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Labor Series

AMBASSADOR PHILIP M. KAISER

Interviewer: Morris Weisz
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INTERVIEW

Q: The date is Thursday, October 8, 1992. I am interviewing Ambassador Philip Kaiser, who will tell us about his work in the labor field beginning with his work in the Labor Department and then later on in the Foreign Service as an Ambassador. Phil, will you begin by telling us about your forthcoming book so that during the course of the interview you can refer to various chapters or sections. Students might also want to look at material you have submitted to libraries including the Truman Library, as well your book.

KAISER: The title of the book is Journeying Far and Wide, A Political and Diplomatic Memoir. There is a short chapter at the beginning dealing with my childhood in Brooklyn, then there is a rather long chapter on the University of Wisconsin. My studies there laid the foundation for my interests and activities in labor. Anybody who is interested in a vital chapter in the history of American labor might find it worth reading because Wisconsin was the university where the first significant research on labor was done and the first important books were written. It was all under the aegis of the famous John R. Commons. He had a wonderful group of students, who participated in the production of the first great study and history of labor in America, Selig Perlman, David Sapos,

William Leierson, and Edwin Witte. They all played a vital role in American social and intellectual life.

Q: Well, that's the chapter about Wisconsin.

KAISER: Then we go on to a chapter that is of particular interest here called, "The Truman Years: Labor and International Affairs", in which I go into considerable detail about the Labor Attaché Program, how it got started, how it grew, what the role of the Labor Department was vis a vis State, about our membership on the Board of the Foreign Service in the late 1940s, when it was a very important instrument in the work of the Service, about the ILO and not least of all about the role that American labor played in the critical years of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. I think too little is known about U.S. labor's contribution to the success of the Marshall Plan and of Greek-Turkish aid, the role the AFL in particular played in breaking up the Communist dominated World Federation of Trade Unions, the role labor played in helping break the Communist grip on the trade union movements in France and Italy, which at the time were probably the greatest threat to the success of the Marshall Plan. The Communists there were under orders from Moscow and they did everything they could to sabotage and frustrate it.

Q: Then you left the Labor Department.

KAISER: I left the Labor Department in 1953 and went on to I work as a Special Assistant to Averell Harriman, whom interestingly enough I had gotten to know when he was running the Marshall Plan in Paris. He was very interested in the labor aspect of the whole enterprise and had created a strong labor division there, which we helped staff. I always saw him on my way to and from Geneva when I was a member of the ILO Governing Body and Chairman of the tripartite American delegation to Annual Conference. I would go to Geneva three times a year.

Q: And with his successor. Who was there in 1950?

KAISER: Milton Katz. And when I came to Albany, one of my jobs was to serve as Governor Harriman's liaison with the trade union leaders in New York State.

Q: You came to Albany to work for Governor Harriman?

KAISER: Special Assistant to Harriman, yes.

Q: Then you came back to Washington.

KAISER: I taught at the School of International Service in American University and served as the Director of its International Labor Training Program. I gave a course on Labor and International Affairs for a couple of years before I went off to be Kennedy's Ambassador to Senegal and also Mauritania. It's interesting that when I asked Chet Bowles, "Why does Kennedy want me to go there?"

Q: Chet Bowles was the Under Secretary [of State].

KAISER: The Under Secretary who was handling these assignments for Kennedy. He said, "Why Senegal? The President of Senegal, Senghor, a very remarkable man, is an old French Socialist. His political ideas were shaped by the French Socialist Party and his heroes were Jean Jaures and Leon Blum. This is a world with which you are familiar; you know French; and we think that combination will prove to be a valuable asset in your dealings with him." And so it turned out to be.

Q: I assume that you cover this in your book too.

KAISER: Yes. It's covered in the book. Then of course from there I went to London as Minister, and there too this background that I had had proved invaluable. A Labor Government was in power.

Q: You were not ashamed of your Oxford background?

KAISER: No, not at all. Actually I had known about half of the Labor Cabinet from my Oxford days and I had seen them regularly in the succeeding 20 years.

Q: I was completely shocked when I arrived there--in 1964 I guess it was--coming back from Vietnam and you had a dinner for Walter Lippmann to which you invited me as your house guest and there were four or five members of the Cabinet there of whom at least three or four had gone to the same college at Oxford. Come clean.

