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

PAUL R. PORTER

Interviewed by: Morris Weisz
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INTERVIEW

Q: The date is February 27, 1992 and this is Morris Weisz for the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project interviewing an old friend from long ago - he's not old yet - Paul Porter. Paul Porter's background was in the labor and Socialist field and then he went on to doing many different things in the government and the object of the interview is to relate the labor background to work he did at other levels, much higher levels, up to Ambassadorial status later on, the theory being that a background of the sort he has gave

him some insights into work in a non-labor field. Paul, would you tell us first where the bulk of your recollections are located so that any academic who is studying this field of labor diplomacy will be able to go back to other sources to get basic materials so you don't have to repeat it here.

PORTER: Well, my first contact with the trade union movement was in the summer of 1925. Clarence and I had both just graduated from the Kansas City Junior College.

Q: We have to identify Clarence Senior for our project.

PORTER: Clarence Senior. We had become very good friends as students at the Junior College and we decided to organize a Midwest Student Conference mostly around the theme of economics. We had students come from about a dozen different colleges to Kansas City. One of our speakers was a lady from the Women's Trade Union League, Sarah Green. I am inclined to believe that she was associated with the ILG, but I am not positive about that. In any event she made a very stirring talk about the conditions of women working in garment factories and that was my first introduction to the trade union movement. I think it helped develop my interest in the Socialist movement, because I was not yet a Socialist though I began to call myself one the following year. I didn't have any further contact with the trade union movement until 1929. By that time I had graduated from the University of Kansas. I had taken a year out between my sophomore and junior years to work in a brokerage house, not a very important job. I was just posting stock prices on a blackboard. That was the way in which stock prices were posted then. I would read the ticker and then post the stocks in which certain investors were interested. Then Clarence went on to the University of Kansas, so I was one year behind him there. After he graduated, he became Director of Adult Education in Cleveland and he encouraged me to take a job when I graduated as Director of Adult Education in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Q: Were these state government jobs?

PORTER: No, these were entirely privately funded. I was on my way to Philadelphia to take this job, but stopped in Cleveland to be briefed by Clarence on his experience and while there I learned that the job had folded up for lack of funds. Just by chance Norman Thomas came to Cleveland while I was there and Clarence and I went to hear him speak at a Hungarian Workers Hall. Afterwards we went out for a cup of coffee and Norman learned that I was free, not employed, and said that he had just had a vacancy in the League for Industrial Democracy. Paul Blanshard had taken a job as an Associate Editor of "The Nation". He had been their field secretary organizing college chapters. So Norman offered me the job. That evening I took it and the next day or the day after that I headed for New York. I went to the offices of the LID at 70 Fifth Avenue. That was where the offices were when I first went to work there. I arrived about eight o'clock in the morning for work and waited until 9:30 until the office opened. I did not realize that Midwestern office hours are a little different from those in New York. Well, I spent the rest of that academic year speaking at various colleges and organizing local LID chapters.

Q: At the age of?

PORTER: I was 20 when I started. I was born in 1908. Then, while I was in Chicago I got a telegram from Norman, who had become Chairman of an organization known as the Emergency Committee for Strikers' Relief. A number of textile strikes had broken out in the South. The Committee, which Norman had organized was raising money to help support the strikers and he asked me to go to Elizabethton, Tennessee, to look at the situation there and estimate what help they needed. So I took a train there.

Q: Was Norman doing that in his capacity as LID Director?

PORTER: Yes.

Q: Not in his Socialist capacity?

PORTER: No. This was entirely done by the LID. LID took the initiative in organizing it. This was a rather tense situation. Just before I had arrived, two of the principal organizers, who had come there to try to help what had been a spontaneous strike in a German-owned rayon factory at Elizabethton, and I pronounce it the way it is pronounced there... That in itself was a rather interesting story. The organizers were a man by the name of Tiny Hoffman...

Q: Oh! The Tiny Hoffman who went with the Steel Workers later?

PORTER: Yes, I think so. He was with the Hosiery Workers...

Q: Yes, that's where he came from, with Emil Rieve.

PORTER: Yes, that's right, but he had been loaned by the Hosiery Workers to the Textile Workers. I guess practically the only use of rayon in those days was in manufacturing hosiery. The other organizer was Ed McGrady.

Q: Later an AFL officer and Assistant Secretary of Labor.

PORTER: He became Assistant Secretary of Labor. He was then an organizer for the AFL and then sent there by Bill Green and I got to know them quite well. Just before I had arrived they had been put on a train by some local vigilantes and told not to come back. They came back the next day. I was there about a week, then I was sent over to Marion, North Carolina, to look at the situation there. This was a wholly unrelated strike. It had nothing to do with the one in Tennessee, but it also was in a hosiery mill. Then from there I went to Gastonia, North Carolina, where there was a strike of textile workers and that was under Communist leadership. The organizer was an employee in the mill named Fred Beal. He later went to the Soviet Union and eventually became disillusioned, but I would have to dig out some old files to see if I still have that story. I wrote a series

of articles for "The New Leader" based on the experiences at that time. Incidentally it was at Gastonia that I first met Sam Friedman. He was there reporting it for "Women's Wear Daily" and that was really my introduction to the trade union movement - meeting the strikers in each of these places and getting to know their stories, finding out how much money was needed from the Emergency Committee for Strike Relief and trying to publicize that need. It was in that connection that I met Sinclair Lewis the second time. I had gotten to know him very briefly in Kansas City when he was there writing the book Elmer Gantry. Eddie Levinson asked me to go with him to... Well, let me back up.

Sinclair Lewis had at Norman's request agreed to write a pamphlet describing the need of the workers for emergency strike relief to enable them to carry on their strikes. I went to see Lewis to give him some background on what I had learned in these meetings. Eddie Levinson went with me. You remember Eddie, I'm sure.

Q: I remember Eddie, but I don't know that our project remembers him. Eddie Levinson was a very...

