

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

**JACK SHEINKMAN**

*Interviewed by: Morris Weisz*  
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## INTERVIEW

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

*Q: This is Morris Weisz and the date is April 23, 1995. We are sitting in the very pleasant home, west of Central Park in New York City of Jack Sheinkman, the president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, and soon to be something else, UNITE [Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees]. Jack has invited me—since he's very busy with negotiations—to spend a pleasant afternoon in his home, eating a nice lunch. And, then we're sitting down, now, for a leisurely discussion of his background and some of the items about his union, which we want to have reflected in the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project.*

*Jack, first to get an idea of your own background. Born in New York, I first found out today. I don't know why I thought you were born in Chicago.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, because most of the union leaders came from Chicago.

*Q: Right.*

SHEINKMAN: I'm the first president that didn't come from Chicago.

*Q: Really? I didn't know that. And, you were born here, in New York.*

SHEINKMAN: Born in the Bronx.

*Q: And went to school there. We found a couple of schools we had gone to at different times, but similar schools. High school education in the Bronx?*

SHEINKMAN: Yes.

*Q: And, you started at City College?*

SHEINKMAN: City College.

*Q: When did you start?*

SHEINKMAN: I started City College in 1943.

*Q: During the war.*

SHEINKMAN: Yeah. And then I left in 1944.

*Q: To go into?*

SHEINKMAN: To join the Navy.

*Q: Well, and then you came out and took advantage—*

SHEINKMAN: Of the G.I. Bill of Rights.

*Q: Many people did of the G.I. Bill.*

SHEINKMAN: Yeah. I had a chance to go to Cornell when they opened up the Industrial and Labor Relations School. But, my interest in the labor movement predates that a long time ago. I was a student at the Workmen Circle Schools in the Bronx, Workmen Circle School 2. And, as you know, there was in Circle's background, was not only in terms of Yiddish and Yiddish culture, but socialist orientation with a great deal of emphasis on Jewish participation in \_\_\_\_\_ and the trade union movement, which automatically tied us in with the history of the ILGWU [International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union] and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, which had its origins, primarily from Jewish workers and Jewish trade unionists. And also the life of Eugene Victor Debs left an indelible impression on me.

As a matter of fact, you might be interested in knowing I'm the president of the Debs Museum, now.

*Q: Oh, really?*

SHEINKMAN: In Terre Haute, Indiana. So, that was these two aspects of my life—as

well as membership in the Red Falcons, the youth organization of the Socialist Party, and the YPSLs, "Young People's Socialist League"—that directed me toward a desire to spend my life working in a trade union movement. And that's what interested me in the Industrial and Labor Relations School at Cornell. I had an opportunity to work for the Pub Sulfite and Paper Mill Workers as a result of my experience there. And then, afterwards, to go to law school. When I finished law school, I went to work for the National Labor Relations Board for a year.

*Q: Where did you go to law school?*

SHEINKMAN: I went to Cornell Law School on undergraduate. As a matter of fact, at Cornell, I started the first inter-racial inter-religious living unit called "Water Margin," which is a transliteration of "All men are brothers," in Chinese. I started that.

*Q: Then, you went to work for the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board].*

SHEINKMAN: For a year. I worked for Abe Murdock, who was formerly the Democratic Senator from Utah.

*Q: And appointed to the Board when the Board was enlarged in 1947, from three to five members.*

SHEINKMAN: And then, I was probably the shortest term appointee who \_\_\_\_\_ Board Member Rogers. Because I used to hang out with some ex-communists like Mike Burnstein. And they thought that because of that, I was tied in with his ideology. So, I call it, "innocence by association" instead of "guilt by association." So, they offered me a job to work, they transferred me over from Murdock's staff for two weeks. But, by then, I went to work for the Amalgamated.

I went to work for the Amalgamated Reel Department.

*Q: This would have been when?*

SHEINKMAN: This was in 1953. I went to work for the Amalgamated.

*Q: And, this would have been right at the time of?*

SHEINKMAN: Right after Eisenhower's election.

*Q: Right.*

SHEINKMAN: And, the first appointee was Rogers, the first Republican appointee. And they transferred me over without asking me, which incensed me. Because they assumed because I knew Mike Burnstein, who was a very active—at that time—Republican—because even though we'd get together and discuss things, they assumed that automatically I accepted his ideology.