KAISER: Well, I was a student at the famous Balliol College and I was President of the Junior Common Room, which means President of the student body. I was succeeded by Ted Heath or Teddy Heath as he was called then. Of course he later became the Conservative Prime Minister. He was succeeded by Denis Healey and Healey was succeeded by Roy Jenkins. The latter two were leading members of the Labor Government's Cabinet. We have all been friends ever since. I have seen them regularly since the end of the war. I have seen them practically at least once a year.

Q: Now this is covered in another chapter. You then came back to the United States or went into business or something like that.

KAISER: It just so happens that each time a Republican President came in, I left the Government. As I say to some of my friends, there's no one that I know of who's more of an expert on "lame duckery" than I.

Q: But your lame duckery as I recall lasted a little bit longer than normal both in the Labor Department, when you stayed beyond Eisenhower's Inauguration for a while, and...

KAISER: I stayed beyond Eisenhower because Marty Durkin asked me to stay on a while. I tell the story in the book. He wanted me to go once more to the ILO Conference as a Delegate.

Q: You of course resisted that.

KAISER: No. One of the main reasons was... I am honest about that in the book. I accepted because it turned out that a big celebration, the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Rhodes Scholarship, was starting in Oxford the day after the ILO Conference ended and so this was very much an added incentive. We asked Irving Ives, who was a fairly liberal, moderate New York Senator, to attend the ILO Conference as the second delegate. This was Marty's idea and mine. We wanted to...

Q: The Marty you refer to is Marty Durkin, the Secretary of Labor.

KAISER: Marty Durkin, the Secretary of Labor, the plumber amidst the eight millionaire colleagues in the Cabinet. Very nice guy. I knew him of course when he was head of the Plumbers Union. A very sweet human being. He insisted that Eisenhower see us before Ives and I left for Geneva. Mainly because...

Q: I don't think that our project knows that there is a member of Congress, usually a senior member interested in the labor field, who is always a member of the delegation and goes over there.

KAISER: That's right. That was the practice. I don't know whether it still is. It certainly was our practice. Durkin wanted the three of us to see President Eisenhower because he thought it was appropriate, and he also had a little item of business. My instructions were to vote against the new ILO budget because the State Department objected to a specific expenditure of \$23,000. Durkin thought this was rather ridiculous. He wanted to get the President to overrule State and the President did, although when the meeting broke up, I heard him whisper to Sherman Adams, his Chief of Staff, "I am beginning to feel like a New Dealer." After giving \$23,000!

But the other story about our meeting with President Eisenhower is a wonderful one, I think. It was a cloudy day and I was going to fly to New York immediately after the meeting to catch the United States, a wonderful ship. In those civilized days we used to take the ship to Europe every now and then. There was no shuttle in those days. The United States was leaving at noon and I had to catch a flight which was coming in from Mexico City and was leaving Washington about 9:30.

Q: You should have taken the train the night before.

KAISER: I couldn't. I was seeing the President at 8 o'clock in the morning. While we were waiting to see the President, Ives was teasing me, saying, "Phil, you'll never land in La Guardia. I've taken this flight many times. When it's cloudy this way here, La Guardia

is fogged in." I said, "Well, I'll take my chances." When we got through with our business with the President, Ives turned to the President and said, "Phil here thinks he is going to be able to get into La Guardia in order to make a boat at noon today and with this weather he won't be able to." So the President said to me very seriously, "Look, Kaiser, if La Guardia is fogged in, you just go up to the pilot and you tell him to go to Floyd Bennett Air Field." That's the military field. He said, "I've come into New York many times when all the other air fields were fogged in except Bennett. Bennett seems always to be open. It is never closed down by fog." So I said, "Thank you for that very good piece of advice, Mr. President." As I walked out, I thought of myself going up to the pilot and saying, "You know, the President told me..." and the next thing I knew I'd be carried out in a straight jacket. I should have put that story in the book. That's about as practical...

Q: Did you land at La Guardia?

KAISER: Sure. That's how practical military people become after many years of their kind of experience.

Q: Yeah. Well, after...

