nobody there, just darkness. I turned to Elaine and said, "Didn't you hear the doorbell ring?" "Yes, a very distinct ring." Just then a figure came out of the darkness and scared the life out of me. Not only did he step out of the darkness, but he pushed his way into the apartment. I

closed the door, and then I recognized this guy. He was in a shirt and a tie and a jacket; it was this physician I had met. He came to tell me about a shootout at the Pyramids with the Muslim Brotherhood, this extreme right-wing group. The police had discovered a hideout in a village near the Pyramids and had gone in. The Brothers had resisted, and there had been gunfire, and people had been killed. That set off alarms in the security system, and so they decided to roll up the Brotherhood again, something they had done before. He was worried about word getting out and people learning. It had happened apparently two or three days before, and no one seemed to know about it. He felt that he might be picked up, so he wanted people to know that this had happened. That is the kind of thing.

Q: I imagine it was in the dossier.

WRIGHT: It was not in the dossier apparently. He didn't mention it anyway.

Q: You had turned out the lights so people couldn't see who was there.

WRIGHT: Apparently he had come into the lobby where you have those timer buttons that you push them and the light comes on. He just came in without turning on the light.

Q: Tell us quickly about the World Council of Churches.

WRIGHT: My church in Detroit, the Tabernacle Baptist Church, had sponsored my going with the World Council of Churches to two work camps in the summer of 1952 in France at St. Etienne, an industrial town in France, and another one, Le Chambon, in the mountains of France. There, I along with other young people from other countries; in St. Etienne there were nine Americans out of eighteen Germans, Angolan, Portuguese, Italians. Mainly we dug ditches for a housing project which was run by Le Castor, which is a very well known organization in France for cooperative housing. After four weeks at St. Etienne, I went for two more weeks at Le Chambon, where there is a Protestant college originally founded by the Huguenots, College Cévenol. There, we were digging a main drainage line for the dormitory so they could have a sewage line running out. Altogether we had about 35 students; our group was greatly augmented there. This telephone call was from Henry Meyer.

Q: Who had run that program.

WRIGHT: No, he was a student there in 1952. I met him and talked with him. We became friends of a sort. Years later, I was assigned to a consulate in Florence and served on the vestry of the American Church in Florence, St. James. The rector of the church was Edward Lee. I left Florence in '79 and eventually came back to the United States in '83 and heard that Edward Lee was rector now of St. Johns of Georgetown; so, Elaine and I went to services there, and after the service while he was still shaking hands with people leaving the service, we went to the parish hall for coffee to wait for him. One of the parishioners walked up and introduced himself as a member of the parish and hadn't seen us and wanted to welcome us, and that his name was Henry Meyer. In a very strange

monologue I said, "Henry Meyer, that is a very interesting name. You would think in 30-40 years with a name like that you would run across it several times, but I've only met one other man named Henry Meyer." In a sense his name wasn't Henry Meyer, it was Henri Meiere. I looked at this guy and said, "Wait a minute. That was you. I met you 31 years ago at Le Chambon, a mountain village in France." When I started this monologue about his name, he looked off and tried to figure who else can I talk to. I need to get away from this kook who wants to talk about my name. When I said, "That was you", I got his full attention. He turned around and looked at me. I could see he was trying to remember what is he talking about? What does he mean that was me? I said, "Were you in Le Chambon in '52?" He said, "Yeah, Yeah." I said, "I met you then."

Q: What a fantastic memory for names and faces. That's incredible.

WRIGHT: Anyway we renewed the friendship. He was married and was a professor of French literature at George Mason University.

Q: Anyhow, we have you still in the kitchen of the Nile Hotel, I believe, being interrogated by the secret police. How did you get out?

WRIGHT: Oh, we sat down and had a wonderful conversation. The colonel said, "Tell me, what do you really think of our President?" I said, "President Nasser? I think for Egypt he is a great hero. He has opened the door to a whole modernization, a whole change. Political, social, economic, his change is revolutionary. Egypt will never be the same. No question, he is a great leader. I don't agree with everything he has done. I think, unquestionably, like everybody else in the world, he has made mistakes, but he is a great leader." He wanted to discuss in precise detail specific things. Parenthetically, I thought the trade unions should be more free than they were, and I thought that limiting the political climate to just socialists was suppression to others, but we had a wonderful conversation. He expressed his views about American politics and to my surprise made a few guarded comments about Egyptian foreign policy. I told him I thought Nasser made a very major mistake in sending the troops into the Sinai and not backing off, and more specifically, he made a mistake in, I thought, a most interestingly articulated effort to put troops into Sharm el-Sheikh. The Israelis had said that militarization of Sharm el-Sheikh under the 1956 withdrawal agreement would be casus belli. The Egyptians had tried to show in many ways that there was nothing to fear. The troops going into the Sharm el-Sheikh, they intimidated, would not even have weapons, and besides, they were going to be ground troops. The only threat to Israeli interests would be if they had artillery or mortars or something that could attack shipping through the Straits of Tehran. So, the Egyptians were going to elaborate at length to show that this was not a threat, and it would pass. If I recall the date correctly, it was supposed to end May 19 or something like that because the Syrians had been very specific. What started the whole crisis was the Syrian complaint that the Israelis were going to attack them. Then they kept putting on all these pressure points and kept taunting Nasser, saying he claims to be the protector of the Arab world. What's he doing about this attack. They claimed there were heavy armor and artillery on their border. Our investigations and Israeli public statements said this is not so. My impression is that Nasser thought this was a chance for him to play the hero at no

cost. If he put troops on the Israeli southern border and the Israelis didn't attack Syria, he'd been assured they were not going to, he could say I protected Syria and withdraw. Our military buildup on the Israeli border prevented them from attacking Syria, when, in fact, there was no attack impending at all, but his militarization on the Israeli border got him caught in a number of problems, most specifically Sharm el-Sheikh. The Israelis said they couldn't tolerate that.

Q: They viewed it as a real threat then.

WRIGHT: Well, that's what they said. They looked at the situation, and they saw that everybody else was militarily flat. Nobody else had any kind of buildup. The Egyptian military buildup was phony, and I think they recognized that. There were published photographs of frogmen in the desert laughing with pilots. All of this was orchestrated to tell the Israelis, "Look, there is no attack coming. Just sit still. Let the date of the alleged promised attack pass; we'll withdraw; the game will be over, and I'll be the hero of the Arab world." I think the Israelis looked at that and didn't like the idea of Nasser being reinforced by this and they being diminished. The story was that they had been intimidated by his force. They didn't like that. They saw his armor, his whole military machine spread out publicly. My guess is that reconnaissance planes, ours also had assured them that this guy is vulnerable, and they saw a chance to clean up.

Q: They saw a chance to take him out for years to come even though their assessment was that he wasn't prepared to move. That's interesting because that is not quite the interpretation that history has given it.

WRIGHT: We were working very hard to negotiate a climb down, and we had started the machinery. Ambassador Yost came out.

Q: Was he the UN Ambassador?

WRIGHT: No, he was in the department. I don't know what his job was, but he came out to negotiate the details of a climb down, and we had it set in motion. It is interesting; a very good friend when I was in Egypt was a journalist, Mohammed Haqui; he lives here in McLean now. We were talking a few months ago, and he said that one of the conversations I had with him during that crisis before the war broke out was about a climb down expressing then my interpretation of the roles and my feeling that Nasser was on very dangerous ground and needed to work something out fast. It deteriorated. My suggestion was that we have an exchange of vice presidential visits. Zachary Muechadim, I knew, was held in very high esteem in the U.S. Government, and Hubert Humphrey, his profile as Vice President; we could overwhelm the whole crisis situation and forestall the outbreak of war by getting these vice presidential visits going. That somehow got into the machinery. Mohammed tells me that he passed that on. That, indeed, is what we were working on; and we, indeed, had worked it out for Muechadim to go to the United States, and Yost was working on it. We didn't have an ambassador. Battle had gone back to the United States to be Assistant Secretary. I have a hard time remembering the name of the guy who was named ambassador, but he came out, and he hadn't presented his

credentials. Yost was there trying to get this thing going when the attack occurred. My feeling is that the Israelis just saw a great military opportunity for themselves and seized it even though they knew there was no attack or no threat.

Q: The image issue and ego and the rest had taken over so that...

WRIGHT: And the Egyptians unquestionably had as much or more equipment than the Israelis did. They saw a chance so that made them very uneasy, so they saw a chance to destroy it. They totally wiped out the Egyptian Air Force.

Q: You mean the Israelis saw a chance to destroy all this Russian equipment. They realized it wasn't as well maintained as it might have been.

WRIGHT: My information is taken from direct sources. I was talking to people whose husbands or brothers and, in one case, a guy himself who had left the Sinai; they had this image of the Egyptian Army on a raid in the Sinai with guns ready to attack. The Egyptian Army wasn't ready for anything like desert warfare. First of all, they had a huge rate of desertions according to the people I was talking to. The guys walked out into the desert, and then they walked back. They were scared to death of the desert. They were like people living in the valleys of Austria, in some ways in contrast to them. Most people don't go walking on the glaciers. A good many Egyptians, I don't know about all of them, but a good many of them have a lot of fears and superstitions about the desert. Egyptians don't live in the desert; they live in that green Nile valley. So, the desertion rate was very high. They had a huge problem with diarrhea and stomach upset. They had big problems with equipment. Sand and grit was getting into the equipment and machinery, so things weren't working right. The Army was practically immobilized. They had been out there for two weeks when the war started. Their Army was decimated by desertions, or not desertions just guys going home.

Q: And the Israelis just absolutely clobbered them. Anyhow in '67, you were evacuated then?

WRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Did you return later on?

WRIGHT: Unfortunately, no. I haven't been back to Egypt to this day. As part of our negotiations with the Egyptians on the break in relations, the Egyptians had agreed to a fairly substantial mission there, but there was not agreement on who should head it. The names on the list to be in the mission had to be approved by the Presidency, that is Nasser's office and by the Foreign Ministry. It is my understanding -- I wasn't a part of that, of course -- the Presidency approved one guy, either Dick Parker or David Ness, and the Foreign Ministry approved the other, and they hadn't worked it out. Ness, of course, was chargé d'Affaires. He was annoyed by the whole process and felt that they were jerking him around. It was my understanding that he made the decision to pull the whole mission out but was persuaded that would be unwise, because it was harder to open a

mission than to enlarge one. So, he agreed to a much reduced staff of only four with an understanding that in two to four weeks he would send the rest of the people back. My name was approved to stay, but when they cut it back to four, I was one of those who was going to leave and come back. But, as things worked out, that didn't happen either.

Q: You went to Athens.

WRIGHT: To Athens, yeah. I reported to the Embassy every day and then went out and interviewed people who came out of Egypt. An interesting report that I wrote -- we sailed out of Egypt on June 12, if I recall correctly. Anyway we sailed out of Egypt in June, and they had brought some other Americans to that ship. We had some officials in Alexandria. We had shipped some to Greece, but some other people were in Alexandria. Those of us left at the Embassy joined those in Alexandria, and we got on the ship. Some other Americans they had interned were brought on board the ship. One was brought alongside just before we cast off. He was brought in chains. He had shackles on his arms and his legs. So, I went to meet him to find out who he was. It turned out -- I don't remember his name any longer -- I wrote a report on it that I filed from Athens. He was an Argentinean, but he was Jewish, and he had married an Egyptian woman, who was Jewish, and happened to be visiting in Egypt when the war broke out. He gave us the most extensive report on what had happened in the Jewish community in Egypt at the time of the war. The Egyptians went around and arrested all the young men. They jailed them, but on checking, they discovered he wasn't an Egyptian, and apparently the people who interrogated him didn't quite understand that he was from South America. He evidently didn't think they would know Argentina, so he told them he was from South America. What they got was America. They thought they had a hot potato, so they moved him from where they had taken him originally to another jail, where the same thing ensued. They discovered he was not an Egyptian but possibly an American, so they moved him to another jail. Over that seven- or eight-day period from the beginning of the war, they rolled him up the day after the attack, June 5. He was passed around from one jail to another and back to where he started from. He saw a lot of what was going on inside the internal security system with the people who were jailed, and he saw almost all of them were Jews. Based upon his observations, I filed a report. He said mostly they were being badly treated, but some were being beaten. He claimed that he had been cuffed about and punched and so forth, but he had no bruises or scars to show for it. There was at least one guy he saw who had been badly beaten whose hairline had been grasped and pulled and the scalp torn. In the end they just decided to put him on the boat with the rest of the Americans and get him out.

Q: Can we go back to some of your experiences with the labor movement in Egypt? I don't think we've really covered that.