PORTER: He was the Associate Editor of "The New Leader".

Q: He was a famous journalist in the socialist movement and later on in charge of information policy for the UAW.

PORTER: That's right.

Q: A very wonderful guy whom we both remember.

PORTER: Yes. Well, Eddie went along with me to invite Lewis to join the Socialist Party, which Lewis agreed to do that evening.

Q: Oh, really?

PORTER: Yes. Eddie got his signature on the membership application card and departed. Lewis asked me to remain to give him more information about the strikers. He kept talking and drinking and soon he was not asking me questions; I was just listening to a monologue. Dorothy Thompson, who was then his wife, was trying to get him to stop drinking and take us out to dinner, because Lewis had said, "We'll go to dinner in a little while." But he preferred to keep on drinking. He got pretty well plastered. Finally about 10 o'clock, Dorothy turned to me and said, "Let's go to dinner ourselves." So we went to a nearby restaurant in Greenwich Village. Lewis and she were living on West 10th Street at the time. I found that I did not have enough money to pay for the dinner for the two of us and I was immensely embarrassed when a lady paid for my dinner. That just wasn't done, you know, that a lady would treat a man to a dinner.

Q: She was employed, I would say, more profitably than you were.

PORTER: She was much more profitably employed. About 17 years later, I had an opportunity to take her to lunch in London. She was writing... She resumed her business temporarily as a foreign correspondent and was writing about economic conditions in Europe. I was then in London and she asked the Embassy for someone to brief her and I was very pleased to have the opportunity. I was able to buy her luncheon then. Well, I am telling you a lot of things that have nothing to do with what you are interested in.

Q: No, it does give the spirit of your background which, when we get to the much less labor-oriented part of your work, will put it in focus.

PORTER: I was then Chief of the Mission for Economic Affairs in London. Well, that was my introduction to the trade union movement and a very interesting one. I went back to the South several times to gather more information and to report it to the L.I.D. That is when I got to know Louis Stark, a labor reporter for The New York Times. He was covering a trial of some of the strikers in Marion, North Carolina, and I was there at that time. Well, I was as much a trade unionist as a Socialist from the very beginning as a result of the experiences that I have just related. Then,...

Q: You hadn't gone to Wisconsin yet?

PORTER: No, I didn't go there until 1935. The Biemillers, Andy and his wife Hannah, had moved to Milwaukee and he was Educational Director for the local Socialist Party.

Q: Are we now talking about 1935?

PORTER: 1935

Q: Between 1930 and 1935, were you with the LID all the time?

PORTER: No. I'm skipping something. Yes, thanks for correcting me. In 1933 I went to Philadelphia to act as the organizer for the Socialist Party. I lived for a time while I was there with Wes and Alice Cook. I got there just at the time that there was beginning to be the surge of organizing unions, almost spontaneous organization. I decided that I ought to spend more of my time trying to get in touch with unions that were just being organized. So I helped develop a plan for organizing the Philco plant, which was about six miles from where the Cooks lived. With help from Phil Van Gelder and several other people who were active in the Socialist Party, we put out a number of leaflets distributing them at the gates.

Q: Does the name Harry Block mean anything to you? He was later an organizer for the Electrical Workers in the anti-Communist caucus.

PORTER: The name means something to me, but I don't remember him at that time.

Q: His son Steve became a well-known Labor Attaché years later.

PORTER: Oh, is that so? Well, we did a pretty good job of planning and we had even hired a hall to which the workers could come to hear speeches to persuade them to join the union. We passed out the leaflets one morning calling on the workers to leave their jobs and come on to the hall to join a union. A strike did break out there but not at the gate at which we had expected. Nothing happened where we had been organizing. Instead the strike broke out at another gate. When we learned about it, we hurried over there and found a large gathering of workers out in the street, just milling around. So we started saying, "Come on down to..." I forget the name of the hall. It was only a couple blocks away, where we were all gathering. Soon they were following us down to the hall. That was the beginning of the organization of the radio workers, that later became the UE. One of the workers was a youngster named Jim Carey. I was presiding at the meeting and Jim held up his hand. He wanted to speak. I invited him to come up on the platform and he did. In the meantime the word had reached the local AFL Headquarters that the Philco workers were on strike and so the local organizer for the AFL came out to the hall as the meeting was going on. I wish I could think of his name. It will come to me later. He later became very prominent also in the labor movement. Not with the best reputation. He and Jim Carey got into an argument and he literally threw Jim off the platform. He tried to take over the union. They did become a federal labor union but Jim Carey became the president of the local and that was the beginning of the UE.

Q: Of the UE and later he became the head of the IUE.

PORTER: Right. Well, it was then just a federal labor union affiliated directly with the AFL. Then I had gotten to know a policeman who was a member of the Socialist Party. He came to me one day and said, "The taxi drivers want to form a union and they would like some help. They are afraid to have anyone of their own number become identified with the union because it would mean the loss of his job. Would you be willing to act as the President of the Taxi Drivers Union?"

So I agreed to help organize them and we passed out leaflets at the garages where the taxi cabs were stored and we soon had a strike on our hands. We had a strike lasting I think about seven weeks. I was the President of the Taxi Drivers Union then.

Q: Unpaid? Paid by your...

PORTER: Oh, yeah. I was getting $20 per week from the Socialist Party. In the midst of it, I became ill with tuberculosis and could not continue. I was out for a year. I think Wes Cook or Alice or someone got in touch with Norman. He asked me to come to New York, which I did, and he arranged for me to see a physician, Dr. James Miller, who said, "I want you to go to Trudeau Sanitarium tomorrow. I'll call and see that you are admitted." That was in Saranac Lake. So for the next year, almost a year, I was there.

Q: Did Clarence also... It is in my mind... My recollection is that Clarence was also ill.

PORTER: No

Q: It was only you?

PORTER: Yes.

Q: I must say that you and Clarence are sort of mixed up in my memory.