KAISER: I am now in London, of course. It was a great asset. I knew a lot of labor leaders. I knew the politicians. In fact I had even met Wilson at Oxford. I was on an easy first name basis with all of the members of the Government and a good many of the opposition leaders, many of whom I had met during my student days at Oxford. And with all due modesty or immodesty I can say that it turned out to be very helpful. Technically I was the first non-career man to be Minister in London, which was considered one of two or three choice career jobs in the Service. The career FSO's weren't very happy about it. They are used to having non-career Ambassadors but they didn't like the idea of having a non-career person who seemed to be qualified doing that job.

Q: But the Ambassador took care of that problem?

KAISER: I couldn't come unless he approved the appointment.

Q: I mean he took care of any problems you might have had with the Foreign Service. Well, again you stayed on in private business in London coming here [to the United States] frequently and active in the Democrats Abroad.

KAISER: And I served on the Platform Committee of the 1976 Democratic Party National Convention; in fact, I was Co-Chairman of the section on international relations. I was a compromise candidate; Bella Abzug and Pat Moynihan were opposing each other in senatorial primaries and they agreed on my chairmanship.

Q: They had different candidates.

KAISER: In any case, [after the Democrats' victory in 1976], I thought that I was all set to go to Yugoslavia as Ambassador. Cy Vance and I had been friends since the Johnson Administration. At the last minute, Kissinger asked Vance as a special favor to appoint Larry Eagleburger as Ambassador. Larry had served as a young officer there.

Q: And wanted to go back.

KAISER: Very much so. They appointed me to Hungary which was most fortunate. It was a much, much more interesting and a more productive assignment. It also gave me an opportunity to see how a relatively liberal Communist society, but still Moscow controlled, how it works. I have a long chapter on this in the book. I mention the fact too that, just as a matter of interest, that when Reagan came into office, Cy Vance asked Haig as a special a favor to appoint Peter Tarnoff, who was a Foreign Service Officer and had been Executive Secretary to Cy. . . to give him an ambassadorial appointment and Haig said, "Sure, we'll look after him." Nothing ever happened. Cy told me, "I called him once. I called him twice and then I let it go. I knew nothing was going to happen." This is not untypical. The Democrats have always been much more generous on this kind of thing than the Republicans.

Hungary was a fascinating place. As I indicated it was the most liberal of the Eastern European countries. They had what they called their NEM, the new economic mechanism. They were trying to develop a market economy, by fits and starts trying to develop a real authentic price system, and they had trade unions which were under state control. The head of it was a man called Gaspar, who was conservative, and President of the Communist World Federation of Trade Unions. He didn't particularly like this economic reform because the farmer seemed to be doing much better under it than the average worker, particularly the less skilled worker. He received me. I was the only Western ambassador he ever received, and the reason was because of my labor background, and because they were kind of currying my favor. They wanted to get the Crown of St. Stephen back. He was very cute, insisting the Hungarian unions were "autonomous". As a matter of fact they had their own newspaper which was a little more independent - I underline a little more - than the party paper and the government paper. As I mentioned earlier, he gave me a real pitch about what a great trade union leader Meany was and how he wished I would talk to Meany and urge him to return to the ILO, because they needed him and the American labor movement. Also, now that I recall it, he gave me another amusing pitch about how important trade unions were for the development of democracy in a system in which there was only one political party.

Q: The separate function of the trade union.

KAISER: And, as I told you, it was interesting too, how the Austrian trade unions kept pretty active liaison with the Hungarian trade unions. I also saw it on the other side when I got to Vienna.

Q: Did you get into the problems that existed within the American labor movement when Rudy Faupl, the AFL-CIO International Representative, who was a Hungarian who believed in this business of a little bit of an opening to Hungary on the part of the Austrians. He had very good contacts with the Austrians. In conversations with me, he criticized this hard line official AFL-CIO attitude; he was more sympathetic to the Austrian idea of opening up a little bit to them.

KAISER: Well, I had talked when I got to Austria with Benya.

Q: Benya was head of the trade union movement and the vice...

KAISER: Yes. He was also President of Parliament and he knew about what we had done to help in the reconstruction of the Austrian trade union movement. He still remembered our exchange program. There were still some men around whom we brought over as trade unionists.