*Q: I guess we've never had this in any of our interviews, but there was this group of young people including you—I found out later—and me, and people like Mike Burnstein whose full-time job was fighting communists from the very reactionary point of view, and a whole lot of trade union people like Burt Sideman.*

SHEINKMAN: That's right. We used to go to that Thursday luncheon group.

*Q: At the Rumanian Inn.*

SHEINKMAN: The Rumanian Inn. That's where we first met.

*Q: That's right.*

SHEINKMAN: And that was the first group. That's what got me into it. That's how I got to know Mike. That's how I got to know you.

*Q: Yes. Well, that's a long time ago. And then you started working in the legal department.*

SHEINKMAN: Of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. I joined the staff and, as a lawyer for the Amalgamated, in due course, I got to do a lot of things. I got to do a lot of work involving organizing. I was very heavily involved in collective bargaining. And, also, by '58, I became the general counsel. And then, shortly after that, because we were running a strike in three states involving three vice-president's jurisdictions, I was the only one who could manage the whole thing. And, interestingly

enough, the company was called "The Boss Glove Company," which was a significant name. And, I ran that strike and got to know a lot of people. And, in 1968, I became a vice-president of the union. I was elected a vice-president in 1968, which was fifteen years after I joined the staff. And then, in '73, '72, I became secretary-treasurer. But, that was a result of a political deal. And, I was really, effectively, co-president, under the constitution, with the president. Because he and I, instead of running against each other, cooked this political deal up.

*Q: Well, clearly the Amalgamated had different groups of people. And, as you told me at lunch, you had built a political constituency by your non-legal activities.*

SHEINKMAN: That's correct.

*Q: And, therefore, became an official. Because this is very unusual to have a president of the union coming out of—not out of the union or related to the union.*

SHEINKMAN: Didn't come out of a factory.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: And the result of that, that's how I became a leader in the union and, ultimately, the president for it.

*Q: Did that background, that is, non-worker in the shop, disadvantage you as you went along?*

SHEINKMAN: No, not at all.

*Q: Nobody ever said, "He never worked in a shop."*

SHEINKMAN: No, that didn't come up because at no time did it ever get raised.

*Q: And you came to work, originally, at the New York Headquarters or?*

SHEINKMAN: In Washington. Headquarters in New York.

*Q: So, you moved from Washington to New York?*

SHEINKMAN: That's right. In 1953.

*Q: In 1953. And you've been living here, ever since?*

SHEINKMAN: Living in New York.

*Q: But you certainly come down to Washington often, I know that.*

SHEINKMAN: Pretty often.

*Q: And, you're a member of the Executive Council.*

SHEINKMAN: I'm a member of the Executive Council, the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] and the Executive Council in the Industrial Union Department. And, also—if you'll excuse the expression, I haven't gotten them to change it—the presidium of the International Textile and Garment and Leather Workers Federation.

*Q: That makes it dangerous.*

SHEINKMAN: I often wondered why they used the term, “presidium,” which also had a certain implication in politics today. Not today, but historically.

*Q: Well, of course, it was taken over by the communists from European experience, not—they're not Soviet Revolutionaries.*

SHEINKMAN: Exactly.

*Q: Describe the International, because later on we'll be asking you.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, that was set up—originally it was a merger of the Textile and Garment [Workers' Federation] with the Leather and Shoe Workers' [Federation], back in '73. And it does a lot of work, and has done a lot of work, historically, primarily with unions in developing countries. For example, the U.S. unions have been working in the

Inter-American Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation. The Japanese work for an organization in Asia called "TWARO," which is subsidiary, and, of course, there's a European aspect, a European division. So, it's been very heavily involved, and particularly, in the last several years, as we've seen a globalization of trade. The ITFLGWU [Irish Transport and General Workers' Union] has been very active in the whole issue of a social contract and work rights. And, we've been very active every time workers are imprisoned or workers are threatened or workers are killed. When they attempt to organize, we mobilize public support in an effort to change the situation. We apply international pressure, by calling it, by writing letters, raising it within the ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions], raising it with our own governments.