WRIGHT: Right. The principal contact there turned out to be Ahmed Fahim and his international secretary, Magdi Serafi. We were able to get a lot of books and materials into their hands, again from USIA. We just ordered books and would place them in the libraries of the trade unions most of which had no books at all. Interestingly, they had bookshelves there and one or two magazines but not even Russian materials. We had

books in Arabic. One of the benefits of the PL-480 counterpart funds was that we set up a translation service there. We contracted with local Egyptian printers, so we set up a translation service. We translated a lot of American books into Arabic and then printed them up and circulated them throughout the Arab world.

Q: Books on labor as well?

WRIGHT: On our request, yes. Books on labor and we put them in the libraries there. Also some books on socialism. We were told, when Kennedy came in, that it was no longer “verboten” to deal with socialism or the socialist issue. We put materials in their hands. We got visitors to come over. I think we got a significant improvement in the understanding and the views of the trade union movement while I was there. We had Victor Reuther come over and visit. We had Victor Rizzel, the labor journalist who was blinded, as you recall, come over, and we got pretty good audiences for both of them. We had Sam Haddad of the ironworkers union visit. We got some support from the Egyptians in the ILO on some issues, nothing major as I recall.

Q: How independent were the unions in Egypt of the government? You had the trade union movement in Parliament as a major figure. It raises questions as to whether he is acting as a government official or for the trade unions.

WRIGHT: It was a constant question. As a matter of fact, Ali Said Ali, anyway Salami had moved out of the trade union movement to become Minister of Labor. The Egyptians interpreted that the other way around. They said this means that labor has influence in government rather than government has influence in the unions. Ali Said Ali was appointed Minister of State without portfolio in about '65 or '66. He was still head of the petroleum workers and still a vice president of the International Federation of Petroleum Workers. The Egyptians cited that again as further evidence of labor extending its influence into government.

Q: I think, in that part of the world, the personal aura of these people could not be understated.

WRIGHT: They are individuals who have tremendous power, and what role they are playing at any given time gets blurred. That was my experience.

Q: I don't think in their own minds they have a clear distinction between what they can do. When they do something whether it is government or trade union. In Islam you don't have that kind of distinction.

WRIGHT: I was going to say the concept of a conflict of interest in the American sense just doesn't seem to be on the scope.

Q: Their concept of family and one's obligation to family are very different. You would not let your brother suffer. If you had a job, you controlled a job, and your brother needed a job, you would give it to him. You would take care of family and friends.

WRIGHT: Of course, and other people would regard you as derelict and probably a fool but also a knave if you failed to take care of your family.

Q: So the concept of nepotism hasn't arrived either as a pejorative concept. Rather the reverse, nepotism is what you are supposed to do. It is part of the way of life.

WRIGHT: Hence all these petitions. You go to call on Ali Said Ali in his office, and there would be five or six people there, including a couple of cousins and in-laws. I was able to talk to them; they listened. It is difficult to say how that played out in international trade union meetings. My own opinion is that they were very sympathetic to the United States, our point of view, our approach. I found in contrast, for example, to my time in Morocco which was very pleasant, and Morocco is a very friendly country to the United States, but Moroccans, I found, very distant and reserved. Egyptians, it was easy to communicate with them. We share a lot of common values, not all, of course, but a lot of common values, a point of view, a sense of humor, an irreverence for politicians. They were ready, but I think they felt restricted by the climate of relations that existed with the United States during the time I was there. They didn't want to go out on a limb and take a lot of chances, unless it was undercover, as in the case of Sadat. He wanted to be covered.

Q: Also, the element of trust seems to me to be very important. At the point where they trusted you personally, the relationship probably changed dramatically.

WRIGHT: Then they were willing to take chances. They opened doors for me to see other people. My understanding is that Ali Said Ali -- who at one point was head of the Arab Socialist Union, passed that responsibility to Ali Sabri, who was taking the Arab Socialist Union to a higher level of importance -- arranged for me to meet Ali Sabri. He too had been painted as a *bête noire* after he returned from the United States on that arms mission, he then went to Russia and signed an arms agreement, but then he became cast in the American thinking as a stooge of the Soviets, a representative of the Russians. He told me it wasn't true. He very much regretted that characterization because he felt it limited his access to Americans. He was unhappy about the run around he got in Washington.

Q: When you use the term Arab Socialist Union, that was the period of time when there was a tie with Syria, wasn't there?

WRIGHT: It had started then. Of course, after the break with Syria, it continued with the organization in Egypt. They modified it in many different ways, but they kept the name Arab Socialist Union.

Q: That organization was for labor, or was it for other things?

WRIGHT: Well, it was supposed to be for labor and key figures in it; most of the staff people came out of the labor movement or the labor organization. They were very interested in democratic socialism. They knew very little about it, and we got some

materials to them.

Q: On what democratic socialism was.

WRIGHT: Yes.

Q: I've often wondered how knowledgeable they were on theory. I've always thought it was nationalism given another term.

WRIGHT: Nationalism and government ownership, but the democratic part was a little weak and how the mechanics of it, how do the workers make their desires and needs known or understood. They not so incidentally started worker representation on the boards of the companies. Now the companies were all nationalized, but they put worker representation on the boards of these nationalized companies. They too didn't really know: OK here we are, what do we do? Those were the more insightful ones. The others were just happy to be on the board. Now we are here.

Q: Now we have the limo.

WRIGHT: Yeah, and now we have worker representatives on the board. Isn't that what it is supposed to be all about? But, the idea of what are the workers needs and how do we translate that into company policy was lacking. I had sent for a lot of materials from the North American Cooperative League, which, I thought, would give them material on how to think about my role as a representative of the workers in running the enterprise. What are the workers interests? How do they manifest themselves in wages? How do you look at wages and profits and cash flow as a worker representative?

Q: Was the AFL-CIO active at that time in Egypt in assistance? Was that before the AALC (African-American Labor Center) was formed?

WRIGHT: Jay Lovestone; first of all it was the Arab Socialist Union, and Jay Lovestone did not like socialists. I met him also when I came back on home leave in '66, but it was largely a one-way conversation with him telling me what he knew. He knew a lot by the way. I still don't understand where he got all that information. He knew names, places, and who was doing what to whom, a remarkably detailed knowledge of what was going on inside the Egyptian trade union. At the time, I presume someone had read to him what I had been reporting, but he told me pretty much what I had said, and he had some additional information that I didn't. In effect, he was telling me, "You can mark time out there, but until all those socialists are gone and you get rid of Nasser, nothing is going to happen." But, the constituent unions of the AFL-CIO were helping out.

Q: Which ones were active in Egypt?

WRIGHT: IUE (International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers). Well, active in Egypt, they sent materials to me, and Victor Reuther came out, the UAW. I hesitate to mention that because I told you earlier about people

assuming that I was the man from the UAW. Of course, I had a strong affinity for the UAW; I liked the Reuther brothers. The proposals they made, supplementary unemployment benefits, worker representation on boards. They had a feeling and some knowledge about some of these things, so I wrote to them for material. I got material and Victor Reuther came out, and it was a success, as was Victor Rizzel. Both of those guys were very credible to Egyptians. We invited about 50 people, and I think we got about 250 to see Victor Reuther. Victor Reuther's visit contributed greatly to my own credibility, and I became sort of a special envoy to the automobile workers in Egypt. I concluded that interpersonal relationships and personal identity were especially important in Egypt. When they had asked me about my own background, I told them I had worked in an auto plant which they thought was fascinating; a diplomat who had worked in an automobile plant. They wanted to know in detail what I had done in the factory. As it happened, I had worked in two plants. I had worked at the DeSoto factory of Chrysler, and then I worked at Lincoln Mercury in Wayne, Michigan. I was able to tell them precisely what I did. That was interesting to them from several standpoints: one, that somebody who worked in a factory could be a diplomat. The status of diplomats there is so much higher than here. A diplomat is on a level with a college professor or a physician, a really important figure.

Q: I think it says something for our democracy.

WRIGHT: Also, they were interested in specifically what I had done because it gave them an idea of the level of automation in American factories. The assembly line in -- what do they call those cars? They were making Fiats. Fiat shipped these cars, knocked down Fiats into Spain and Russia, but they were shipping them also to Egypt. Oh, it was called a Nasr. Nasr is an eagle, so, in effect, the name of it was Eagle. I went down to visit the Helwan Auto plant twice and met the leaders of the union. They invited me to come and spend two weeks at their summer vacation camp at Mercer Matou up on the Mediterranean. I indeed did go out there. I spent three days at the auto workers camp at Mercer Matou, where they, in effect, had a tent camp and for administration and for feeding the workers and their families had smaller tents and cots to sleep on. There were very few recreational facilities there, and it gets very cool, even in July, I discovered. At that time, the cool air with moisture from the sea would come in so you would wake up in the morning soaked to the skin really with dew.

Q: Were these designed along an Eastern European model or were these indigenous designs, these recreational facilities?

WRIGHT: It was a Russian concept. A summer vacation with the family.

Q: Russian concept of a vacation on the ocean or lake.

WRIGHT: Well, what they believed the Russian workers would do. You see these pictures of Russian workers on the Black Sea. That was kind of the concept they had.

Q: The Soviet model had kind of penetrated Egypt by the end of your stay for better or

worse.

WRIGHT: They were unimpressed with the overall Soviet model. They themselves enjoyed the right to pick and choose. "We want to select out of your system of doing things what we think will work for us. If the Russians have things we think are going to be effective or useful for us, we are going to use those things too."

Q: Of course, the British had left behind another model, a little more sumptuous with Farouk and company. Maybe they needed a compromise in between.

WRIGHT: I think Farouk had very little impact on the mass of Egyptians in terms of his lifestyle or thought or way of living. I think the automobile workers thought of themselves, or were working to think of themselves, as kind of a vanguard for workers. Reuther had an aggressive attitude about this. We visited an office of metalworkers in Alexandria. We arrived in the evening, and they sent someone to meet him. Victor volunteered that he was hungry and wanted to eat. They spoke about hotels in Alexandria and dining rooms. He said, "No, no. I want to eat with the workers."

Q: In the cafeteria.

WRIGHT: I want to eat where the workers eat, in a restaurant with the workers. So, the guy took us to a Baladi restaurant, where they serve these big beans; they boil them and pour oil over them and bread. So you eat bread and beans.

Q: How did Victor react to that?

WRIGHT: Well, as far as I could tell, he thought it was great. This is what he wanted to know. He thought the beans were delicious. I was less impressed.

Q: Were there other things about your experience in Egypt that you would like to cover before we turn to your next assignment?

WRIGHT: My view is that the labor connection is really the dominant theme that ran through the whole experience. It opened the doors that enabled me to do everything of a positive nature that I was able to accomplish there. Because of the contacts I established with labor, even before I left the United States, and that I had entry to the labor movement which had credibility; so, to some degree, I think to a significant degree, labor did have influence. Labor personalities, anyway, had influence in the government. Their experience with me was communicated up the line to fairly high levels of the Egyptian government and made it possible to accomplish some useful things. At the grassroots level of the labor movement, I didn't see there was a great deal that could be accomplished. There was a lot of rudimentary grassroots work that could be done. That was really worker education, visitors, books, publications, exchanges of publications, to the extent possible. I tried, incidentally, I don't know how the people felt about this, to encourage others to do the same thing. I thought that the democratic socialists of Northern Europe could do something very useful there, so when I went on vacation, on

the way back to Egypt, I stopped in Copenhagen and visited the trade unions there and the labor attaché who was there at the time. I can't think of who it was. I asked the trade unions in Denmark to establish contact with and to send materials to their own people there with whom they had credibility. I suggested to my counterpart at the Swedish Embassy to do the same thing. He did not seem to be particularly impressed with that idea. Klaus Hendrik Quaid at the Danish Embassy did seem to think it was a good idea, and my impression is that he tried to do something about that.

Q: Henri Nage was the Labor Attaché at that point?

WRIGHT: That's right, and he was very helpful. I called on the federation and one or two other unions. In Austria under the complicity of Arnold Steinbach, I don't know how smart this is to put it on tape. He was with the headquarters of the Socialist International, and they too suggested that they too should put materials into the hands of and establish contact with, and I gave them the names and addresses of people I had spoken to in the Arab Socialist Union. If you are going to pursue socialism, it ought to be democratic. I said to the Egyptians, "We don't have a quarrel with your socialism; our quarrel is with your democracy. If you can make socialism work for you and be democratic, that's your choice."

Q: That sounds a little harder over at the AFL than it was at the UAW.

WRIGHT: That was probably not selling well with Jay Lovestone. Mike Ross, I think, would have been willing to play that role.