Q: Did you know Kienzl?

KAISER: Yes, we brought over others as well and Benya mentioned it a couple of times. On a relate subject, he said, "I don't understand the policy of the AFL. We receive these Eastern European so-called trade unionists. They don't subvert us. We have an impact on them. They don't change us. They learn much more from us than we learn from them." He was very cute about it. He valued very highly his relationship first with Meany and then with Lane Kirkland.

Q: Was Vienna considered a more important post?

KAISER: No, about the same. As a matter of fact, Hungary was in a real way more challenging, more interesting. Austria was a new, vibrant democracy. It was really quite extraordinary the job they did considering their immediate pre-war history and it was a Social Democratic Government, a Socialist Government. Chancellor Kreisky liked my background. The first meeting I had with him he said to me, "I have letters about you from Jim Callaghan, from Denis Healey, from Harold Lever and from Kitty Carlisle. He knew Kitty Carlisle, and like everybody else who knows her, was very fond of her.

Q: Oh, because of her Vienna background.

KAISER: He said, "How do you know Kitty Carlisle?" He didn't ask me how did I know the other people who wrote him. "How do you know Kitty Carlisle?"

Q: Well, I am not asking you for the details, but how did you know Kitty Carlisle?

KAISER: She was the wife of Moss Hart, and I knew Morris Hart when I was a kid. We were in the same camp together. We were friends.

Q: Well, you have a chapter on Vienna too. At the end of that period which coincided with the Reagan Administration coming in, you came back to the United States and you have been active here keeping your contacts pretty well with the labor movement. What I want to do now is go over a couple of subjects with you and please stop whenever you wish. We have a number of things that have come up in other interviews that you might be able to shed some light on. One of the questions is the problem in this international labor field between the U.S. Department of Labor and the State Department. At the time you were involved, the Labor Department had a higher status on international labor issues than it has now. You were an Assistant Secretary.

KAISER: That was George Schultz's doing by the way. He was the one who abolished the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs.

Q: They had another Assistant Secretaryship that they wanted to establish.

KAISER: Steve Schlossberg told me that they are now trying to reestablish the old arrangement.

Q: In the State Department your counterpart was not a person at [the Assistant Secretary] level and then both of you would go to the ILO What were the issues between State and Labor that created problems? How was the working relationship there?

KAISER: Well, the working relationship was good.

Q: Who was your opposite number but at a lower level there?

KAISER: Otis Mulliken was head of the division. We had a good personal relationship. He always came as an advisor to the ILO and then there was Walter Kotschnig who was head of the Office of International Organizations.

Q: A wonderful old Austrian. Where was the policy made?

KAISER: Mostly in the Labor Department on all the substantive issues. Whenever there were political overtones, State would get involved but the agenda of an ILO Conference, as you know, was all social-labor. We in the Department of Labor did the donkey work in developing the position papers. A big problem was always the damned budget. The State Department was always on our backs to keep the budget down. There were house-keeping problems. For example, we never had any money for representation. The most pathetic party given at the Conference was by the American Delegation because they gave us very little for entertainment.

Q: What about the designation of labor officers in the Embassies? You had a whole lot to do with that.

KAISER: There was a great expansion of the Labor Attaché Corps at that time and I tell the story quite frankly, the fact. . .

Q: This is in your book too?

KAISER: . . . the fact that I was an Assistant Secretary. . . We had David Morse first, and then I was Assistant Secretary of Labor and that gave us access to the highest levels of the State Department. We became good friends, Morse and I, with Acheson. We had a warm personal relationship. There are a lot of stories about that that I don't tell in my book. But in any case the big thing really was our membership on the Board of the Foreign Service, and its sub-board called the Appointments and Assignments Board, which approved every assignment in the whole Foreign Service. Under the Foreign Service Act of 1946, the Board of the Foreign Service consisted of three assistant Secretaries of State plus the Under Secretary for Administration, who was always Chairman and of one each from Agriculture, Commerce and Labor. I had the advantage after a while of being the senior member in terms of service. I was the Assistant Secretary of Labor for almost five years and there was a big turnover in the State Department. During my time, I served with all the top people including Dr. Freeman Matthews, Jimmy Riddleberger, George Allen, Bill Benton and I can't remember... Was Dean Rusk?. Yes, he was on the Board.