PORTER: By the time I was able to get out, there was no job for me in Philadelphia. I am not even sure that they were able to pay an organizer by that time. Anyway there was no point in trying to resume the presidency of the Taxi Cab Drivers Union either. By that time they were functioning pretty well. They had been absorbed into the Teamsters Union, which we tried to prevent at first because there was quite a bit of corruption in the Teamsters Union then, especially among the over-the-road drivers, but it was only the Teamsters Union that could back them up and give them the help they needed in negotiating. After I got out of the sanitarium in Saranac Lake, Clarence [by then National Secretary] asked me if I would take a job in Chicago as National Labor Secretary of the Socialist Party, which was a new position that he created and he had gotten some special funding for it. So I took that job from around October 1934 until the next summer when we ran out of funds, that is the summer of 1935. My first job was to attend the AFL Convention in San Francisco and then the President of the Montana Federation of Labor Jimmy Graham, who was a member of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party - Clarence had gotten in touch with him and asked Jimmy if I could be of any help in Montana. So Jimmy Graham scheduled a series of meetings for me to visit various locals of the Socialist Party in Montana. I discovered later that he had me visit the Socialist locals which were the least effective. There were others that he wanted to keep direct control over. Anyway I spent about a week touring Montana speaking to Socialist locals and they had some pretty good crowds. When I got back to Chicago a little bit later, an election was held and that was the first time I learned that there were Socialists running on both Democratic and Republican tickets.

Q: Against each other?

PORTER: No, no.

Q: As the occasion arose.

PORTER: That's right. Where the Democratic Party was stronger, they ran as Democrats. In a Republican district, they ran as Republican candidates although members of the Socialist Party. The day after the election I got a telegram in Chicago from Jimmy Graham saying, "We have just elected five Socialists to the state legislature, three on the Democratic ticket and two on the Republican ticket." They were good, card-carrying members of the Socialist Party, but they didn't conform to the line that they should run only on the Socialist ticket.

Q: This would have been the election of 1933?

PORTER: 1934. Yeah, that's right. I had just started work. Well, I felt that was a pretty good start. But I was in touch with all of the presidents of internationals who were members of the Socialist Party. We had a fairly...

Q: At that time we had many.

PORTER: Yeah, we had quite a few. (Telephone interruption) Well, I was in touch with officers of various unions that were led by Socialists, the Paper Workers, the I.L.G., and several state federations like Montana, Pennsylvania, and some local areas like Bridgeport, Connecticut and Reading, Pennsylvania. I don't think that I accomplished anything but I tried to give them service from the National Headquarters. Then I went back to Trudeau for the summer. I needed a little bit further rest and wanted to be under observation there for a while. It was just about the time that I was leaving Trudeau that I got an invitation to go to Kenosha to be the editor of a new labor paper being started there called "The Kenosha Labor", which had been organized by trade unionists and then they had gone to "The Milwaukee Leader" to see if "The Milwaukee Leader" would print the paper for them and "The Milwaukee Leader" actually took over the business management of "The Kenosha Labor" in the beginning. Andy and Hannah Biemiller wrote to me and asked me if I would take the job, which I did. I was editor of the Kenosha Labor there for nearly six years.

Q: For any value to people who are doing research in this field, we should identify Andy Biemiller as an active Socialist and a Socialist member of the Wisconsin legislature.

PORTER: Later he was elected to the legislature and of course later to Congress.

Q: And later to Congress on the Democratic ticket and later the Legislative Director of the AFL and then AFL-CIO.

PORTER: Yes, that's right. I think that by the time he became Legislative Director, it was just about the time the merger took place. Well, we had unions in Kenosha that were affiliated both with the AFL and with the CIO. We had a practical reason to keep them together because without holding them together we might not have been able to keep the labor paper alive, so a large part of my job was to promote labor unity and to keep the CIO unions in the local AFL Trades and Labor Council. There was no problem about that in the beginning, but eventually [John L.] Lewis learned that the CIO unions there were affiliated with the AFL and ordered them to withdraw. About the same time Green sent instructions to the President of the State Federation of Labor to force the CIO unions to withdraw. By that time I had an opportunity to become well acquainted with Henry Ohl, who was the President of the State Federation of Labor and also a very active Socialist.

Q: I didn't know that. Oh, really.

PORTER: Oh, yes. He was not particularly active in the Socialist Party by that time. His heart was there. He had his hands full running the State Fed. Well, he told Green that he wasn't going to do it. That that would be disruptive and that...

Q: He wasn't going to throw them out.

PORTER: That's right. He persuaded Green to leave us alone and I think Lewis simply forgot about us and the CIO unions continued. Well, I had published several stories about that. I think I wrote one for the Phi Beta Kappa magazine "The American Scholar." (Pause)

Well, I was just telling you that I had been very active in keeping the CIO unions in the local Trades and Labor Council, which was a great help to them. If they had been cut loose I think that they would have failed... They would have encountered quite a few difficulties and I was strongly convinced that we should try to preserve the unity of the trade union movement. I was not very friendly to what Lewis was doing, not at all friendly.

Q: At least partly because of his friendship with the use of Communists.

PORTER: Oh, yes. We knew by then that the Communists had penetrated the top level of the CIO, people like the man who became their General Counsel, Lee Pressman, and two or three others were playing a very key role in the top levels of the CIO.

Well, as I said, I had written some articles about preserving labor unity in Kenosha and trying to introduce it on a larger basis. I had written an article for "The American Scholar", the Phi Beta Kappa magazine.

Q: Are you a Phi Beta Kappa?

PORTER: No. Herb Harris was a journalist who had written a book on the trade union movement and he had a section in it about what we were doing in Kenosha. He came out to Kenosha to interview me. In 1941 when the Office of Production Management was established by Roosevelt, which later became the War Production Board,...

Q: By this time had you quit the Socialist Party or had you just resigned from official positions?

PORTER: I had just resigned as a Member of the National Executive Committee.

Q: But you remained in the Party?