Q: Mike Ross had left by then, or am I wrong.

WRIGHT: Actually, Mike, I'm not sure when he died. I had met Mike Ross before I went into the Labor Department, and I had some contact with him while I was in the Labor Department. I'm just not sure he was still alive when I went to Egypt.

Q: Did the Scandinavians pick up or the Danes pick up?

WRIGHT: The Danes did. The British were completely unimpressed; they didn't see this as something. The British, I don't think at the time, at least the diplomats in the Embassy, thought in terms of trying to have diplomacy reaching to the grassroots. You don't go talk to workers groups and political party groups about how to do these things. They had the British Consul which did some things like that. I never really got in much, I had very limited contact with the British Consul.

Q: Did the British have a labor attaché in Cairo at that time?

WRIGHT: No. They had a break in diplomatic relations. I was trying to remember the other day what the issue had been.

Q: The Suez Canal?

WRIGHT: They had restored relations after the Suez break, but there was something else the British did after that somewhere else in the world that caused them to break relations with the British, and the Canadians were representing the British. I don't recall any particular effort of the French. The Dutch, there was a Dutch man. I later ran into him when I was stationed in Holland as Labor Attaché. I can't think of his name now. There was a Dutch Embassy officer who was interested. There was a junior officer at the Swedish Embassy who may have done a few things. He happened to develop an interest in one of the secretaries at the embassy. As it happened, she lived in an apartment in the same building where I was, so I used to see him and talk with him. He indicated some kind of interest; I'm not sure how far he went with it. My idea was that we were in a situation where we could get good materials to them and plant ideas and concepts of democracy, and how it did work and should work. They seemed to accept it and even ask for more books. Occasionally, I'd get a call from a union saying they got some books; "do you have any more; could we have some." I put quite a number of publications in the library of the Arab Socialist Union headquarters in Cairo there on the Nile next to the Hilton.

Q: OK. Well, after Cairo you went to Athens for awhile.

WRIGHT: I came back to the United States for language training in Italian. Then I went to Rome, a very different kind of..

Q: Tough duty! What were you in Rome?

WRIGHT: I was Commercial Officer. Then after two years in the Commercial Section, I went to the Economic Section. I came back to the States for economic training. The USA people with whom I had worked so closely, I had built up a reputation with USA people in Cairo that followed me to Rome, and I got involved in some USA things in Rome. This is not really about labor, obviously. Materials sent out from the Commerce Department to promote American exports and joint ventures, but it was mimeographed. I thought we could do better than that. I talked to the USA people; it turned out we had a printing plant that was underutilized. They were only too happy to convert this mimeographed process into a magazine. We did a competition for the cover design. We did a four-color cover. Then, every month we inserted these, printed on slick paper, announcements of new products, opportunities available in the United States for export and trading opportunities available with the United States. The USA people were very pleased to have that; they could point to as the value they offered to the State Department. When I came back to the States and completed my economic training, I got an invitation to work as an information officer with USA. I went to work on their first economic program, International Economic Interdependence, for about 18 months. I helped put together a multimedia package.

Q: This was back here in Washington. Could we get the dates? The tour in Italy was from late '67 to '71. Then you were back here from '71 to '74. Before we skip over the Italian tour, were there any contacts with labor?

WRIGHT: Strangely enough, there were. Some business people, one guy in particular, a British manager of a pharmaceutical plant, took a great interest in my labor background. A fellow named William Cavendish. He ran the Wyeth pharmaceutical plant in Aprilia, outside Naples. Twice a year he would invite me down to talk to what was, in effect, his workers' council. He had integrated them.

Q: Integrating meaning Italian and American managers?

WRIGHT: No, they were all Italians. He was the only foreigner there, and he was British, although the company was American. He had integrated the worker representatives with his management council. He had a team. I have a photograph of him somewhere. He had a team of about five managers, and there might have been about five labor representatives from each of those departments. They worked the problems out together. He invited me down about twice a year. Once was essentially a ceremonial thing when they passed out awards, and the other occasion was just for a general meeting and talk about worker representation.

Q: Was this similar to the German model? Was this the Italian counterpart?

WRIGHT: I don't know where Cavendish got these ideas. It sounded to me from what I've read about the German model, that it was like that.

Q: But it was something that was sort of required by Italian law.

WRIGHT: No.

Q: He wanted a joint body that would address issues then.

WRIGHT: Yes. He had an attitude about labor himself. I don't know where it came from. It is possible that he told me, but I don't remember, but he had a very strong attitude which is why he probed into my background and wanted me to come there even though my job was really commercial officer. He didn't see a conflict in that, so he invited me. It may have contributed to his credibility. Tom Bowie was Labor Attaché when I was there. He had an assistant, John Guinn. I don't recall that we did anything together. Socially at receptions, and then I met labor representatives. John was very generous in his invitations. I guess if he had thought about it, he could have made more use of me in that light, but I attended quite a few labor functions. Whenever he had an out of town visitor, and Bowie deferred often to John and let him do the honors for visitors fairly frequently, it seemed to me, the top level ones from out of town.

Q: Actually there is a lot of overlap between the work of the commercial section and the labor attaché. I found I always worked very closely with him.

WRIGHT: Sometimes it can be, and logically it will. I don't recall that we did very much except for these receptions, and occasionally, John would have sessions at his house

where we would sit down and talk, and I was included in those. Similarly with Bowie, more with Guinn than with Bowie, I think the hierarchy came into play because I was the third man in a three-man section, commercial section, so my counterpart was more near to Guinn than Tom.

Q: You moved back to the States for this joint project with USIA?

WRIGHT: Yes. International Economic Interdependence.

Q: Was that a study or was that a program?

WRIGHT: It was a program. It tended to be a multi-media program, multi-media being print, television and public speaking. We recruited speakers from the private sector to go on speaking tours for the U.S. government in selected areas. We bought copies of their publications, their books, and we produced video programs. We recruited journalists to interview them and took them down to the USIA studios and interviewed them. We did some Labor people. I think we did Victor Reuther in that context. I know I suggested it. I think we actually did it, but I didn't run the program in the end. In fact, there were some labor economists we picked up in that program also. I again didn't work directly on those. I got focused on trying to get some Nobel Laureates and to recruiting the AEA, the American Economic Association, to cooperate with the program. What we were trying to do is to take American economics and business practice overseas; let people see how we did it, and, hopefully, influence them to emulate. I got to meet Simon Kuznets, the famous Nobel Laureate for economics for national income accounting, and Vassily Biankief from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and also at Harvard. I went up there to meet them. They did eventually get them into the program. I wasn't able to get them. I tried to get -- I ran into some very strong opposition from John Kenneth Galbraith, who happened to be president of the association at that time. His opposition was because of Nixon. He blocked the American Economic Association working directly with USIA. It's funny; I'd met him before when he was Ambassador to India. At that time, I was in the Labor Department. I with a fellow named Al Abdu, now known as Al Alexander; we organized something called the Middle East Luncheon group. We tried to and we did catch ambassadors who had served in the Middle East and come back, also Assistant Secretary Phillips Talbott, AID administrator for the Middle East to come and speak to us. I met John Kenneth Galbraith when I happened to be, Al and I would alternate as chairman of these meetings; I happened to be the chairman when John Kenneth Galbraith came back. I mentioned that to him in trying to recruit him to, not recruit him, actually, I tried to recruit him also to speak, but that was out of the question. I tried to get him to agree to AEA. What we wanted from them were their publications, and we wanted their blessing when we approached their members to be speakers, to go overseas and speak. What worked out was an arrangement with people in the AEA to use their materials and get the names of people.

Q: You would think someone who had been in senior U.S. Government positions would be willing to cooperate with USIA, which is supposed to be non-partisan. It must have been a tough sell with someone as...

WRIGHT: This of course, we were getting into Watergate at that point. Antagonism toward Nixon was just too strong.

Q: John Kenneth Galbraith is not a man known for great modesty.

WRIGHT: He has apparently mellowed a great deal. As it happens, he is one of the big profile people I have run into repeatedly since then.

Q: I remember him at Harvard when I was there.

WRIGHT: I admire his economics. I wish that he were more influential, or his approach to economics were more influential. Anyway, that is mostly what I did at USIA, putting programs together, getting speakers, and arranging; actually, I got into producing. I produced television shows.

Q: That was up through 1974?

WRIGHT: No, '72. I left USIA and went back to the State Department in the Near East Bureau in the public affairs office working for Jim Briggs. That's where I heard Roger Davies quote from a telegram sent by Lucius Battle when I was still in Cairo, in which Battle quoted Sadat as saying, "I have a new understanding of the United States, and I will always oppose American policy when it is against Egypt, but I will never again oppose America as such." That was an interesting occasion because it was to honor Mike Sterner, who was going out on his first ambassadorial assignment and to honor my boss, Jim Briggs, who was leaving the Department to go -- I've forgotten where. Mike was going off to be Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, and Davies said that in some ways it was appropriate that we should have this as a joint ceremony because Jim was going to work for the IVP Program. He was going to the IVP program, which had really launched Mike's career, because he had been the escort officer for Sadat.

Q: Mike Sterner; and you said earlier he had opposed the visit back on the Washington side. It shows the ironies and ambiguities in your progression in the Department of State. You can't define anything more than that.

WRIGHT: He was the departmental expert on Anwar Sadat.

Q: Did he ever discuss with you the politics of reversing his earlier objections?

WRIGHT: No.

Q: Was he aware of your role?

WRIGHT: Yes, he knew those messages were coming from me. He left the original invitation with me. I was there from '72-'74. This really was almost entirely administrative, and a certain amount of writing of press releases and mostly press

guidance. We would write press guidance and take it to the desk for clearance, or sometimes we would ask the desk to write it.

Q: And you would put it into English that the newspapers could understand.

WRIGHT: Yes, and give it to the spokesman principal. Sometimes we gave it directly to the press, but usually it was given to the spokesman to use at the noon press briefing every day.

Q: Who was the spokesman at that time?

WRIGHT: When I first went there, it was the guy, he had been promoted to Deputy Assistant or Assistant Secretary of State. I'm not going to be able to think of his name. He was praised as the one guy, government spokesman, who was always honest with them throughout all the Vietnam War. George Vest became spokesman for a brief period of time. They had actually gone through three spokesmen.

Q: Was Bill Dyess in that period?

WRIGHT: No. I met Dyess when he came out to be Ambassador to the Netherlands. George Vest is the one I remember best. He had been in that job for years, and the press said they loved him, because they said he never lied to them. He was written up in newspapers as a big success as a government press briefer.

Q: OK; we can fill that in later.

WRIGHT: Then I went to Rabat, an economic commercial assignment, where again I had some as you say labor and commerce are really not that far apart. There was no labor attaché. Well, there was a labor attaché down in Casablanca.

Q: He's always been in Casablanca.

WRIGHT: A young fellow.

Q: What year was this, Wilbur?

WRIGHT: '74-'76.

Q: We had someone named Edmund van Gilder.

WRIGHT: That's it.

Q: And Thor Kuniholm.

WRIGHT: I met him too. Yes. Ted van Gilder.

Q: Ted van Gilder. I don't think I have encountered him in any of the other interviews. Was he a one time labor attaché?

WRIGHT: I think so; labor reporting officer who was working in the role. I got involved in some commercial initiatives that had some limited labor dimension to them. I met, actually through the army attaché, as it happened, a man, Mohammed Madran, from the town of Birkan. He liked to say Madran from Birkan, who had been in the king's escort service and had a motorcycle accident and was pensioned off as disabled. He got a big cash settlement, and he went into business back in Birkan up in the Atlas Mountains. The first thing he did was buy several tracts of land and plant them with what turned out to be clementines. It is a grafted process to produce a seedless tangerine called clementine. He used a staff of about three workers, but his picking was seasonal. We talked about that. He had originally come to me in connection with his desire to go into business with Americans, and were there any joint venture opportunities or possibilities. I put him in touch with something that turned out to be quite tumultuous. It looked beautiful at the time. He did, in the end, open a battery manufacturing plant, automobile batteries. We had talked about his use of seasonal labor, and we never really got very far with that. But, the battery plant, an agreement with an American company to supply the battery boxes, the plates, and the acid. He assembled them there and paid a royalty, but he came into bitter conflict with the American representative. In fact, after I left, they pursued me -- because I went to Florence from Rabat -- they pursued me in Rabat to mediate the dispute.

Q: To mediate. You made yourself indispensable as the only go between.

WRIGHT: They never did resolve it, though. By the time it got to me, they had a lot of bitter recriminations about personality and alleged misdeed perpetrated each by the other.