*Q: ILO [International Labour Organization]?*

SHEINKMAN: ILO, too, but mostly with our own governments.

*Q: The organization has a number of affiliates in the United States, including the Amalgamated and the ILG [same as ILGWU]. Any others?*

SHEINKMAN: Yes. It has the ILGWU. It has a small group from the United Food and Commercial Workers, which has a shoe division. But the main unions are the ILG and us.

*Q: I imagine you work together on your positions that you take.*

SHEINKMAN: Oh, sure. Very closely.

*Q: And as far as I have heard, no problems on that \_\_\_\_\_.*

SHEINKMAN: We have. We've worked very closely on the whole international aspect. For example, we started a joint project in the Dominican Republic Free Trade Zone, where originally, workers didn't have the right to organize free trade zones. And, by bringing pressure on the GSP [Generalized System of Preferences], by filing petitions, we forced the Dominican Republic, for example, to extend the laws that apply to worker rights from their own non-free trade zones into the free trade zones. Even after it was put into effect, it was not becoming effective. So, we applied pressure again. And, in 1994, the first contracts in any free trade zones in the Dominican Republic came about. We provided money, the ILG, our union, in assistance to the unions in the Dominican



Republic, together with AFIELD and the ITFLG, who put this project together. Now that we've succeeded there, we're moving elsewhere—into Honduras and other parts of Latin America. And that explains, to a certain extent, our concern with worker rights and the whole trade issue.

As you know, trade deals, historically, with investment and tariffs—both tariffs and non-tariff barriers. And the argument is, worker rights have no place because they're social items in an agenda for trade. But, we find that companies move to countries where labor is cheap in an effort to maximize their profits. For example, you can buy a children's OshKosh B'gosh pair of overalls made in Honduras and made in the U.S. And, you pay the same price, \$24.95, for the same garment. So, this is the whole issue of why we're involved as a means of international solidarity. Even before trade became such a big issue, in the early days of the ITFLG, we were always trying to assist our brothers and sisters in these developing countries. You know, both in Asia, Latin America, Africa, wherever they exist.

*Q: Well, earlier in this interview, you were describing to us what your relations were with the various embassies, foreign service, labor attaches, etcetera, in connection with the work you were trying to do, how they helped you or hindered you in what you were doing, etcetera.*

SHEINKMAN: Early on, you asked me—see, when I came on board the union, there were still people there from the original, founding days. For example, Potofsky was the president. Potofsky joined the union in the early days when it was formed in 1914. Frank Rosenblum, who was the secretary-treasurer, was still there, and Heime Blumberg and all of the then-vice-presidents that I knew. Like, for example, Abe Chapman out of Rochester, when Rochester was organized, became an officer. There was also Louis Hollander, who ran the New York State Regents' Board operation. So, in a way, I now span the original period, even though I'm younger, and the new generation of leadership. So, I had my roots with those people.

*Q: Well, we were going to cover whatever you remember of those groups. I remember Potofsky, also, largely because of Esther Peterson. And, there were different types of people. Potofsky always looked to me like a diplomat.*

SHEINKMAN: It's very true.

*Q: You mean, very true that he looked like one, or was a diplomat?*

SHEINKMAN: No, he looked like one. Because, whenever I traveled with him, everybody thought he was a foreign dignitary.

*Q: He was a remarkable man in that respect. But, the things that you remember that may have related to their international work are not—they would appear in your records which I hope to be looking at.*

SHEINKMAN: Yes. Well, the only thing I do remember is, you know, I first got involved with the ITFLG with Jack, when he was the President.

*Q: Jack Potofsky, that is.*

SHEINKMAN: And then, when he left and I took over his role there, that's how I got to meet him. In those days, when I came on board in 1953, we did not have that active an international presence. The only part that we had was Potofsky was a member of the International Affairs Committee of the AFL-CIO. But our union did not play the kind of role it did when I took over, because I moved it into a new level of international participation. For example, in 1981-2, I'm losing track of time—I set up the National Labor Committee for Human Rights in El Salvador, which had, with me, at that point, Bill Winpisinger and a number of other unionists.