PORTER: Yes, though no longer active. As you know I had felt that we would be drawn into the war, in fact felt that we should enter the war. At that time Art McDowell, Leonard Woodcock, Frank Trager and I withdrew as members of the National Executive

Committee because we felt that we had the majority on the National Executive Committee but we knew that we did not have the support of the majority of members. We felt that it was unfair to Norman to put him in the position of being a minority member of the National Executive Committee. So by agreement with him, the four of us withdrew. In the withdrawal statement, which I wrote, I said that I felt that we should support the war and after the war the United States should promote the United States of Europe.

Q: That's interesting in the light of what you did later.

PORTER: Yes, that was directly related.

Q: I want to get the date of that quitting in terms of the convention that we had in 1940.

PORTER: The Convention was in May 1940 at the National Press Club in Washington. I spoke against the resolution that was adopted there, I and Sarah Limbach, who was head of the Socialist Party in Pittsburgh. I don't recall any other people who spoke against the majority resolution. There may have been several others. I think at the time I was the only Member of the National Executive Committee that could have been called "pro-war" but in the months that followed Art McDowell, Leonard Woodcock, and Frank Trager had changed.

Q: We should identify these people briefly. Art McDowell later went to work for the Hat Workers Union; I think he was a viscerally active anti-Communist type.

PORTER: From the very beginning. I had known him since 1929 and he was strongly anti-Communist then.

Q: Frank Trager later went on to work for the AID program.

PORTER: I recruited him for that. Yes.

Q: And active in Burma. Leonard Woodcock, of course, later became the head of the U.A.W. and then Ambassador to China.

PORTER: That's correct, yes. We withdrew. We had a very deep respect and affection for Norman and we just didn't want to put him into the position of being in the minority. At the same time I still considered myself to be a member of the Socialist Party. In the autumn of 1940 I began to make speeches on the need for a United States of Europe after the war and that we should use our influence at the end of the war for that purpose. Our withdrawal statement was published in "The New York Times" in full sometime in February 1941. [March 10, 1941; a copy is attached hereto.]

Around June of that year...

Q: Were you still at "The Kenosha Labor"?

PORTER: Yes, I was still the Editor of "The Kenosha Labor". I continued until June as Editor. One Saturday morning I was working at the office when I got a telephone call from Herb Harris, who as I said had interviewed me a couple years earlier. He was public relations officer for Sidney Hillman, who was Co-Director of the Office of Production Management. The other Co-Director was William Knudsen, who had been President of General Motors. Herb asked me if I could come to Washington immediately. He needed some help. So I agreed and I left the next Tuesday after I had made arrangements for a successor at "The Kenosha Labor", a man who I had made Associate Editor earlier, a very capable fellow, Harold Newton. I don't know whether you ever knew him or not.

Q: No, I didn't.

PORTER: He was a very active leader in the Wisconsin Federation of Labor. I visited him last August in San Diego when I went to Ruth Senior's 80th birthday party. He is living out there now.

I did some speech writing for Hillman and I was asked to work on a Labor Day Speech for Roosevelt and one sentence survived, but I wasn't very interested in public relations. I showed more interest in having direct contact with the trade unions, so I was asked to help settle some strikes. That's when I got to know John Frey, who was head of the Metal Trades Department, a man for whom I formed tremendous respect. He had quit school in the fourth grade, but was one of the most widely read men that I have ever known who was not a professional intellectual...

Q: Well, there are a number of people - I put Meany in that category - whose education is based on reading and so well educated. Meany does not have that general reputation, but like Harry Truman - I am now pointing to your autographed picture of Harry Truman - learned, got his great education through reading biographies. I remember once hearing of a reference Frey had made at an old AFL meeting - Frey had the reputation of being very conservative, which he was - in which he displayed a knowledge of something he had read that just amazed me. I was fascinated by it.

PORTER: He was [conservative] and a man of highest integrity. I got to know him intimately. We were together on many, many occasions in the next four years. I was with him in San Francisco on the day of Pearl Harbor. He and I and a Commander for the Navy were meeting to try to work out a settlement for a local machinists strike in the shipyards, not in the Navy shipyards but in one of the repair yards in San Francisco. What was even more important then than new construction was to repair the ships we had. We were in the hotel room trying to reach a settlement when the Navy Commander's wife telephoned to say that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. So we immediately ended the meeting. We knew that the outbreak of war would settle the strike. There was nothing more that we needed to do.

Q: This would have been on a Sunday that you were negotiating.

PORTER: It was Sunday morning in San Francisco, so this Navy Commander George Keller asked me if I would go with him down to the Navy Headquarters of the 12th Naval District on Market Street. He said, "Maybe they will need us down there." We went down. He showed his badge and introduced me. There was no investigation as to whether or not I was reliable. And sitting around down there at the 12th Naval District Headquarters we learned the whole story of Pearl Harbor that afternoon, the extent of the damage to the Navy. You can't imagine a more downcast group of people than the admirals and the commanders and so forth, sitting around listening to the news or reading it as it came in on a teletype. It was a very dismal day.

Well, by that time I was beginning to get knowledgeable about the ship building industry because I had been involved in trying to settle several strikes, and shortly after that, just a couple of weeks later, I was asked if I would take the job as Chairman of the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee, which had been organized by Morris Llewellyn Cooke, whom you may have heard of.

Morris Llewellyn Cooke was a highly respected industrial engineer and he had headed the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee to create uniform wage standards in each of the four shipbuilding zones, the Atlantic Coast, Pacific Coast, Gulf and Great Lakes.

Q: He later was with T.V.A. or something, wasn't he?

PORTER: I don't remember.

Q: His reputation was as a professional engineer who was well versed in labor matters.