Q: So, at this stage you were pretty much on a commercial track.

WRIGHT: Well, it was supposed to be economic, and I was doing the economic work until a new guy came out, and he decided that we would do a division of labor. He would do economic and all high-profile commercial ...

Q: It sounds like an unequal treaty between a boss and a subordinate.

WRIGHT: The last I heard of him, he had stepped in front of a bus at the Virginia Avenue entrance and got knocked down. I guess his wife had just divorced him. Later, I heard he recovered and married a secretary and was traveling as a dependent husband which is altogether rather remarkable. He is a Mormon which is a major factor in his thinking and activity.

Q: Then after Morocco you went to...

WRIGHT: I went to Florence. They gave me a wide range of possibilities. There I did get back into labor, but it was a multi-functional job. There were three State officers, Bob

Gordon, then I was number two, and there was a consul and a vice consul. As it happened, both vice consuls were women. She may have been followed by another woman. Anyway, there were women in that job. I was Administrative Officer, Commercial Officer, Labor Officer. They were looking for somebody who had this range of experience to be the number-two job. Of course, this was the red belt. This is where we had contact with the Italian left, so I had some contact with Chisel. By this time, it was my understanding that the Communists had worked out an agreement with certain segments of the U.S. Government to not oppose their participation in a government. There would not be blanket opposition to any Communist participation in a national government, and the Communists had, in fact, already withdrawn their opposition to Italian membership in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Italian membership in the European Economic Community.

Q: What years were these?

WRIGHT: '76-'79.

Q: '76-'79. So that would have been the end of Ernie Nage's period in Rome? Herbert Baker came in seventy...

WRIGHT: Herb Baker?

Q: Yeah. I have Herb Baker arriving in '78.

WRIGHT: Really. I don't remember that. Who was his assistant?

Q: Richard Booth at first, and then Patrick Delveccio later on.

WRIGHT: Ernie Nage I remember because I had known him before in the stopover in Copenhagen.

Q: And the whole issue of the contact with the CGIL (General Confederation of Labour), which was a major issue.

WRIGHT: I didn't deal with CGIL.

Q: The AFL-CIO, as I recall, was bitterly opposed to any contact between the labor attaché and CGIL, the Communist trade union.

WRIGHT: Even though there was, as I was told, this agreement that we could deal. Well, democratically elected Communist officials, that was it. You had mayors and provincial executives all through this area. The majority of chief executives of those provinces and cities were Communists or near Communists. The Mayor of Florence, Elio Gabbuggiani, was a Communist. There were several fairly prominent mayors and provincial executives who were Communist, and we could talk to them. It was a funny kind of inversion, because my interpretation of the behavior was that they were anxious to prove that they

could get along with the United States. They wanted to show Italians that they could work with Americans and were working with Americans, and so they invited us to a lot of functions. A lot of their front groups invited us to functions. They have a lot of cultural groups. One of their areas of grassroots activity is in partisan- veteran organizations. They have these banquets; I was invited to quite a lot of those. I had no contact with the Communist trade union. Now, because the Communists were courting us, the Christian Democrats and the Socialists felt constrained to do so too; so we saw quite a lot of Christian Democrats and Socialists. It is interesting to read now that apparently all these guys are crooks.

Q: This was the UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro, Italian Labour Union), which was the Socialist, and the so called Chisel, which was the Christian Democratic.

WRIGHT: I did several factory visits there. In Prato there are these fabric and clothing plants, and I visited factories in Livorno. In this multi-media role I never developed a working relationship like I had in Egypt with any of the trade union representatives. I called on them, visited them, talked with them, and in some cases got materials for them. They felt they knew as much or more about trade unionism as any American, at least the people I talked to. So kind of an exchange of how do you do things, what are we doing and sort of an updating on what was going on in some of the international trade unions, the ICFTU. I was also interested in -- they had good insightful knowledge as to what was going on in the Communist union; so I could get information about what they saw from their standpoint. Not much from the Christians, but the Socialists were well informed about what was going on. The job I had was primarily internal political affairs. The parties was what we were most interested in; particularly, how this relationship was going down with the Communist rank and file. And to show the flag at a lot of socializing.

Q: Florence is a nice place to socialize, I understand. It must have been a very pleasant tour anyhow.

WRIGHT: Oh yeah. From that standpoint, it was probably the best. As I say, a lot of banquets and dinners, showing the flag, a lot of ceremonies. On one occasion, we got an invitation to participate in a weekend event in Reggio Emilia. We were going to visit several sites. It was essentially partisan guerrillas. The Italian Army had been essentially disbanded, and Italy didn't have an Army. In fact, the reason that area is Communist is because the Communists, after Italy withdrew from the Axis and had no Army, the Communists organized partisan guerrilla bands to attack the Germans in central and northern Italy. Allen Dulles talks a good deal about that in his book The Secret Surrender. We were invited to send a representative up to this event in the province of Reggio Emilia. I went. There was a Russian colonel, Assistant Army Attaché from the Russian Embassy, Boris Goudz. There is a photograph of him there. We went to different locations around Reggio Emilia; speeches were made, we were introduced. Interestingly, he spoke very good Italian, and he was invited to speak. I was not offered an opportunity to speak, but at the next site, I asked about that, so they gave me the chance to speak. Apparently, they were not greatly excited about an American presence there. In one of these little towns while speeches were going on, I had said my piece and was just off the

dais. The fellow who was mayor, if I recall he was 21 years old. It was a town of maybe 1200 people, and this guy was mayor. I had served in the Embassy in Rome. He said, "Up here we are not like the rest of the Italians; we're different." I said, "How's that." He said, "You see, we liberated ourselves. The other parts of Italy were liberated by allied armies while they sat on their hands, but up here we liberated ourselves." This was really a commemoration of all the heroics of the guerrillas, in fact they had a guy who had been a Russian colonel who had been captured by the Axis on the Russian front.

...the prisoner of war camp and liberated the prisoners, the Russian army veterans who they then took into the partisan guerrilla band.

Q: I see, so he fought with the Italians toward the end of the war.

WRIGHT: Because he was a colonel, he knew more, and so they made him a leader of the guerrilla band, and they had brought him back for this ceremony. He spoke only Russian, so I couldn't communicate with him at all. It was interesting that he and Goudz did not mix. He seemed really disenchanted. I was very curious about him, but I had no way of communicating with him. Everybody there was, they were not terribly sympathetic to my curiosity. He seemed really worn. In any case, this mayor was talking about "we liberated ourselves." I asked him if he knew when this area was liberated. He gave the exact date the town had been liberated. I said, and where was the Fifth Army at that point, because the American Fifth Army had fought up the west coast of Italy. He said they were about 10-15 kilometers away. I said do you think the Germans knew they were there? Yeah he thought the Germans knew the Fifth Army was there. I asked do you think the presence of the Fifth Army had some influence on the fighting? He said he never thought of that. This is a 21-year old mayor.

Q: So you were giving him a history lesson.

WRIGHT: I have some interest in this, because I have a cousin who was in the 92nd Division, one of the units that fought through this area. He knew about these black soldiers that fought through there, because he was wounded fighting in this area. It might have been some assistance in helping with the liberation here. Yeah, maybe so.

Q: Anyhow, aside from giving history lessons to unreformed partisan mayors and what have you.

WRIGHT: Well, factory visits and some talks with UIL officials and CGIL people. They weren't terribly open, and I'm not sure I had much of a message to impart to them. I visited the Maserati factory with Ollie Jones up in Bologna. We wrote up a joint report about the new agreement between Chrysler and Maserati. We met with the factory owner, and he walked us through the plant.

Q: Did they let you test-drive a Maserati?

WRIGHT: A Maserati Merak.

Q: They used to be the car of the sports fan.

WRIGHT: I don't know where it stands now. You don't hear much. Ferrari and Lamborghini is still out there.

Q: Maserati I haven't seen in a long time.

WRIGHT: They signed an agreement with Chrysler to produce engines for a sports car or not a sports car, a convertible. You will see them around. Some of them actually have the Maserati crown on the grille, and they sold the rights to their engine design to Chrysler, so Chrysler could manufacture these engines using their patent on a new valve approach. It's four valves per cylinder. That was Florence. Then I went back to Labor to the Hague.

Q: The Hague. You arrived there in '79?

WRIGHT: '79. There it was very political. They were interested in the position of the trade unions on international issues, nuclear weapons. In fact, that was the big issue, their only focus. Their first great fear was that the unions might oppose the installation of the missiles. This is cruise and Pershing with the nuclear tips. I was covering both Belgium and the Netherlands. The Dutch were really opposed to nuclear weapons. The Dutch union leaders that I met really did not want them there. They were really kind of held in check by the government, and they were taking their lead from -- all of a sudden I can't think of the name of the Dutch Labor Party. Joop den Uyl -- I think, is the name -- was the head of the Labor Party. They had pretty much taken their lead from him.

Q: It was voluntary. There was no real coercion. They probably wished this issue would disappear.

WRIGHT: Yes, right. Den Uyl was trying to see what he could get for it. I don't think at the grassroots level from my talking to people, they just didn't like nuclear weapons in general. They would rather not have them on their soil, but they would go along with the government or with the leadership of the Labor Party, and the Labor Party was negotiating with the government for what they could get out of it.

Q: Was the government at that time a labor-led government?

WRIGHT: No, it was a conservative government. The name of the prime minister won't come to me. Den Uyl was ready to retire. One of the big questions was would he retire? When would he retire? Who would succeed him? They guy who was the leading candidate was the head of the Federation of Labor, and I'm blocking on his name now. We became friends. He had an assistant, a fellow named Tom Etty, with whom I established a good relationship, a friendly relationship. Tom had pretty much, in my view, made up his mind about the U.S. Government, and it was not a very positive image he had of the U.S. Government. I think he thought more of the American people and the United States than he did of the U.S. Government. I think he felt that we were kind of

wrong-headed in our foreign policy.

Q: This was toward the end of the Carter Administration and the beginning of the Reagan Administration.

WRIGHT: That's right. It's funny, I can't think of that guy's name. I can picture him so clearly. Indeed, he did become prime minister.

Q: We will add that when we go over the transcript.

WRIGHT: He was, I can't say shy, but kind of a retiring guy. He felt that American trade union leadership, the AFL-CIO leadership, was too conservative and too heavy handed in international affairs. I think the Dutch have been fairly consistent with that over the years even with changing leadership. Arnie Geier, who had for years been president of the ICFTU, was Dutch. I went to visit him. He was, at that point, mayor of a town way up north. I thought it would be useful for me to talk with him and to say that I had talked with him and for people to know that I had a good meeting with him. It was a very good meeting. It didn't hurt, and it might have helped. I never saw any clear evidence that word had been passed back down the line that I had gone to the trouble to visit the grand old man of the international labor movement who was Dutch. We had a very good meeting. Groningen is the name of the town. They did not oppose it either there or at the national level. I had some interesting experiences with some local issues there. There is a small Ford assembly plant in Amsterdam, and the workers went on strike while I was there. I had made it a point to get to know the automobile workers again. The president of the local (union) there was a charismatic, enthusiastic kind of guy. He thought it was great that I had been with the UAW. He knew something about the UAW and the leadership; so he welcomed the relationship. I had met him before, so when the strike came along, I went to see him. He had me come in to a meeting with about eight of his leadership people. They just moaned and groaned. Ford, how can they do this; they just don't understand; they must be taking orders from Detroit. This is awful; we don't want a strike, but we can't let them do what they are doing. They were changing the function of the plant, and they were doing it unilaterally without any consultation, and they had announced they were going to close the plant. You can't do that. You have to talk to us. You make us irrelevant. They said confidentially, we know the plant is inefficient. It is too small. It was built I guess '49 or '50, something like that. It was just a little assembly plant. We had been doing spillover work for years when there was a shutdown or a shortage of parts; they would send some machines over here, and we would turn them out. We were very flexible. We did what Ford Europe needed. We made parts for German Fords, Taunus, and parts for the Fords in Britain, and we've assembled Taunuses here when...

Q: This is Ford management speaking?

WRIGHT: No, this is the union representatives and the president. They were saying we understand where we are and who we are. It is a small plant, and it has been doing spillover work for 30 years. In a sense, we've been lucky to have work here, but we can't

let them close the plant without consulting with us, just unilaterally announce this. We can make shifts and changes. People ask why are we paying dues?

Q: What did they do then?