*Q: Hapsmee? Hapsmee?*

SHEINKMAN: Doug Frazer. Hapsmee was part of it. I got together, over a period of time, twenty-one unions. And our job was—I made several trips to El Salvador—was to try to assist trade unionists who were under pressure, who were being arrested, killed, and murdered. We helped every time we found out that something was happening. We saved the lives of a number of trade unionists by getting them exiled and helped bring them back. And we highlighted what was happening to workers in that situation. Because, you know, it was always pictured as an anti-Communist war, but we didn't look upon it in that way. We felt that the kind of peace that was ultimately achieved could have been achieved a lot earlier. We felt that the problem was a question of social uprising, which happens when, as you know, democracy was squelched. The democratically-elected

president ultimately had to escape because of the military. Even though in the thirties, they had an attempted coup there. So, that opened up a whole new expanse of our role.

And also, beyond El Salvador, following that, we changed the name, called it the National Labor Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Central America. So, we've been operating, for example, in Honduras, in Haiti, in Guatemala, in the Dominican Republic, wherever else worker rights issues are involved. And this is not limited just to textile, garment and leather workers.

*Q: I know. There are other unions involved there, too. And, at this point, we might as well continue with that. And, let me ask you how you fit it into the—this was in opposition to what our U.S. government policy was. How you fit it into that, what your relations within the AFL-CIO, how they were affected, if any. And the AFIELD.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, what happened was, in terms of our government, we took a contrary position. We lobbied very hard in the Congress. We worked with Congressman Markey of Massachusetts. We worked with Senator Dodd, a number of other Congressmen, in opposition to what the U.S. government was trying to do down there, because they were supporting the established government which was really the handmaiden of the military. When I was there on the first trip, we had a reception at the embassy for us, despite the fact of where we came from. The military thought I was part of a congressional delegation and gave me a list of military hardware, which I wrote down, that they wanted me to take. We met with the—

*Q: That they wanted you to take or get for them?*

SHEINKMAN: Get for them.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: And we met with the rebels. We also met with the government. We met with the president of the country. We met with the military. We met with the business community. And they utilized this to suppress unionism, legitimate unions as well. And, of course, at that point, AFIELD and us were in conflict, at the time. Because they felt we were supporting too many of the left wing groups. But, we felt, at that point, some of those left wing groups were not communist fronts or communist allies, although they

were to the left of some of the unions that the AFIELD was supporting. And that put us in opposition because of various conventions. We would take different positions on resolutions affecting El Salvador and some of the others.

*Q: At various AFL-CIO conventions.*

SHEINKMAN: That's right.

*Q: Well, given the issue—*

SHEINKMAN: And we got certain resolutions modified. We lost some battles, won some battles. So, we were really in opposition to the established policy at that point, of the AFL-CIO and the government.

*Q: Let me draw you into a discussion of this. Currently, with all the documents coming out about the support by—there's a very good book out recently by two academics, Klinger and Haines. They searched through the documents, got a whole lot of money from Yale University, I think, to search through the documents, not as a KGB but of the \_\_\_\_\_ to find out how much money was being sent by the \_\_\_\_\_ to be party to the Communist Party, here. Obviously, it is certainly true that the Communist's had a caucus. I \_\_\_\_\_ them in many unions all over, in many organizations, liberal, radical, etcetera, which directed the policy using \_\_\_\_\_ funds.*

*The argument, now, among both academics and researchers in the field is—*

*—The comments being made, now, are, “well, even if these left organizations were not communists, they were serving the interest because they wouldn't have been in a united front with communists unless the communists \_\_\_\_\_”*

SHEINKMAN: It's a lot easier doing this here than in the office, because in the office I'm under pressure.

*Q: Yes. Well, thanks very much. Well, you were saying before the telephone interruption about the reasons that you contacted groups that were not in line with U.S. policy. Well, later on, toward the end, we'll talk about the involvement of the labor attachés in this. But, as far as your delegations were concerned, you were in disagreement with the*

*American policy. You met with the American government people and you criticized the policy that they were following.*

SHEINKMAN: Exactly.