PORTER: That is correct. I think Roosevelt had personally selected him to organize the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee to prevent a repetition of what had happened in the First World War when there had been a great deal of labor pirating. That is to say there was a shortage of skilled workers and one shipyard would be pirating them from another shipyard. Cooke had concluded that they needed uniform standards, which was immediately of course welcomed by the trade unions, especially the AFL. The CIO Shipbuilding Workers Union was a little more suspicious of it, but they became convinced that the wage standards were necessary. The first job I had after I had been there just a few days was to ask what can we do about eliminating the old automatic escalation of wages to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index. It was a job that I didn't relish, but it became apparent that we had to stabilize wages. We could increase them but we couldn't... (End of side one, tape one)

Well we recognized that wages during war time could not keep pace with the Consumer Price Index. In fact the pressure was coming directly from Roosevelt. I don't think it was his idea. Some of his advisors had persuaded him. David Niles, who was one of his advisors, got in touch with me and started insisting that we do something. I talked to John

Frey. I talked to Johnny Green, who was head of the CIO Shipbuilding Workers Union, whom I had known...

Q: A Socialist.

PORTER: Yes, he was a Socialist, whom I had known very well when I was in Philadelphia.

Q: Yet he was suspicious of the whole Stabilization Commission entirely. You're now going to tell me whether he went along with that decision?

PORTER: Very reluctantly. In fact he didn't officially commit himself to it, but he indicated to me that he wouldn't oppose it. Well, we concluded that we needed to call a national conference of shipyard workers and ship builders in Chicago to renegotiate that clause in the wage standards. It was common in all four of the zones.

Q: Well, what was the relationship of that to the general wage stabilization program of the War Labor Board?

PORTER: This preceded the War Labor Board. So this conference was called in Chicago. I prepared a telegram from Roosevelt to me to be read at the conference and it had to be approved by the Navy and the Maritime Commission and by John Frey and as I said I don't think Johnny Green ever agreed to it except he agreed not to oppose it. After a couple days in Chicago, I telephoned Dave Niles, who was an Executive Assistant to Roosevelt and said, "We need the telegram." So the telegram that I had prepared and had been amended by others, but essentially it was what I had prepared, came to me from Roosevelt asking the unions to agree to amend their zone standards and that was what enabled us to do it, the appeal by Roosevelt. Well, I remained with the Shipbuilding Committee till nearly the end of the war, up until March of 1945, but in the meantime I...

Q: May I interrupt you a moment to comment on one part of it?

PORTER: Yes.

Q: This would have been after we entered the war, of course, and therefore the Communists who were so powerful in the CIO would have supported the stabilization idea.

PORTER: Yes.

Q: And they were very active in the Shipbuilding Union opposed to Green and...

PORTER: Yes, especially the New York Local.

Q: ...and did they initiate or oppose or take any position on that? I'm just curious.

PORTER: I can't recall them taking any position on it. I suppose that they felt that if their support was necessary they might have supported it but they preferred to keep quiet if it wasn't necessary. The decision was made by the AFL unions, which were much more influential in the ship building industry. That gray book up there has a chapter that I wrote telling the story of the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee. If you would like to borrow it, I would be glad to...

Q: I have a copy of it, because this is the history of the war period. I wrote a couple of chapters on the War Production Board part of it.

PORTER: Oh, did you? I didn't know that. Well, we were quite successful with the stabilization program in the ship- building industry. We had fewer man-days lost per capita than in any other industry and we were the largest industry. We expanded from 175,000 to nearly 2 million in about 18 months without any of the labor pirating that had occurred during the First World War.

Q: What was the relation between your Commission and the War Production Board where the rest of us were?

PORTER: The War Production Board? We were...

Q: Of course Hillman had some position... Oh, no.

PORTER: Hillman didn't last very long. Hillman had left just about the time I became the Chairman of the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee and Don Nelson took over as the head of both boards.

Q: With two trade union vice-chairmen, Clint Golden and Joe Keenan.

PORTER: Right. We had to work very closely with the procurement agencies in the Navy and the Maritime Commission and later the Army when they became interested in landing barges. We had a lot of conflict among the shipbuilders, particularly between the cost-plus shipbuilders, people who had never been in the shipbuilding business before like Kaiser and Bechtel and who had become shipbuilders on a promise that they would be paid on a cost-plus basis and on the other hand the fixed price contractors who worked mostly for the Navy like Bethlehem and New York Shipbuilding, which had it yards in Camden, New Jersey, where Johnny Green had gotten his start.

Q: Sun?

PORTER: Sun. That's right. So I think that we had as much conflict between the procurement agencies, each pressing their own program, as... Well, obviously they had to put their own objectives first. So we had really quite a complex group of shipbuilders in competition with each other, of two labor organizations in conflict with each other, ...

Q: You maintained good relations with the trade unions during this period?

PORTER: Yes, very close. I had a very good relationship with all of the unions involved.

Q: How long did you stay? You said just until the end of the war or practically the end of the war?

PORTER: Until March of 1945. By the previous summer I had concluded that the war would be over in a year or so and that I would like to go into military government. Andy Biemiller and I discussed it. Which one of us would go. But Andy wanted to go back to Milwaukee and run for Congress, so I agreed to apply for a job in military government with the primary objective of trying to get an early revival of the German trade unions as an instrument of democracy. We felt that it was necessary to create a strong trade union movement in Germany or revive a trade union movement there to ...(telephone interruption)

There is an interesting bit that I could add. Andy and I were in the same car pool with Harry Dexter White, who was a neighbor of ours in Bethesda and he was in a car pool with Bernice Bernstein, whose husband Bernie Bernstein worked for the Treasury Department as the Treasury representative on the staff of Eisenhower.

Q: Eisenhower in his capacity as European Commander?

PORTER: Yes, of SHAEF, Supreme Headquarters American Expeditionary Force. Well, Andy and I had been riding together but we found that gas rationing forced us to combine so we combined with this other car pool and Harry Dexter White was our car pool companion for quite a while.

Q: Assistant Secretary of Treasury then?