WRIGHT: Well, as it happened, that was just before home leave. I came back to the States, and I went to Detroit, my hometown, to visit my sisters there. It was my habit to stay with a very close friend of mine -- we had been together since elementary school, double-dated through high school and college -- who had become a Ford dealer. As it happened, I stayed with him for two weeks. Then I went to visit a friend in Denver, just alone. I flew out to Denver, and he deposited me back in the airport in Denver, and I walked into the terminal and coming towards me in the main concourse: Henry Ford with Kathleen DuRoss. So I walked up to him. "Mr. Ford, excuse me. I used to work in the Ford plant, because I worked at Lincoln Mercury, and I am the Labor Attaché in The Hague in the Netherlands." He's looking at me like get away from me. What do you want? Fortunately, Kathleen DuRoss, who was a very attractive woman, was curious. I think that she was startled that someone would just walk up and start talking to them.

Q: Who is she?

WRIGHT: He later married her. She was his mistress, his girlfriend at that time.

Q: Significant other, I guess, we would call it.

WRIGHT: She wanted to hear what I had to say, and so out of deference to her, he listened. She suggested let's go sit down and have coffee. He said, "No, no just tell me."

Q: Amazing that you could recognize him in an airport.

WRIGHT: I'm from Detroit, are you kidding!

Q: He's on the evening news in Detroit, I'm sure.

WRIGHT: I said I've talked with the leadership of the FNV (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, Federation Dutch Labour Movement), the national union, and I've talked to the president and his executive board of the Ford plant. They do not want a strike. They want to end it. They can resolve it, but they have to talk to them. He said, "Who is the manager?" "Well, he is a Belgian, which is not a good idea politically. The Dutch have the wrong attitude about the Belgians." I told him about the newscasts had followed this. They had gone to the plant to talk to the manager, and he wasn't there, and they said he couldn't be reached. But these clever investigative reporters had found out where he was, and they followed him in a car. They followed him to the Holiday Inn Leiden. They followed him with a camera at a distance when he checked into the hotel desk and went up to a room in the hotel. They found out what room he was in and went and knocked on the door. He opened the door and let them shoot the camera in his face. When he saw who they were, he tried to close the door. They put their foot in the door, and he talked to

them through the door. I told Henry Ford about this.

Q: He's got a public relations problem.

WRIGHT: I told him it makes Ford look ridiculous, and it makes the United States look ridiculous. As I say, the union wants to settle; he won't talk to them. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going back to Detroit. I'm staying with Nate Conyers." He says, "Nate! You know Nate?" I said, "Yes, I'm staying with him." He says, "Oh hell. OK; I'll talk to you tomorrow." As it turned out, his vice president called Nate's house. Nate Conyers, first of all at this point, he is the oldest continuously existing African-American owned dealership, but also he is the brother of Congressman Conyers.

Q: I think that speaks for itself.

WRIGHT: When I got back to the Netherlands, the strike had been solved, and Staub had been fired. I don't know if fired; he had been removed.

Q: Was this as a result of your intervention?

WRIGHT: Who knows. I would guess, probably.

Q: Amazing. That's a real story. Initiative and results, that is very good.

WRIGHT: It gave me a conviction about, probably wrong, but it gave me a conviction about strikes, and I got involved with three others. At the L'Empereur plant in Belgium and at -- I can get the names of the other two. They were all American-owned factories that had strikes. In the case of L'Empereur, again, it was heavy handed management with the union saying we understand what they are trying to do. We don't oppose it, but we cannot tolerate the way they are doing it.

Q: Was this in the Netherlands or in Belgium?

WRIGHT: The L'Empereur plant was in Belgium, but it was essentially the same thing the guys had told me at Ford in Amsterdam. The L'Empereur plant had been founded by a Belgian after WWII, and they had gradually upgraded. They were an electronics, electrical plant, and they had gone into the electronics, stepped up to the technology. L'Empereur is the family name of the guy who had founded the company. He had established a joint-production relationship with an American company, using American technology and had been very successful. He came to think that America was great as was cutting edge on everything, Americans were wonderful, and he had sent his son to the United States. The son had taken an undergraduate and a graduate degree from an American college and had come back, but he had brought with him what he perceived to be American concepts of management. They have very restrictive legislation in Belgium on labor relations calling for consultation and prior notification. Notification, in case of layoffs or shutdown; all these things you have to give prior or 30 days advance notice. This guy was ignoring all of those things.

Q: O,K today is Wednesday, May 28, 1997. I have the pleasure of continuing the interview with Wilbur Wright. Wilbur, last time we were interrupted by the doorbell. You were telling us about labor relations in the Belgian plants.

WRIGHT: Yes, L'Empereur, the emperor, was the name of the company. It was an electrical supply company and had graduated into electronics. Louis L'Empereur was the man's name who had founded the company and developed a relationship with an American manufacturer and evolved, as I understood it, from electrical equipment supplies into electronics and was very grateful for the tutelage that the American parent had shown. He had sent his son to study in the United States, both the technology of the industry but also labor-management relations. I don't know where he studied labor relations in the United States, but he came back with an attitude that was really...

Q: The National Association of Manufacturers.

WRIGHT: Not to say antagonistic but certainly in conflict with the laws and practice in Belgium. He attempted to impose layoffs, for example, which is the exclusive prerogative of management in the United States. In Belgium, by law and certainly by tradition and practice, (layoffs) are subject to consultation and negotiation before you take it. He did these things, and it resulted in a lockout. Of course, the workers -- it was a very odd situation -- the workers somehow got back into the plant and locked the management out. This was the problem they were facing at the time. I, in talking to the union, they were extremely frustrated. They didn't like the situation they were in. They felt they understood the problem correctly and thoroughly. Of course, they always do. In this case they discussed the problem from the management standpoint; so I thought there might be some basis for negotiation there. I got in contact with the American parent and laid out what I had learned there. I had talked to some managers, not the son himself. If I recall correctly, the founder, the "old man" as some people referred to him, who the workers loved, a wonderful easy to work with guy; but the son with his American management techniques -- it just won't work. I talked with some of the people who worked in management for L'Empereur, and they, too, were frustrated. We got in touch with the American parent corporation. It took less than a week to resolve the problem, for them to come into compliance really with Belgian law. It was one of those remarkable situations where the trade union people said, "Look, we are ready to comply with the law, we want the company to succeed. We understand it is a competitive industry, and we have to do what is necessary for the company to survive, but we have to do it in a way that is consistent with the law and doesn't make us irrelevant." It worked. Strangely enough; that happened in two other cases in Belgium. Claire Electronics was one of the other companies. The other company, I think, was Kennametal. Again, through contacts with the unions and visiting the union offices and talking to them, we, on a broad scale, weren't going to solve all problems but those particular problems where there was a miscommunication because of the two different cultures, traditions and legal structures governing labor relations -- it was possible to just make American management aware that they are operating in a different environment. As it happened, they had trade unions which were willing to comply with the needs of management, but it had to be done

according to certain protocols. We got very good results there. The overriding issue still for the Labor Attaché Division was this matter of the cruise missiles and the Pershing missiles.

Q: Now this was in the Netherlands or in Belgium?

WRIGHT: Both places.

Q: Can we backtrack just a little bit and make sure we have the dates of your assignments? You were in the Netherlands from '79 to..

WRIGHT: '79-'82 in The Hague. Then I moved to Belgium, to Brussels, in '82 and I was there from '82 to '83. In effect, it had been a four-year assignment to The Hague to cover both countries. I spent a week every month in Brussels, but as we approached '81, the Department decided they would rather have the Labor Attaché in Brussels than in The Hague. So, the job was moved, but it took a year for it to get done; so the last year of the four years was spent in Brussels.

Q: What were some of the difficulties of spending one week a month in another country? I would think that would be a very challenging assignment, to say the least.

WRIGHT: Prior to going there, I didn't think it would be, but it did prove to be much more difficult for me than I anticipated. It was really more a matter of housekeeping and psychology than anything else. I think it would probably depend on the individual. One of the reasons I felt so sanguine and sure that I could manage it easily, I had observed Harold Snell operating out of Beirut when I was in Cairo. He was able to come, set up shop in Cairo, make his meetings, always in a supportive role in Cairo, and you could consult on the reports. He would get back, and it went very smoothly. I saw his reports out of other places when he would, for example, go to Saudi or to Yemen or over to the Gulf. He would be there two or three days, and then he'd be back in Beirut and his reports would go out. Sometimes he would file reports from the post. So, it seemed to me an easy process, although it did not go all that easily for me. My feeling, looking back on it, I'm sorry to say is that somehow I found it difficult to make that work.

Q: One thing about Harold was he was there for ever and a day.

WRIGHT: That's true.

Q: He had a long assignment; he knew all the people, and he was highly regarded wherever he went.

WRIGHT: Yes. In fact, he had a reputation that preceded him that set people up to cooperate with him.

Q: A no-nonsense guy, as I recall. I remember Harold very well.

WRIGHT: Incidentally, some of the audacity to step into some of those labor incidents I was just mentioning was due in large measure to me having read about him doing it. I had never seen him do it. I talked with him about those situations he had been able to work out, labor disputes. Most notably, there is one that I recall rather vaguely now but I heard the details of, an oil company dispute out in the Gulf. So, I imagined that it would be possible, and as it happened I came across some good ones. I operated out of the political section out of Brussels, and they arranged to make things quite comfortable for me.

Q So the working relations in both places were pretty good.

WRIGHT: Yes. In both cases they had this overriding concern, anxiety about the possibility that the unions would come out against the installation of the Pershing and the cruise missiles. I found that the union people really didn't want to talk about it very much and deflected a good deal of the conversation on the subject. There was nothing in their publications on the subject. I tried a number of different approaches, straight on asking them their views on it and asking them about their relationships with the government on these issues, but they really just didn't want to talk about it. My conclusion was that they were constrained to go along with it. They didn't want to discuss something that, in a sense, was embarrassing to them.

Q: They deferred to the party, basically.

WRIGHT: Thank you, that is a central element. They deferred to the party decision basically on this issue. My own feeling was that the leadership had mixed emotions about it. In general, they were opposed to nuclear weapons and would like to have seen an aggressive policy to eliminate nuclear weapons and not allow them to come into their countries. On the other hand, they recognized that they were part of an alliance and what the alliance had done to protect the western world. While they thought it would have been better to pursue an aggressive policy to get rid of weapons on both sides rather than to threaten with our own missiles, they felt constrained to go along.

Q: Did you find a generation gap as well between the older leaders who had contact in the post WWII period with American trade unionists and the younger leaders coming up, who were more eager to challenge.

WRIGHT: Yes, some of that. I didn't meet many of the new young leaders in Belgium. There weren't that many around. But in the Netherlands there was a new generation. Most of the leadership was young and new. They had an interesting ability to make the generational change in the Netherlands. It appeared to me to be quite amicable. The older leadership had stepped aside and had gone essentially into retirement but was still available for consultation. They gave full power to the young leadership at the local and at the national levels. I was impressed with how the Dutch ran things. The Dutch had never been terribly popular, of course, with traditional leadership at the AFL-CIO. They had been quite independent and outspoken and, generally, more inclined to want to talk with the East than to challenge and confront them. They tended to -- I don't know if I want to use these incendiary words. They felt we should deal with and talk with East

Europeans, particularly like those countries like Poland. I found that they had a continuing network of relationships, specifically in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Now they weren't dealing with the dissident elements in Poland like "Solidarity".

WRIGHT: No, they were.

Q: They were as well. Were they also dealing with the state organized...

WRIGHT: No, they were in some cases dealing with illegal and underground trade unions.

Q: That bothered the AFL-CIO? I mean the AFL-CIO was doing the same thing in Poland at that time.

WRIGHT: Yeah with "Solidarity". In Poland there was less conflict, except that they were doing it less harmoniously. They had their own independent contacts. The Dutch contact people that I talked to were not all that anxious about confrontation with the government, with the Soviet system. As I recall, they wanted more to undermine the system slowly, to erode it, rather than risk open confrontation at that time, anyway. They were willing to talk to the WFTU, and they did talk to the WFTU people, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Communists.

Q: That would have been a no-no for the AFL-CIO.

WRIGHT: But they claimed to have found sympathetic voices in -- I was going to say -- all the East European countries, and I shouldn't say that. They had contacts in Russia, but certainly in those countries I named, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. I don't recall Bulgaria, but in Romania they had good contacts, as I recall. They felt that they could accomplish a good deal through their approach, and they were very unhappy with the policy of the ICFTU, which was no contact with Communist trade unions or Communist trade union people.

Q: In Belgium, did you have any contact with the Solidarity office that was set up and essentially funded by the AFL-CIO, or was that after you left.

WRIGHT: No, that would have been -- I think it did occur after I left but I think Jim -- you see, there were two labor attachés in Brussels, because there was a labor attaché to the US Mission to the European Economic Community (USEC).