Q: He was an Assistant Secretary.

KAISER: Assistant Secretary for the Far East and on the Board of the Foreign Service. I had a very warm personal relationship with Jack Peurifoy. He was the Under Secretary and Chairman of the Board. We had to clear all promotions. We set up the promotion boards and we were the ones--Labor and Commerce--in 1948 who insisted on public members being on the Foreign Service promotion boards. It made a big difference. Later on even old time Foreign Service Officers appreciated that it was a smart idea.

Q: Politically it is a way at getting at a constituency on the domestic side. I am surprised that that idea was not accepted earlier.

KAISER: Well, at first the old timers didn't want it. And then of course the most important thing was that we used this leverage of Board membership to get additional labor attachés. On more than one occasion, State wanted my vote on something unrelated directly to the Labor Attachés, so I would shamelessly use it and say, "Well, I'll do it, if you will give us a Labor Attaché here or a Labor Attaché there, which they knew was justified and badly needed where we were fighting to get an additional assignment.

Q: What about the pressures on you from the trade union movement to nominate people for jobs?

KAISER: Well, it wasn't easy and we tried to get the right people with background but if they didn't have it we... We didn't consciously take any lemons. We took a fair number of people who hadn't been in the trade union movement. As they say at Harvard, "If you

have two candidates who are equally good, one whose father went to Harvard and one whose didn't, we'll take the one whose father went to Harvard." Well, if there were two candidates equally good, one from the trade union movement and one not, we'd tilt toward the trade union guy.

Q: Comment on that aspect of the Marshall Plan operation. Did you also have some influence on the selection of labor persons there?

KAISER: Yes, they turned to us for some advice and what we did do, which was important and I tell this story, was to assist the Greek-Turkish program the first time they set up a labor section.

Q: Was this under Point Four or the Marshall Plan?

KAISER: The Greek-Turkish aid preceded the Marshall Plan.

Q: This was the Point Four thing.

KAISER: No, Point Four was different, entirely different.

Q: Oh, really. This was the Turkish-Greek thing?

KAISER: Aid. Point Four was world-wide technical assistance. We had set up this Trade Union Advisory Committee when there were still two trade union movements in the United States, the AFL and the CIO. David Morse did this with Secretary Schwollenbach's backing, which was really crucial. Morse set it up just after the CIO had rid itself of the Communist influence and so it became possible. There were ten members, four from the AFL, four from the CIO and we had two from the railways. We had Art Lyon of the Railway Executives Association and then we had a man named Harkin, who represented Whitney of the trainmen and the engineers. It was a very active and a very effective group. We met regularly every month and it consisted of George Meany, Mat Wall, David Dubinsky, Jack Potofsky, Clint Golden, Jim Carey and two international representatives, Delaney of the AFL and Mike Ross of the CIO. They knew about the Greek-Turkish program before it was even public. Dean Acheson came over and spoke about it. He later spoke about the Marshall Plan and solicited their support. And when it came to appointing a man to run the labor section, George Meany - which was really absolutely precedent shattering - came up with the proposal of Clint Golden of the CIO. Clint then - I tell the story in the book. It is one of my favorite stories - Clint then picked Alan Strachan of the U.A.W. as his deputy. Meany was up in arms. I said, "George, you just gave Clint Golden this vote of confidence and then you are going to tell him that he can't pick his own deputy." Well, it was one of the few times that I got George Meany to back down.

Q: But they also put in an AFL'er right there, Joe Heath.

KAISER: But Strachan was the deputy.

Q: Strachan was the deputy and did very well. He later went on to be very active.

KAISER: In Pakistan. He happens to be the father-in-law of Tom Foley, the current Speaker of the House.

Q: What about the Cold War and McCarthyism?

KAISER: I deal with it in my chapter. I was a semi-victim of it.

Q: Yourself?

KAISER: Yeah. It's in the chapter.

Q: You're not much a victim though compared with some others.

KAISER: No, I make that point.

Q: Now, what about the duties of the Labor Attaché?

KAISER: Well, it's all laid out in the book.