PORTER: He was the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and the real author of the Morgenthau Plan. We heard him expound on the Morgenthau Plan during the time we were riding in the car pool with him, which alarmed me very much because I was not an expert on Europe but I realized that the countries that were our allies were deeply dependent upon Germany for such things as steel, fertilizers, and coal also. I didn't have much knowledge of it but I knew at least that much and the idea of stripping Germany of its industry which should have been used instead for the recovery of Europe stirred me very much and I decided that I would do what I could by going into military government to oppose the Morgenthau Plan. I applied for a job in the Manpower Division which was responsible for a labor program. Dave Morse was the Director of the Manpower Division. In March 1945 I went to London, where at that time the Manpower Division was waiting for the opportunity to move forward and I spent about a month there and that's when I learned that the Communists were very influential in the Manpower Division under two men, George Wheeler, whom you may know or know about...

Q: I worked with him at the NLRB.

PORTER: I thought so, yes. ...and Mortimer Wolf, who was a lawyer from the NLRB. It took me about two days in London to realize that they were Communists. I had known Wheeler as a Socialist but I had not known anything about him after about 1933. So I was astounded to find that he was very actively promoting the Communist line.

Q: This shows you how poor our communications were because he came to the NLRB, I would say, about 1935 or so, and joined the Socialist Party in Washington and it immediately became obvious that his views were closer to those of the Communists than to the Socialists. Everybody was inclined to blame it on the influence of his wife and things like that. Of course ultimately it was clear what he was.

PORTER: Well, I have written that story for the Truman Library and rather than take time now to repeat it, I will get you a copy of that memoir, but very briefly, I felt that I was wasting my time at the Headquarters of the Manpower Division and I asked to be transferred to Germany. I was sent to Germany and went on the staff of the Military Government in Frankfurt. I didn't stay there very long because I was then asked to go to the Ruhr and report on the condition in the coal mines.

Q: This was under McSherry?

PORTER: No, McSherry had nothing to do with it at that time. He had not yet succeeded Dave Morse as the Head of the Manpower Division. Henry Rutz was the man who asked me to go to the Ruhr to look at the coal situation. You know Henry Rutz, of course.

Q: Henry Rutz, the AFL International Representative for some time.

PORTER: That's right. He was a Major in the 12th Army Group. He asked me to go to the Ruhr. Well, the situation there was very dismal. The mines had been operated to a large degree by slave labor and as soon as the Ruhr had been freed from Nazi control, the miners from the West, Belgium and France and the Netherlands, started walking home and the Russian prisoners of war who had been working in the coal mines quit and many of them became bandits just roaming the countryside robbing for food. There was just a breakdown. I wrote a report on the coal situation and as you know when the Army gets a document and it's not classified they will reproduce it in great quantities. A copy of it reached Tom Blaisdell in London, who was then Chief of the Mission for Economic Affairs. Also I had been asked to go to SHAEF Headquarters in Rheims, France, where it was at that particular moment, to give a report. My plane, however, was grounded by bad weather, so General Draper came to Wiesbaden, where I was then at that time, to see me and get the story on the coal situation. Later I was his deputy on the American team for organizing NATO in Paris from 1952 to 1953.

Q: Where I worked.

PORTER: Yeah. Well, before I left, however, I went to see Ernie Bevin. Frances Perkins had given me a letter of introduction to Bevin. I told him that I hoped the English would work with us in promoting the early revival of the democratic German trade unions. He had not been briefed on the situation there. He was not yet Foreign Minister. He was then Minister of Labor. This was in April of 1945. He was receptive when I outlined what we were hoping to do. Of course I had not really had any authority direct...

Q: April 1945 before V.E. Day?

PORTER: Yes, I was in Germany before the end of the war. Well, I had a very good conversation with Bevin and he said, "Well, I hate the Germans for what they have done to us, but I know that we have to learn to love the bloody bastards. It will probably take us two years longer than you to do it." Well, I was only with Military Government for a couple of months in Germany. Then I got an invitation from Tom Blaisdell to come back to London to join his staff and shortly afterwards I became his deputy. That was about the end of my direct contact with the labor movement, because from then I remained in London for two years and when Tom left to become Assistant Secretary of Commerce, I succeeded him as Chief of the Mission for Economic Affairs. Then when the UN organized the Economic Commission for Europe, I went to Geneva for two years as Head of the American resident delegation. From there I went to Greece as Chief of the Marshall Plan Mission, back to Washington as Assistant Administrator of the Marshall Plan and then to Paris and you know that story.

Q: I know it. I don't know that our records do. So why don't you go rapidly through your career before I start asking you questions about the impact of your labor background on those successive assignments.

PORTER: Well,

Q: You were Draper's deputy in a certain area as I recall. We had four...

PORTER: I was his Deputy for Economic Affairs.

Q: And as such, our division, the labor division, was under you.

PORTER: That's correct, yes.

Q: And then you went to...

PORTER: Well, before then I had quite a bit of contact with labor in Geneva too. I was in contact quite a bit with the I.L.O. and by that time Dave Morse had gone there as Director of the I.L.O. In Athens we had a very effective labor division, which had originally been organized by Clint Golden, who had recruited Alan Strachan as his deputy. When Clint

returned to the States, Alan became the Chief of the Labor Division and he had a deputy named Joe Heath from the AFL, a very nice fellow but not nearly as effective as Alan.

Q: They divided the job. The AFL wanted somebody in there and...

PORTER: That's correct. Yeah.

Q: Later Heath came to Paris as Cruikshank's Deputy and later his successor.

PORTER: That's right. He came to Paris later. I had to give a lot of time to the Labor Division in Greece. Alan Strachan was one of the most effective division heads we had. Well, that's my background.

Q: Well, that's good and now I want to start asking you questions about the good or bad aspects of your background in terms of the broader programs you administered; for instance the one I'm most acquainted with is... When I arrived in Paris to become Joe Heath's assistant, deputy, whatever else I was, because somebody had to do the work there, he...I liked Joe very much.

PORTER: Oh, yes.