Q: I see; that was Jim Matson.

WRIGHT: Exactly. Jim Matson did the international union relationships out of there. I always spent time with Jim, and we always worked together, which sometimes took a little sorting.

Q: So your portfolio was really the Belgian internal trade unions.

WRIGHT: Exactly.

Q: Did you have any responsibility for the parties, the Labor Party in either the Netherlands or Belgium?

WRIGHT: Technically, no. Well, in Belgium specifically, no, because that was well covered by other people in the political section. In The Hague, we had one man for the parties, and, generally speaking, he was happy to get whatever input I had. The writing and description was always done by the political officer. As things evolved in the Netherlands and Wim Koch, whose name I couldn't remember the last time we talked.

Q: He was the head of the labor movement.

WRIGHT: Yes, president of the FNV. As it became apparent that Wim Koch was emerging as the logical successor to the head of the Labor Party who had been there, I guess 30 years, and had served as prime minister at one time. It also became apparent that the Labor Party might succeed to government. There was increasing interest in Wim Koch, with whom I had been able to establish a very good working relationship. He was generally accessible, but he didn't like the limelight, and he had quite an unusual attitude toward politics for someone who eventually did become prime minister.

Q: Usually the head of the labor movement is a very political person who doesn't mind being out front.

WRIGHT: Koch was not like that. At least that was the persona he presented. He was kind of like the politician that Americans like to pretend that they are. You know, if I'm asked, I will serve.

Q: If elected, I will take the office.

WRIGHT: If nominated, I will run; if elected, I will serve. As a matter of fact, at one point we got to knuckles down type of pressure. I persuaded him to have dinner. He resisted and avoided and reflected. He refused initially to have dinner with the ambassador. They had met at some reception, so he knew her and her background. She came out of the Minnesota farmer...

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WRIGHT: Geri Joseph. A woman who came out of the Democratic farmer-labor party in Minnesota. He respected that. Her reputation in a small country like that was well known, and he was sympathetic, but still he didn't want to get involved with the American Embassy. He didn't want, but finally he consented. He declined; it was his wife who wouldn't come. He did come to dinner, but it was without spouses.

Q: Which always makes things pretty stiff.

WRIGHT: Well, I think so. While the spouses don't necessarily participate in the conversation, they contribute to the atmosphere about people being relaxed and at ease. Geri Joseph, being a woman, would have made spouses rather than wives, so we are breaking that barrier. That is something he was very sympathetic to, by the way. I don't think he was going to get out and fight, crusade as a leader on women's issues, but he was very supportive of women's rights. They take a different attitude, though. They are not all that anxious to push women into the working place. They see it more as a matter of women deciding what they want to do, creating a free, open opportunity for those women who want to work.

Q: Choice rather than economic necessity.

WRIGHT: Or ideological determination to force women to work or depress women to work. So, we had a good session. We got to talk with him. Then he, unlike Anwar Sadat who was anxious to have the relationship go back to just talking with me instead of developing a one-to-one relationship with the ambassador. There was a continuing contact, but not the kind of close contact that we had.

Q: The ambassador took over the contact in effect.

WRIGHT: Well, she wanted to, but he declined. For one thing it made it awkward because he was based in Amsterdam. His home and office were in Amsterdam. While that is very close, it still means running back and forth. With people who were as busy as Ambassador Joseph was and Vim Koch was, it wasn't convenient. He really did not want to be seen to have an intimate relationship at all, a continuing close relationship with the American Embassy. He felt that the labor attaché was somehow less embassy. I found that attitude, incidentally, generally everywhere I went. Even when I wasn't a labor representative, I told people I had been a labor officer, somehow their anxieties seemed to abate a bit. They were a little more willing, a little more trusting than they had been previously than just with an embassy officer. There was a widespread anxiety about the CIA and being contaminated. There had been enough situations where the CIA people in the newspapers had been in close contact with somebody. The subject of the legend was an innocent relationship, but there always was the suspicion that the person had, in fact, gotten onto the payroll of the CIA. That was part of what fueled the anxiety and fear of the people. But, somehow concern about that or fear about that was less apparent when you are dealing with labor attachés.

Q: Do you have any evidence that had been a problem in the past in the Netherlands?

WRIGHT: The CIA was known to have operated in the Netherlands. I don't recall it coming up in Belgium. There is stuff you just don't recall. The Dutch had real concerns about that. Not as labor attachés I recall, but I think there had been CIA contact with trade unions in the Netherlands; so they wanted to avoid any taint.

Q: Speaking of elements in the embassy, did you have much contact with USIA or use their programs while you were in the Netherlands? You mentioned how well you used them in Egypt.

WRIGHT: I got materials from the USIA people, and we had speaking programs. Yeah, I did do some work with them. I forgot about that, but it wasn't the very close intimate relationship that I had in Egypt. In Egypt they had a whole world of materials that were very useful. They were practically evangelists with Americana and American materials, so they had this printing plant and this translation service. They had more structured programs going in both Belgium and the Netherlands. They did arrange some symposia on labor subjects, and they approached me about that and invited me to participate. I did participate as a panelist on two occasions while in Belgium. In the Netherlands, they arranged speaking engagements for me on the subject of labor and labor relations on about three occasions, maybe more. I just recall three occasions. One was quite notable because it got a lot of attention. It was covered in the press. It was a symposium on the future of labor at the University of Leiden.

Q: Was this the future of organized labor or workforce?

WRIGHT: Workforce, which was quite an education for me and very valuable in terms of making broader contacts in the field of labor, academics following labor.

Q: What were the big concerns about the future of the workforce in the Netherlands at that time?

WRIGHT: There was great concern about the volume of work that would be available for young people. They had a huge problem of unemployment which they were facing head on. The number of young people graduating from high school and college, the number of jobs available to them. They were not so concerned about unemployment for women. There was discussion, of course, in that area, but there seemed not to be a lot of pressure from women for jobs in the workplace, and they had free access to universities; so they could get whatever training they wanted. They had not yet, I think, looked at the professions, particularly things like law and medicine as areas where women could more readily go. There were a number of women in the Foreign Ministry and working in government offices, but they did not acknowledge that there was resistance to women. Their principal concern was the changing nature of work and having enough jobs for young people. There was concern about adequate training. I remember I went and spoke at a labor training institute in Rotterdam. I learned it was a very famous one that had been very successful. So successful, in fact, it was being held up as an example in Europe of how to train young people for dock work. There was also concern about technological impact on the workplace, to what extent it was displacing labor and if there were economic benefits, who would get the benefit. If a machine displaced a worker and did it more efficiently and cheaply, there was, in theory a bonus there. Did the company pocket the profit, or did it share. There was, in effect, an increase in productivity in effect and who got the benefit of that. There was a good deal of discussion about that. The structure

of labor relations and labor negotiations was a big issue, because they have a three-year cycle of, in effect, a national labor contract. That came up while I was there. I found it very difficult to get good information about that. There seemed to be a tendency on the part of some people in labor to feel that this was their business, a domestic issue, and it really isn't any of America's business to know what our negotiating positions are going to be and what kind of wage demands we expect to make and what kind of general position we are going to take on guaranteed employment. I think they also felt that Americans didn't understand the cultural traditional aspects, the wellsprings of this approach. Indeed, I think that is generally true; Americans don't understand or accept that type of sense of community. Many of these countries have a sense of community. They think of themselves as homogenous, and to a large degree they are, much more than the United States, and so they have an inclusive kind of concern with harmony in the community. They are much more forgiving and compassionate about their people. They tend to look at America as not concerned with the lives and survival and good health, mental and physical health, of people, workers included. The unions there negotiate not just for people who are employed but for the whole workforce, employed and unemployed.

Q: By extension, these agreements are really spread throughout the entire society.

WRIGHT: Exactly, and they negotiate for benefits for the unemployed or the non-employed.

Q: Oh, for the unemployed as well. That's not set by law generally?

WRIGHT: Well, that's in the national labor contract. They have tripartite negotiations, labor government, and management, company representatives. The three of them sit down and negotiate this. In principle, they look at the productivity benefits of the last three years and decide who should get that.

Q: This is both in the Netherlands and Belgium?

WRIGHT: No, they don't have a comparable, they have industry-wide negotiations in Belgium. They are bi-lateral; the government is not a party to the negotiations, as I recall.

Q: These are labor-management.

WRIGHT: The government follows them and can intercede, but it doesn't sit at the table with them.

Q: Do they extend the provisions to non-covered employees?

WRIGHT: No, they don't. They pass legislation to cover the unemployed. You get the same result but by a different road in Belgium.

Q: You mentioned that you moved from the Netherlands to Belgium. Were there specific reasons why folks decided that it was more effective to have the labor attaché in Belgium

rather than in the Netherlands?

WRIGHT: No one ever explicitly told me that, and I wanted to know. I didn't want to move for one year, even though it was a short distance, breaking up a household, kids changing schools. I didn't want to go through that, so I said, "Either let me stay here and finish out, or if I go to Brussels, let it be for two years." I lost on both. The conclusion I came to was that they were concerned in the political section in Brussels about the possibility of the unions getting out of control on the missiles. They wanted somebody close. We were coming down to the wire. We were getting ready to put the missiles into Florin, the name of the town. My perception was there was a great deal more anxiety and worry, just pressing anxiety about this, on the American side, and the Belgians were just accepting it. They wanted the Belgians to be persuaded that this was going to mean a lot of employment, the construction and the maintenance work. The Belgians seemed quite relaxed about it. I don't know why there was this great emotional stress on the American side. I wondered at the time whether it was coming from the Belgian government, but I wasn't told what. One, that there was any critical anxiety on the Belgian side. I could see there was great pressure to assure and to meet with, and meet with again, and find out what the attitudes were about this.

Q: Any final conclusions about your tour in the Netherlands and Belgium that you want to make before we turn to the next assignment?

WRIGHT: No. It was an interesting assignment. I found the unions in both countries, the union leadership and for that matter the membership, I made a great many factory visits, to be open to the American point of view, certainly not in an aggressive way pro American, but they just accepted Americans without problem or without resistance. George Meany was a name that was well known. The leadership had a detailed knowledge of who the movers and shakers in the American labor movement were. They understood there were limits on how much cooperation would be possible with the top leadership of the AFL-CIO. Because of that, I tended to the extent we could get direct bi-lateral relationships between unions, I tended to think more in terms of industrial sectors. The CIO elements of the AFL-CIO were much more congenial to the thinking of the Belgians and the Dutch than that of the AFL-CIO top leadership. You have to be careful that you don't get cross-wired here and create more conflict because it could be seen to be undermining the AFL-CIO leadership in the ICFTU. So, I wasn't pushing hard on this, but I began to understand there are a variety of opinions in America and in American labor unions. Certainly, there is a lot of sympathetic understanding. There was this one particular guy; in fact, he was probably the single most interesting contact I had in that four years, a fellow named Tom Etty who has an assistant for international affairs. He worked very closely with Vim Koch and over time became very frank. I learned only after I came back to the United States that Etty was regarded as a far-left type person. I think that is an inadequate description. If you had to summarize it for a certain kind of audience, that would be accurate and it may be for some people sufficient, but Tom, with whom I spent a great deal of time, was very compassionate and a great believer in human beings who tended to look at issues from a human point of view. What does the man think and why, rather than seeing him as an ideologue and write him off or accept him or

reject him as a Fascist or a pro-Nazi or pro-Communist, but who is he. He tended to feel that Americans tended to treat people broad brush strokes and classify them and handle them forever and after based on that label. He used to decry that quite a lot. He went to ILO and ICFTU and some other trade secretariat meetings, so he had been exposed to American labor leaders and their thinking.

Q: Maybe he had dealt with Irving Brown and Jay Lovestone.

WRIGHT: I don't know if he had dealt with him, but he knew of Irving Brown. He felt that he was too preemptory. It was a major source of concern and discomfort to him. He traveled also to Eastern Europe and felt that it was a weaning process. The countries were evolving, the unions were evolving, and they were evolving, so to speak, our way. We should maximize our contact with them. The idea that we would not talk with them, not have any social contacts, was antithetical. He thought we should talk to everybody, and we should be open to hear what they say and press for open dialogue. He was well aware that they had rigid situations very often, and we ought to be aware of that and seek to counter that. We should maximize the contact with the East Europeans, including the puppet unions. We should always talk with them. The trade secretariats were an area. That, of course, was something else. I had worked in the trade secretariats when I was in the Labor Department. Of course, the trade secretariats were a good area for penetration to open up the dialogue and increase understanding.

Q: Did you have contact with them while you were in Belgium? There are a number of them located there.