Q: Good. Now, let me just go over some of these questions. The CIA? You don't go over that and you don't want to go over it?

KAISER: Not really.

Q: We are going to have some contributions from other people. You can make up your mind what you want to say about that. I know that in what I am going to say I have plenty to say about that. Could you distinguish between - because of the paranoid attitude on Communism that varied from people who were intelligently anti-Communist and the ignoramuses like the McCarthyites, etc. - What about the relatively innocent people who agreed with some individual aspect of Communist policy and the fact that McCarthyism caught these people up and criticized them even though they were not Communists? Did you have any experience in that regard?

KAISER: Yes, there were guys who... Let me make one point about the CIA, which is interesting, I think. Jay Lovestone was one of their favorites. You know, I went to the memorial service at the AFL-CIO [Headquarters] for Jay.

Q: Did you see all those CIA types there?

KAISER: There were more CIA people there than there were trade union guys.

Q: I noticed that too.

KAISER: I went there because of Jay Mazur, whom I am very fond of, the President of the ...

Q: The Ladies Garment Workers Union.

KAISER: I think he is a modern, contemporary version of Dave Dubinsky. He really is. He's wonderful. Dulles was very interested in the free trade union movement. Like Nixon, he understood the role labor had to play in fighting Communism. And that's why they liked Irving. Once or twice Dulles invited me over to meetings in the National Security Council, when they were working on policy papers to be sure that there was the right kind of reference to the role of labor in the policies that were pursuing.

Q: Well, there's an interesting book out called The Cold Warrior, about Angleton. It just came out--I commend it to your attention--in which there is some discussion of Lovestone and the relationship of Lovestone to Angleton and what is apparent to me - and I am not asking you to agree to that. You may have a different view on it - is that Lovestone utilized his knowledge of Communist policy to get his thinking into Angleton's. Both of them were paranoid anti-Communists. Angleton felt that if he were Stalin he would place a mole in the CIA. So that automatically meant that there was a mole in the CIA, and we have to find him. And, similarly, Lovestone had that outlook, and you could see the relationship between them as being one in which a paranoia about Communists--in Lovestone's case because he had been a Communist--led to pushing in directions which had some negative effects. Now that's my view. If you have any comment on that, I would like to get you... without mentioning any specific cases.

KAISER: Yes, we came into contact with that when Lovestone felt that people weren't anti- Communist enough and I make a reference to that in the chapter [on Labor and International Affairs in my book]. Several authentic anti-Communist liberals suffered as a result of unjustified evaluations of their activities.

Q: You're talking to one of them right now. It was terrible.

KAISER: You had to be--It's a good phrase to use--"Communist paranoids". Look at the damage Angleton did. There were a number of innocent people in the CIA, who were destroyed by him, destroyed by him. There was a ruthlessness about them and you know Lovestone cooperated with the Un-American Affairs Committee and with all of these elements. The fact is as you say he fed them because of his background. He was so bright. He was such a manipulator. He was clearly reacting to his experience as a Communist.

Q: I find a very interesting similarity among J. Edgar Hoover, Angleton and Lovestone, individuals like that, who got a whole lot of gossip and were able to influence important people-- J. Edgar Hoover with all the Presidents from Roosevelt to Nixon and Lovestone

with Meany--by feeding them with the gossip of what was going on, instilling trust and fear.

KAISER: They love gossip. Politicians love gossip. I said this from the very beginning. I said, "On the basis of my own experience with politicians, it was inconceivable that Nixon didn't know about the break-in. It was just utterly inconceivable."

Q: But that's because you have a paranoia about politicians.

KAISER: No, no. I've seen them. I know them. I like the good ones. They are important to the effective functioning of our political system.

Q: Well, maybe that's behind some of the things that are going on now with accusations. Phil, I'm finished unless you want to say something. I reserve the right to talk to you again.

KAISER: No, no. I think this was pretty good. It worked out very well.

Q: Well, thank you. I shall purchase your book and give it to the [Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project]. When is it coming out you say?

KAISER: The first week of January [1993] they now say.

Q: What is the price of it?

KAISER: I don't know. They want too much money. It's \$27 I think.

Q: Are you going to get us a bargain price?

KAISER: I hope so. I'm going to try.

End of interview