Q: He was an honest trade unionist, but his suspicions of people were based on visceral reactions. In your case, as you know, he disagreed with a few of the things you did based on his unwillingness to recognize your broader responsibilities beyond the labor function, and the fact that sometimes even a person with a labor background was required to take other considerations into account. Joe was an emotional trade unionist and he was greatly influenced by the attitudes of his predecessor as Director of the Labor Division, Nelson Cruikshank. Cruikshank, an old friend, had recruited me to take Sapass' job as his trade union advisor but soon thereafter returned to the AFL-CIO. Nelson had a different type of suspicion about the overall authority of the Marshall Plan. He felt that the Plan's authorities were underestimating the importance of labor and as a result of his and Joe's reactions, there was a feeling on the part of much of the staff of the Labor Division that you had gone beyond your trade union background and were now beginning to be less constructive in your appreciation of labor. Then, because of your alleged AFL background, which I guess they could point to in parts of your history in the United States, the CIO people in the Productivity Division also had the feeling that you were unwilling to be pro-CIO. I take it that I am not telling you anything strange.

PORTER: No, no.

Q: And I wanted to get on the record your reaction to the labor program and to the types of decisions you had to make, which might have been construed as, if not anti-labor, not fully pro-labor.

PORTER: Yes, I am aware of all that you refer to. I don't right now remember specific incidents. I know I should but I don't remember them after this lapse of time. I would say that I made decisions on what I felt was possible.

Q: The one I remember especially was the business about Spain, which had really little to do with trade unionism, but a feeling you had, after looking into the question, that it was necessary to try to press for Spanish membership in certain organizations in spite of Franco's fascist government.

PORTER: Right.

Q: Do you want to describe that?

PORTER: Yes. That I remember very well. As I listened to the exposition of the military people, and by that time I had gotten to know Eisenhower reasonably well,...

Q: I should say for the purpose of this interview that I am facing a wall with a number of photographs, autographed photographs, and the three - I don't recognize the fourth person -

PORTER: That's Bill Foster.

Q: Bill Foster, right. No relation to William Z. Foster. ...and the other three large photographs are of three heroes of Paul Porter's: Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Norman Thomas. I think that's a delightful group.

PORTER: Yes, three men who ran for President. Two of them made it.

Q: Right. Only two of them successfully.

PORTER: Well, I had been persuaded that from the standpoint of logistics, it was very important to have an air base in Spain. I was very concerned about the reaction of the Spanish people. I knew that the French Socialists were probably in closer touch with the Spanish Socialists than anyone else. So I went to see Andre Philip, who was a Minister in the French Government and whom I had gotten to know quite well in Geneva when he had represented the French Government in the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

Q: Did you know that his son was a Marshall Plan employee?

PORTER: No!

Q: See, you are learning things in this interview too.

PORTER: I certainly am. No I did not know that.

Q: We hired him for the Productivity Program for a brief while. A very competent young person.

PORTER: I did not know that. Well, Andre and I had become very good friends and as you know he was a Socialist, so I went to him and asked him if the French Socialists could use their contacts, or if he could use his contacts in the Socialist movement, to find out what would be the attitude of the Spanish Socialists to the establishment of an American air base in Spain. About two weeks later his office called and asked if I could go to his home for lunch on a certain day. I agreed. When I arrived, much to my surprise I found two Spaniards there who had taken the risk of crossing the border to come to Paris to talk about this question that I had posed as to what would be their reaction to establishment of an American air base. They said they would heartily approve it. I had expected to be chastised for being pro-Franco or something like that. On the contrary...

Q: For betraying your earlier association...

PORTER: Yeah. On the contrary, they said, "Spain is a closed country. We need to open it up and anything that will help open up Spain to a knowledge of the democratic world we are for it." And so we then had a discussion. I don't think that they were able to do very much. We didn't ask them to do anything other than later on we sent a CIA man to Spain to maintain contact with them, but that was the answer that I felt was more effective than any of the other arguments that I heard. I wanted to get the attitude of two underground workers in Spain.

Q: But you didn't or weren't free to, didn't feel free to confide in the people who were criticizing you from within the labor movement. I can understand that now

PORTER: I couldn't do that.

Q: Obviously, I understand that. In similar situations later on there were many things that I was unable to tell my trade union friends.

PORTER: I discussed it only with Bill Draper and the CIA people.

Q: Did you hear from Norman about it, a complaint, or Jim Carey? When we once asked Jim Carey to meet with a Spanish Government person who was friendly to labor and we felt he could... - You know one of the voices we wanted inside. This was many years later. -...Jim Carey, the active anti-Communist, said that he would be accused of being pro-Franco; and if he would take a position that he didn't want to have anything to do with the Communist-controlled trade unions in Russia but was willing to meet an underground trade unionist in Spain, he couldn't afford to do it, which I thought was tragic. We managed to get them together anyhow, I should say. I wanted to get on the record your recollection of this issue.

PORTER: That's an incident that I remember very well. I know that some people were very unhappy about it. The State Department was very unhappy about it. The Spanish Desk in the State Department was strongly opposed to having anything to do with the Franco Government. Our Ambassador there had a different view, but he was overruled by the Spanish Desk.

Q: Which probably accused him of localitis as we used to say?

PORTER: Oh, sure, and to some extent that was true. I think he recognized the same thing that the Spanish Socialists had told me. This would help open up the country. Besides that, he was influenced by the military argument that the base was needed.

Q: Fascinating. What were other aspects of your relations with...or your background as against the duties you had to perform? Did you have anything to do with the appointment of Labor Attachés or evaluating them? Do you have any comments to make about which ones were good and which ones...not as individuals, but what sorts of background?

PORTER: I can't recall that I had anything to do with appointing any of them. When I was head of the Marshall Plan Mission in Greece I naturally had to periodically submit evaluation reports and I evaluated Alan Strachan at the very top and I gave a pretty good rating to Joe Heath.