*Q: Yeah, which did not include rejection, completely, of any dealings with the unions which had some communist elements within them?*

SHEINKMAN: Well, see, our support, mainly, was in terms of where they were operating. Were they operating as legitimate unions in the sense of trying to represent workers? We would be involved where we knew they got arrested. We knew, in many cases, that when they got arrested, if we had not raised an international protest—we raised it not only through our organization, but through the ICFTU—these people would have been killed. We've seen many of them captured by the police, by the military, and they were just killed, without a trial, without anything else. And, by highlighting this, we put pressure on them. And that was the reason we did it. And not all of them had communist elements. They may have had left wing elements, but they were not necessarily—you've got to remember that in the war on El Salvador, historically, the communists were the last to join.

*Q: Oh, really? I didn't—*

SHEINKMAN: The official Communist Party was the last to join in the rebellion. The rebellion was started by non-communists. As a matter of fact, some of the people that were involved in the rebellion were involved in the government at one time. So, you had these kinds of people. So, this was not only an element—and, you've got to remember that one of the leaders was the former—guy was elected, and I think he was elected president back in the seventies, you know. And, he was actually ousted—or vice-president—from the Social Democratic Party or the Social Democrats\_\_\_\_\_rebellion end. There were some Christian Democrats who had left, you know. So, this was not only communists or only, necessarily, left wingers\_\_\_\_\_ thing that happens when you create conditions, which I'm worried about in my own country. We had that, as you know better than I do, in the thirties. If Roosevelt had not come along and put some of those programs into effect, we would have had much more social unrest. We're now developing—we now, in the United States, have the greatest disparity between rich and poor. And if that goes on, you get all sorts of things—not necessarily left wing, you get right wing

problems. And this creates social unrest. And this is what discourages me if you want to have stable, democratic government. So, these are the kind of things that concern me and our committee. None of the people on our committee—all are presidents of unions. For example: Auto Workers, IAM [International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers], IUE [International Union of Electrical Workers], Communication Workers, Teamsters, ultimately, none of these have communist—they were just concerned. And I was concerned too, that we were getting involved, to a certain extent, like we were in Vietnam. And at first, I was a great believer in the domino theory, early on. That was my philosophy too. But, as time went on, I shifted away from that position.

*Q: Were your relations within the AFL-CIO affected adversely by this deviation from AFL-CIO?*

SHEINKMAN: Oh, yeah. I was considered not part of the boys by the Administration. I had a friendly—first of all, I never attacked the AFL-CIO or the leadership. I just fought the policies. So, I never personalized it. I never did that. But, I was considered an outsider. For example, early on, I wanted to have a boycott of South Africa through the Jewish Labor Committee saying—not that we would have a boycott, but we would support a boycott, an international boycott of trade with South Africa because of the conditions there.

*Q: You're mentioning of the Jewish Labor Committee [JLC] leads me to interrupt and mention the fact that for five years or so you were President of that Jewish Labor Committee.*

SHEINKMAN: That's right. That's correct. But, by the same token, I had opposition from the official AFL-CIO on that. At that time, because of the tie of the African National Congress [ANC] to the Communist Party, they were very leery of anything that the ANC wanted. So, as a result, when I took a position in the JLC and urged a resolution be adopted saying we would support a boycott, I lost the fight. I lost the fight. Who did I have in opposition? I had in opposition, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the United Federation of Teachers, who are—you've got to remember, it's like the difference between the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] and the, what's the—

*Q: Social Democrats.*

SHEINKMAN: Yeah. I was involved with both.

*Q: These are the two socialist organizations still expanding, one under the presidency of Don Slaiman, who was associated with [Albert] Shanker and all those—*

SHEINKMAN: Right. He was also associated with the Jewish Labor Committee. He succeeded, could have been president.

*Q: Yes, he could have. President of the Jewish Labor Committee. And, on the other side, the Democratic Socialists of America, the Harrington Group, so it's called.*

SHEINKMAN: See that, to me, is the distinction. It was not the communists. And the attitude of the DSA and the Democratic—

*Q: Socialists.*

SHEINKMAN: —Democrats, was that DSA was too left wing. You've got to remember, interestingly enough, you know, it's the old story: there were Shachtmanites and Sheinkrunites, as you know better.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: And, interestingly enough, both of those groups were the grandchildren of the Shachtmanites. You know, [Michael] Harrington was a Shachtmanite.