WRIGHT: There are three there; no, that was Jim Matson. He took me over to meet them, so I would have an understanding where I found opportunities for meaningful exchange or communication; we could exploit it. I can't think of any specific ones that we did now, but there were contacts that I didn't pursue through Jim. Metalworkers.

Q: They were in Geneva, weren't they? Primarily, or am I wrong?

WRIGHT: You are right. The International Metalworkers is in Switzerland. Miners are in Great Britain. There were some contacts. Etty was also a great believer in that. I had been primed with that point of view when I worked in the Labor Department, because I worked in the international trade union division. Arnold Steinbach was a great believer in the trade secretariats also, so that was kind of a congenial idea. That point of view that I brought to the situation made it easy for Tom Etty and I to communicate.

Q: OK; well, after Belgium you came back to the Department?

WRIGHT: Yes, I came back to the Department to work in the international organizations affairs bureau. I had a conflict my last year in Brussels with the new consul who came out to head up the operation. I'm not sure really just what generated it. I worked aggressively, maybe too aggressively, to win his confidence and support. Those efforts always seemed to go awry somehow.

Q: Who was the new consul?

WRIGHT: It was a fellow named Donald Johnston, who interestingly had been assistant labor attaché in Rome working under Tom Bowie but had gotten out of the labor field and regarded it really with contempt. He said the guys who were losers or on the brink of being selected out had been taken into the labor attaché corps and resuscitated and generally people who were not good quality and had failed.

Q: How on earth did he arrive at that conclusion?

WRIGHT: I don't know.

Q: What empirical evidence did he have to cite that kind of thing?

WRIGHT: I don't know that he did. He was given to kind of emotional explosions. An example of that. I just saw Ron Palmer on Memorial Day service at the DACOR (Diplomats and Consular Officers, Retired) cemetery. Ron Palmer was Deputy Director General or something like that in the State Department. Of course, Ron Palmer is African American. I had developed a very close friendship with a fellow named Steve Palmer. He had been Political Counselor in Israel when I visited there from Cairo. We had a fabulous series of interviews together. Steve really, in effect, used me as a stimulant to conversation with a number of people in the Foreign Ministry there. We had one of the most exciting dinner conversations I have ever had in my life at his home, but it endeared me greatly to Steve Palmer. When I was in Florence, Steve was assigned as Consul General in Zurich.

Q: This was later?

WRIGHT: Back when I was in Florence. We had developed a friendship during the Cairo-Tel Aviv days in the 70's. I was in Florence, and he arrived as CG (consul general) in Zurich. He had a reason to go to Rome. He remembered the friendship we had, so he said he would like to stop in Florence. As it happened, we had an apartment that went with the job that had a guest apartment in it or a guest suite, so I invited him to stay. Thinking this would be a good opportunity to improve relations, for me to improve my relationship with Johnston, I told him that the CG from Zurich was coming through and was going to stop and, in fact, offered him an opportunity to put him up because of closer equivalency of rank. Instead of saying thank you for the offer or I'd like to meet him, he went off on this terrible guy and who the hell did he think he was. Why is he coming down here? A really strange argumentation. It was only later that I came to realize that he thought I was talking about Ron Palmer, who he didn't know either. For reasons that he never made clear, he developed this terrible antagonism to Ron Palmer. I decided not to say anything because my working hypothesis given his reaction was this might be racial. When Steve showed up, you could see he was startled. When he saw Steve, he wondered who was that? I said, "This is Steve Palmer, I told you, the Consul General in Zurich." He seemed to be astounded. Steve Palmer is white, of course. I have forgotten how I got

off on that.

Q: You were at the memorial service. Anyhow, you had gone back to I guess IO (international organizations).

WRIGHT: Yes, I came back to international organizations.

Q: Did you handle the ILO portfolio?

WRIGHT: Yes. The reason I maneuvered my career this way is that I had filed a grievance against Johnston and won it, because he had written some things that were not true. I had documented the case so that I could demonstrate that what he said was not true. I won the case, but I felt as someone who has filed a grievance kind of restricted the possibilities. I took a job in international organizations affairs, and I got the portfolio for UN conferences. I was the accrediting officer for United States delegations to United Nations conferences including the ILO. It was really pretty much a 9-5 job. There was a well established pattern for nominations for delegates on each conference. The most complex one, of course, was the US delegation to the United Nations in New York ,because it is the largest delegation and it is fairly dynamic. People go on and off that delegation. Some people are non-resident members of that delegation. The ILO is a tripartite kind of thing. The AFL-CIO and the labor department have their input. Well, the AFL-CIO on the labor side and the ILO just to get the background information and put it together.

Q: I guess the US Chamber of Commerce does it.

WRIGHT: The Chamber of Commerce on the management side.

Q: The delegations had pretty much been set by the respective parties.

WRIGHT: Exactly. Some of them get a little bit tricky because there are politicians who were rewarded with membership in some of these delegations. There was a conference, of South Pacific states that representatives are chosen for. They often are political, I was in that job from '83-'85. They sometimes don't have any prior knowledge of the issues or the purpose.

Q: It sounds like a nice place to visit.

WRIGHT: Well, you got a chance to get out of the country, meet some new and different people, and have something to talk about at the country club for a few weeks.

Q: Was there any substantive content to the job on the labor side at all?

WRIGHT: No.

Q: Then after '85 did you take another assignment at that point?

WRIGHT: No, in '85 I retired and nurtured a business.

Q: Oh really, tell us about that.

WRIGHT: I had encountered some toys. Because I had filed and won this grievance, I began to feel that my prospects for advancement in the Foreign Service were going to be restricted or for getting an assignment that would lead to a promotion would be restricted, so I began thinking about life outside. I thought I would like to try the private sector for various reasons. I had looked at buying a factory which I thought and still think is the best approach to entrepreneurship, to find an establishment that is a healthy business, but for non-business reasons is for sale. As a matter of fact, we just came through a period where I think I may have missed the boat because large corporations were spinning off profitable but for practical or tactical reasons and for financial reasons. They had to raise cash to pay off the loan they had used to take over the parent company, so they sold off the constituent parts. In any case, I looked at a lead plant in Detroit, my hometown, which made wheel-balancing weights for the automobile companies. My plan had been for one of my brothers to retire as supervisor for maintenance for the Detroit Edison Company and take over management of this company which would be one one-hundredth the volume of work he had in his Edison job. I would work on government contracts for him, and we would own the company jointly. As things evolved and he began looking at the work and got closer to retirement, he decided finally that he really wanted to retire and not take on a new responsibility.

Q: Did you buy that plant?

WRIGHT: I decided not to. It was set up with a very good structure. I would get the profits from the contracts that I generated here. As a matter of fact, what we would do, I would start a company of my own and lease portions of his plant to do the work for the contracts that I generated. I would generate contracts and lease segments of his operation to fulfill the contracts. With the profits from that, (I) would buy his company over time. There was some evidence that we would be able to get a fair volume of business from the government.

Q: What did you finally end up doing?

WRIGHT: I went into the toy business.

Q: The toy business. Manufacturing?

WRIGHT: That was my goal. I identified an educational toy when I was in Belgium, as a matter of fact, although the toy was made in Holland. I showed it to people in the Board of Education in Washington and people who were responsible for early childhood development, and they appraised the toy as a great wonderful learning instrument. I showed it to the supervisor for FAO Schwarz. FAO Schwarz unbeknownst to me had just gone through a big expansion. They later went through a contraction; they shrank back to

their original size. They added new management sometime about 1980, I guess. They decided to expand all over the United States, and they bought five existing stores in the Washington area.

Q: They had one at Tyson's Corner, I recall.

WRIGHT: That's right; Tyson's Corner, Mazza Gallerie, Georgetown Park, but they had five in the area, and they brought a woman in to supervise the five stores; and as it happened through a combination of unplanned events, I found myself able to talk to the supervisor. I showed her this toy, and she thought it was wonderful and that we should immediately market it in the area. She recognized who I was and what my background was, so she gave me in short a little seminar on toys and the toy market and how one sells toys; the FAO-Schwarz approach to marketing toys. She gave me a window, a whole window display. When I suggested I needed a little more time to work that out, she thought it wasn't very difficult. I had taken my son along with me, who at that point was nine or ten years old. She turned to him and said, "You understand this toy, make some exhibits for your father."

Q: What kind of toy was it now?

WRIGHT: A construction toy, comparable to Lego. The difference in concept was it was much more like tinker toy. It was linear.

Q: What was the European name for it?

WRIGHT: The European name was "Rail Click" which, I thought, was not a meaningful name. It didn't communicate very much.

Q: It didn't click here.

WRIGHT: It turned out that the European packaging was illegal in the United States, so we changed the name to "Create It" having found the most creative word in education today. We decided we would market it as an educational toy, and we had the packaging redesigned. American legislation prohibits sale of products to children depicting pictures on the outside which cannot be made with the contents of the box. These boxes from Europe, for example, showed there were three sizes. The large box, for example, had a picture of a large windmill with this construction set. The windmill had 24 plates in it. The box contained four. Someone buying the box could reasonably expect that he could make what was portrayed on the box with the contents, and it was impossible. Ms. Smith at FAO Schwarz pointed that out to me and also showed the shortcomings of the box in general. If you put it on the shelf, you couldn't tell anything because the edge of the box was white with the black letters "Real Click". "Real Click" didn't say anything, and you couldn't see anything. Women walking by seeing the box on the shelf would get no message. We redesigned the boxes so they were thicker and had pictures on them and what we thought to be provocative words, "Create It".

Q: Did you import these then from Europe and use new boxes?

WRIGHT: I had the boxes printed up here. I contracted for the photography and the printing and the manufacture of the boxes and also the shipping cartons. We did a new logo, our own logo, designed by designers out at Atlantic Research Corporation, which you might know as a missile subcontractor, but they have a graphics division. So we redesigned everything and came up with a new concept. Instead of windmills and wheelbarrows and shovels, things like that, we had airplanes, helicopters, robots; things we thought would be of interest to American children, but benign.

Q: No ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles).

WRIGHT: Well, we did have rockets, but they were space research rockets.

Q: How were sales on the product?

WRIGHT: Well, the first full year we did very well. We did \$100,000, but we never got past the \$200,000 mark. A big problem emerged in pricing; the dollar continued to fall. I had expected the dollar to fall, but not that fast. My intention was to develop the market and demonstrate to the Dutch manufacturer the potential here and, hopefully, stimulate their sense of rivalry with the Danes, and we could manufacture in the United States.

Q: In the Lego line. The competition with the Danes would be with the Lego line.

WRIGHT: Exactly. It was my belief that we could make the two compatible. In fact, I found a way to do that, but the Dutch who manufactured the toy were not in the toy business. The company was a contract injection molding firm which made its living from producing parts, component parts for computers, automobiles; the knobs, for example, on the European Ford for cranking windows. The Europeans, more than Americans, crank windows instead of having electronic windows, but also the knobs on the radios and the dashboard, they mold those little pieces and sell them.

Q: I see; so toys were a sideline.

WRIGHT: Very much so, but more than incidental. There is a very interesting story about how they got into the toy business. It went back to when the company had first been founded by two brothers in the 50's, I guess. They were older men. After they had been in business a year or two, they had grandchildren. He didn't like any of the toys he saw around, so he designed and invented this construction set for his grandchildren, and then he manufactured them at the plant and then to try and sell them. They had a Belgian who was willing to work at distributing them. That is how I discovered it. They had no great interest in backing it, and they were unwilling to even consider doing anything in the United States. I had worked out a program by which they would ship the molds over here and let us manufacture a limited volume of them, larger than I was importing. I would buy the plastic here, because I could get it cheaper. Also I wanted to change the plastic, because there was surplus value in unused value in the material they were using. I

could get a better product, shinier, more flexible and durable.

Q: It is quite an undertaking then.

WRIGHT: Yes, it was altogether a fascinating exercise. I'm still convinced that one could make a success of it. The Dutch didn't want to come in on it, so I looked around in the United States. I checked the patent limitations, and the patents were about to run out. I found business propositions here, but I couldn't crack the capital investment. I just couldn't find anybody who was willing and able to lead me to raise money here on a basis that would make it work. I did find three potential partners who were willing to invest in it or guarantee investment, but they wanted 51% of the company.

Q: Then you lose control.

WRIGHT: I thought that wasn't fair, and I thought it was very dangerous for my interest. My lawyer said we can handle that; what are your concerns. One, that they would take over the company and put me out and be a success without me. He said we can draft a contract that would cover that. We really resolved most of the issues, but I was still resistant to the idea of 51% going to somebody. I didn't understand something that is really very obvious and elementary. Someone made it clear to me after I had given up the idea and closed down the business. He said if you were in a position to lend somebody a million dollars or a million and a half dollars -- I wanted three -- but a million and a half dollars, would you lend them a million and a half dollars without control?