Q: Yeah, but they were not Labor Attachés. I'm talking about the Embassy people.

PORTER: Oh, Embassy. I had nothing to do with appointing Attachés in the Embassy.

Q: What about evaluating or... There were conflicts sometimes between the Labor Attaché and the...

PORTER: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you take any sides or were you required to or did you feel you wanted to?

PORTER: I was not involved in that.

Q: Really?

PORTER: No, I didn't even know about the conflicts in any detail. I don't recall that there was any serious conflict in Greece. I think that the Labor Attaché there was very much influenced by Alan.

Q: Dale Good?

PORTER: What was that?

Q: Dale Good?

PORTER: No, not at that time. At the moment I don't recall his name.

Q: John Correll?

PORTER: Yes, John Correll.

Q: Do you know where John is now? In a home right down here in Venice. I visited him last time. This time he doesn't answer the telephone. I'm looking into it.

PORTER: I telephoned him several years ago and proposed that we get together and he said that he wasn't feeling well enough.

Q: Terrible. He's in very bad shape.

The other thing that I wanted to ask you about the labor service in the State Department is a thing that has concerned us in the training of Labor Attachés. How valuable... Labor Attachés come with backgrounds in the trade union movement, some of them, much less now, in the Labor Department, or in the State Department. The regular State Department has a special Labor Attaché group. Is there any particular background that you feel is best for a labor job? Or what qualifications do you think result... What qualifications are the best for a job of representing U.S. Government in the State Department? And before you answer, let me tell you that... No, I don't want to tell you how I feel about it. I want to get how you feel about it. Then I'll ask you to comment on my reaction.

PORTER: Well, I would have to defer to you because you're far more qualified than I am.

Q: I'm also far more biased, based on my background. I'll ask you to comment on certain aspects of it.

PORTER: Well, I would say that on the whole you are not likely to get the best qualified men from the trade union movement unless it is in time of emergency like a war. Then some of the very best men would be made available. But otherwise I think that you are likely to get the fellows who didn't quite make the grade in the trade union movement.

Q: The broken down business agents.

PORTER: Yes. But I don't have a great deal of background for that, but on the limited experience that I have, I think that is what's likely to happen when they come from directly out of the trade union movement. Their experience is valuable. They ought to find some way to utilize it, but I think you do that through a training program probably rather than by appointments.

Q: Yeah, I want you to comment on especially the division between two types of trade union backgrounds, one the labor-political types, not only the Socialists but others who are... as against the business agent type who comes up from the ranks. We've had both and there are advantages and disadvantages that I found in both types of backgrounds. Of course many of our most successful ones were the ones who have the sort of background that you have and I have, interested in international politics, international issues, but there have been many cases in which, or a few at least, in which that has served as a disadvantage in terms of their getting involved in the internal disputes within the trade union movement of the country to which they are assigned.

PORTER: Yes.

Q: And do you have any advice on how to train people to stay out of internal disputes within a labor movement in their host country when they may have personal biases based on their own trade union experience at home?

PORTER: No, I don't think I would have any practical experience there other than to say the way you have put the problem is certainly sound. You get people who have had educational experience within the trade union movement like yourself and Sam Berger. Sam Berger was, I think, as you know one of the outstanding... probably one of the best Labor Attachés we had, who later went on to become an Ambassador. Sam was the only person in the Embassy that had had any direct contact with any of top labor people when labor came to power in 1945 [in Great Britain].

Q: That's a story that is very well known and of course you know that he was not the Labor Attaché. He was a Special Assistant to Harriman.

PORTER: That's right. Yes.

Q: ...but because of his background - Wisconsin educational background - and his relationship to the trade unions before, it opened it up for him. Phil Heller is another one.

PORTER: That's right.

Q: You knew Phil of course and he did better, I gather, in some assignments than others because he had a slight tendency, which was completely overcome later on, to become involved in internal trade union disputes when he served in Europe. Unfortunately, he was with the AID or information, one or the other, and when they had that cutback they let him go and it took him a couple of years to get back. Later on, serving in Africa, he did wonderfully.

PORTER: My experience was more with the men who were heading the labor office within the Marshall Plan Missions, like Alan Strachan, Joe Heath, and Elmer Beck, who was in Sweden.

Q: Oh, I forgot about him.

PORTER: Elmer died several years ago. We still keep in touch with his widow Miralda. But Elmer had the same kind of background, came out of the Socialist movement in Milwaukee and had been one of the officers of the Officer Workers Union.

Q: In my interview on the Marshall Plan, I pointed to an example that I'll mention to you because it is the background for some of the conclusions I came to. I was once told by the Research Director of the Austrian Trade Union Movement, who was comparing to me the contribution made to their efforts at resurgence by the Labor Attaché and the Mission labor man. The Mission labor man was one of these basic trade unionists, a wonderful guy named Einer Edwards. The Labor Attaché was Irwin Tobin. Tobin was a person who had worked for the World Affairs Council in New England. I think he was a pacifist actually and joined the Foreign Service, became a labor officer, had no...

PORTER: Could we suspend for a minute? (Pause)

Q: We have these two people, one of them with a professional background in the State Department, the other a trade unionist. And the Austrian trade union official told me that Edwards was a wonderful person to bounce things against and get automatic support for their ideas, almost uncritically. Whereas when they wanted something done or wanted something approved by the Mission and by the U.S. Embassy, they would have to go to this professional person who was sort of a stately State Department striped pants type, because if they could convince him and they usually could - they felt he was very friendly toward them - then the program would march forward having the status of that person behind them, so that there are... The point I was making and I want your reaction to it is that there are functions for both types. But for getting program support for a good labor program, the trade unionists just have to go beyond getting the automatic support from a pro-labor type.

PORTER: Right. I can see that.

Q: Well, Paul, I'm very grateful to you for spending this time and of course I hope to see you again, but I may have some further questions which I will raise in a letter. Thank you very much.

PORTER: Okay.

End of interview