Q: Good question!

WRIGHT: Again, if you simply look at it from the other person's point of view, you can see. They were willing to cede managerial control, but they wanted the right of oversight, the right of veto, because they were putting up the money. I wanted to make medium sized, I would prefer big molds but that would involve a bigger financial risk than was reasonable. I wanted to make medium sized molds, multiple cavity molds; so instead of making one piece per shot, it would make 15-20. We were talking about \$500,000, just for molds. I had worked out a deal with Toys R Us. I had gotten into marketing another product, a science kit, which I had helped develop. I had been approached by a subsidiary of a Fortune 500 company with a battery that was salt-water, aluminum battery; it was benign, it was safe for children to play with, no acid or lead. They hired me as a consultant to work it into a marketable product. We made it into a science kit, where you would assemble it into a battery and put in a little electric motor with a fan and lights and switches and so forth, all run on just two volts, making it entirely benign and safe. I don't know how much money they made, because I never checked the books. We sold about \$2,000,000 worth of that science kit in a two- or three -year period.

Q: What time period was that?

WRIGHT: This was '86-'89.

Q: '86-'89; OK, and you still were importing "Create It" as well?

WRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Did you continue to import "Create It"?

WRIGHT: I was making money with that, but I was not making money with "Create It", because the dollar had fallen so low. I couldn't raise prices here because the American market just wouldn't tolerate an increased price.

Q: Basically, because it was manufactured in the Netherlands, you couldn't make it profitable. Did you phase that out?

WRIGHT: Yeah. After I became a cropper and couldn't manufacture here, I shut down the whole operation. Then the supplier of the battery, you see I had bought the electric motors and components, the wires and switches, light bulbs and so forth. Excuse me, I said I bought them, they bought them, and we assembled the kits. I had wanted that function here. I thought if I could get an assembly base here, it would be easier to get investors to come in on the "Create It". I then began looking for other educational products that I could put with this. I had not quite a critical mass, but I had about five different toys that I was ready to launch together. I changed the name of the company from Wright International to the Wright Toys Company. I still get letters from people today wanting to know whether I would be interested in their products.

Q: When did you phase out of the Wright Toy?

WRIGHT: 1989.

Q: '89; OK, then what did you do?

WRIGHT: I became Executive Director for what became the Caux Scholars program. I helped form and develop, named after a village in Switzerland where there is a site called Mountain House, which is owned and operated by Moral Re-Armament.

Q: Saginaw Island is it?

WRIGHT: Mackinac Island in Michigan.

Q: In Michigan, right. My mother went to some of those programs years ago.

WRIGHT: They'd be interested in getting in touch with you. It is alive and well. Their major international site is Mountain House in Caux, Switzerland, right above Montreux; beautiful location. I've got a color booklet of that. We developed a conflict resolution summer seminar for college-level students. ...overseeing the preparation of some of the publicity materials and writing some of it, selecting the photographs, composing the brochure, sending the material out to colleges and universities and abroad to recruit

students, because we wanted an international mélange of students, and negotiating with the instructors and the guest lecturers, doing the scheduling, putting all that together for initially six weeks. Then they reduced it to five weeks. I did that for four years.

Q: So that was through 1993?

WRIGHT: That's right. Then I went to work at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) as special assistant to the president. He had started as president there about three or four years before and came to realize that a major reorganization was needed in public broadcasting. It is a large structure, and there is no central power that can change it. Each of the stations is individually owned and operated, and PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) is independent and separated. They receive money from the CPB, but they are independent. Presumably they can be influenced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, because that is where they get a large part of their money, but they don't get all of it from CPB. The National Public Radio is again a separate entity. The largest single source of funds for National Public Radio is the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but it is not the only source.

Q: The Corporation for Public Broadcasting receives its money from the Congress and not listeners like you.

WRIGHT: The Congress. CPB does not get direct cash from the listeners. There was a desire to restructure the operation. It became a monumental task, because there was a lot of jawboning. You have to work out the numbers when you propose to these independent operations that they reorganize in a certain way; you have to have done the homework and show them why it is to their advantage.

Q: What did they want to do that they couldn't do under the old system? I mean with the present corporation?

WRIGHT: One of the things I spent a lot of time trying to work out was the contract process which had a lot of lawyers in it. It was a complex legal process where, in fact, the contracts were pretty standard. One of the things we wanted to do was to standardize the contracts, simplify and isolate the variable sections, the parts that could be changed or adjusted every year; the other part would be fixed, and to reduce the amount of time it took to get these contracts done. That simple process proved to be very complex. Many of the things that Newt Gingrich complained about were already in process that we felt were legitimate inefficiencies.

Q: These were legitimate complaints on his part about inefficiencies.

WRIGHT: Yes, and so we were working on those, but because we didn't have the power to dictate, it is not a network like NBC (National Broadcasting Company) or CBS where you can issue a memorandum and everybody has to fall into line, you had to persuade all these independents. Again, all these stations are individually owned. In addition, you learned a lot in the process. We were trying to reorganize, for example, just the

contracting process and persuade people that this was going to be better and how it would work, what parts would be standardized and fixed, and what they could do if they were not satisfied. We were trying to reduce the time it took to get contracts for production of programs.

Q: Did the Corporation for Public Broadcasting actually produce programs and share them with the networks or the individual...

WRIGHT: We funded and financed programs.

Q: The individual stations would develop the programs and share them with other members of the public broadcasting system?

WRIGHT: Yes. Production of radio and television programs is undertaken by, in some cases, stations individually and, in other cases, independent production companies in the case of Rick Smith, for example.

Q: Oh yes, on Russia.

WRIGHT: He has an independent production company. I don't think he has facilities. He has the ideas, puts it all together, and hires cameramen. He does his own script- writing, probably, but he hires people to do the actual work, but he develops the concept and subcontracts to actually bring it to fruition. PBS finances programs, but WGBS, for example in Boston, is a big producer. They also co-produce with the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), for example. You see this very often. There are a wide variety of ways of bringing things together.

Q: Then the station that produces would get some sort of revenue from other stations that show these things.

WRIGHT: Yes, they would sell the rights to broadcast. It took me a while to become familiar with the process and to identify the specific areas where we could bring about some changes and then get to know the people with whom you have to work to bring about the change. Just as we were getting rolling, the Republicans came down and began to make noises about cutting, which threw everything into a panic. No one wanted to change anything. Some wanted to dig in and fight and keep the appropriation, and to hell with Newt Gingrich. Others wanted to yield and give him what he wants.

Q: There was a public outcry when Congress decided to cut all funding, as I recall. People were telephoning in to Congress, the switchboard was clogged.

WRIGHT: They didn't back off entirely. They are still supposed to cut off government funding for CPB by, I guess, 2000 was their target date.

Q: Did that affect your employment?

WRIGHT: Yes, I found people didn't even want to talk to me. I couldn't go forward, and I couldn't back up. I was very pleased, Dick Carlson, who was president, with whom I was working directly, and Bob Coonrod, the executive vice president, who effectively was operating officer. He was the guy for whom I was really working directly and reporting to Dick. They had a relationship that made this possible. It sounds kind of conflicting, but it worked very well.. They didn't want to fire me, but I couldn't do any work, and there was no point in staying; so I resigned.

Q: Did you take employment after that?

WRIGHT: Yes, I went to Mount Vernon College and took two jobs over there. Initially, I went there just to teach, but I was teaching advertising and public relations, and I had some other work in the international relations field.

Q: You are still at Mount Vernon College then?

WRIGHT: Yes. I met people over in administration and talked to them about their public relations activities. They were really catch as catch can, and they were willing to take me on in a part-time basis and see if I could do something. I was there for a little more than a school year and started to standardize and get things organized to work with the press in a concerted way and develop a specific image and cultivate a definable image for the college and get it projected in to the media when my wife was stricken with cancer. I stopped working as it happens right at the end of the school year.

Q: A year ago roughly.

WRIGHT: Yes, May 4.

Q: Where exactly is Mount Vernon College? Is it in Mount Vernon, Virginia?

WRIGHT: No, it's in the District of Columbia on Foxhall Road. It has an interesting history in many ways. The overall history, but one segment is particularly interesting. It had grown to the point where they bought property on Nebraska Avenue in the 30's, and they built dormitories and classroom buildings, and it was a college for young ladies. When WWII came along, the Navy needed a special facility for secret purposes, so the government took over the campus and put the college out. They used buildings around town where they could find space, which was no easy task during WWII. What the Navy was doing with the college was decoding Japanese codes.

Q: So it was NSA (National Security Agency) in the making.

WRIGHT: Yes. They broke the Japanese codes there, so the battle of Midway. There is an interesting discussion about we knew before Pearl Harbor was bombed, or at least the decoders knew before Pearl Harbor was bombed, that the Japanese were going to bomb Pearl Harbor.

Q: Oh, they did. I thought they knew that the fleet was on the way but didn't know where they were going.

WRIGHT: Well they had refined it to the point where they understood.

Q: They knew it was Pearl Harbor.

WRIGHT: Pearl Harbor was it. They also knew the Japanese were going to declare war, because we had read the transmission from Tokyo to the Embassy here. There is a lot written on this; it is kind of interesting, but the Japanese had difficulty because of a party the night before, from the stories I have read. They had difficulty getting a translation of the declaration of war typed up and in perfect order. While they were stumbling around trying to get the communiqué typed precisely, Pearl Harbor was bombed. It is interesting to wonder, Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State knew this and knew the attack was going to occur, and so when the Japanese Ambassador came, he already knew the attack had taken place and that this guy was coming with a declaration of war. All that decoding was done. More important was the battle of Midway and Coral Sea. Because we translated their military transmissions, we knew what ships were going to be in the task force that would attack Midway, and we knew the order of battle. The movies that were made during WWII of the Battle of Midway are kind of interesting to look at from that standpoint, because they have the patrol bombers somehow knowing that a task force is on the way to Midway. They have them looking all over the ocean when, in fact, they were looking in a particular sector, and they knew what to look for. George Bush was, of course, a dive bomber pilot, a torpedo bomber pilot. He flew the Grumman Avenger, I think. The torpedoes didn't work. The torpedoes were made over here in the torpedo factory in Virginia, and the torpedoes did not explode. All of the planes the Grumman Avengers that went in dropping those torpedoes were shot down. None of the torpedoes exploded. Fortunately, some of the pilots survived. It was a high-risk business. They go in at ground level way below the guns, right into the guns of the ship; they drop a torpedo, and they have to pull up.

Q: I see. That's when they get hit.

WRIGHT: They get hit on the underside. That's what happened to Bush.

Q: Well, to get back to Wilbur Wright, do you plan on going back to college or what is your future?

WRIGHT: I've talked to the people there, and it appears that it is possible. The college, of course, in the interim, in that year I was away, was taken over by George Washington University; so it's not clear, but it appears possible that I could go back.

Q: It is a campus of George Washington.

WRIGHT: It is going to be the Mount Vernon College of George Washington University. The relationship is going to be like that of Barnard to Columbia.

Q: For women only?

WRIGHT: That is one of the things they want to retain. In fact, men study there because it is part of the consortium of colleges in the Washington area, so they exchange students, faculty, and materials.

Q: Well, any concluding remarks you'd like to make about your career or the Labor Attaché Corps, words of wisdom for future generations.

WRIGHT: The labor-attaché function, I think, is a profoundly important one and has attracted, I think, because of its very nature some of the best people in the Foreign Service. It is with more than sadness that I see it is being dissolved. Of course, it perhaps reflects the psychology and the ideological turn in the world today that the market should determine everything, and that capital and management make all the proper decisions and labor should follow along and do what it's told. The understanding of labor is suffering in this era. I hope that we can keep the labor-attaché function alive because reality will reassert itself. In fact, I think we see indications of it already. We forget the purpose of all this activity is to serve man, to make life more abundant and better for people. Whereas the ideology it seems to me we are caught up in, the system we are caught up in, is the function of all this is profits, is to make money. I don't agree with that.

Q: Maybe the labor function provides a corrective factor in providing fairness in the workplace. Respect for the dignity of the individual.

WRIGHT: Respect for his purpose and his function. The purpose of the system is to serve man, not serve the system.

Q: Well, with that bit of wisdom shall we conclude. I want to thank you very much for taking so much time. It has been a great pleasure for me.

WRIGHT: The pleasure has been mine; I enjoyed it.

Q: OK well, all the best.

End of interview