*Q: I knew that, yes. Incidentally, Don Slaiman has agreed to be interviewed for this project because of his relations. And, you can imagine, I'll be getting a different story.*

SHEINKMAN: You'll be getting a different viewpoint.

*Q: Yeah, sure.*

SHEINKMAN: See that, to me, is the difference. I moved more into the DSA camp, as time went on. Interestingly enough, contrary to what most people believed, and you know what turned me a little, was the Vietnam War. Because, I think our own government misled us. I'm not saying we shouldn't, you know, when we got involved and all that kind

of thing. But that shifted me a little bit. But there's a big difference between going from one group to the DSA and then going to the Communist Party. I never went to that, I can tell you.

*Q: I know that.*

SHEINKMAN: That's the difference. And I'm being very open with you.

*Q: Why, sure. By the way, talking about being open, you will get a transcript of this thing, as soon as we can transcribe it.*

SHEINKMAN: Oh, that's fine.

*Q: And, then it will become public. So, I don't want to hear anything that you wouldn't—*

SHEINKMAN: I have no problem with it. This is my feeling. I'm not—talking to you—I just feel, nowadays, on international affairs, whatever differences I had within the AFL-CIO—

*Q: Are resolved.*

SHEINKMAN: Are, you know, because the National Labor Committee is working the same kind of program as AFIELD. As I told you, AFIELD worked very closely with us in the Dominican Republic. And, nowadays, the program and agenda is not different.

*Q: Now, there's some talk about the AFIELD continuing on in a slightly narrower field or anything like that.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, I think AFIELD's problem is going to be government financing, now. I don't have to tell you, with the new Republicans, they are so anti-labor. For example, the Republican Party will not support legislation that contains labor rights at all. They feel it has no place in trade. For example, they will oppose any fast track legislation that would deal with labor rights. So, right now, as far as they're concerned, they feel it's supporting labor rights. And, I feel it is too. That's not an issue. I never felt it didn't support labor rights. But, I felt, at one point, there was a little too much politically oriented and not labor rights oriented, in some cases. That's where my basic difference



was.

*Q: Well, you've gone into the international affairs of the organization. How about some of the economic issues before we get into relationships with labor attaché programs, etcetera. On the economic front, the most important issue is the trade \_\_\_\_\_. Let's have, for our records, a statement that is not as simplistic as some we have heard on both sides of the trade issue. How do you feel your union members are being adversely affected by trade policy? What should it be? Has the government supported you in some degrees and negatively in others, etcetera? Assess the government's attitude, your own, and the government's attitude on trade.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, you've got to remember that, first of all, textile and power was the largest manufacturing industry, still is. Employs about some two million people. It did employ some two million people. It's down. Mostly women, minorities, people with little education. In effect, as you know, within my own union, it was the stairway for whereby immigrants came in, earned a livelihood, and their children had an opportunity for education—some of them teachers, now, professional people, so on and so forth. So, really employees are third-world people, just like employed immigrants who came here at the turn of the century from Europe. It is now employing a lot of Latin Americans and Asians that have come to this country.

So, you've got to look at it in that regard. And, we've had imports coming in which were supposed to have been regulated. And, you know, we have special exemptions under the laws, trade laws. And our union and a good many unions, contrary to popular belief, we're not anti-trade. We just wanted to set a different foundation, as I said earlier on. That trade involved war and just as in protection of investment, protection of intellectual property rights should have evolved the protection of worker rights, for two reasons. One, what's been the great strength of our nation? Even Henry Ford knew this, back in the '17s when he provided the five dollar a day, because he wanted his people to have the wherewithal.

*Q: To buy an automobile.*

SHEINKMAN: When I was in Guatemala, and visited a shirt plant, doing shirts for the U.S., the workers there didn't earn enough money to buy the shirts that they were making. They were buying second-hand, imported shirts from the U.S. Now, it has two effects. If

you want to raise the standard of living of the countries involved, people have to have purchasing power and the wherewithal. And in many of these Latin American countries, people don't even have enough to live on, to support their families. You also have child labor. We've exposed child labor. Last year, our Committee had workers come in and testify—young women—about the exploitation of child labor in these Latin American countries, where these companies are doing work for American companies, exporting goods to the U.S. We fought the battle for child labor here. We're getting a return of sweatshops in this country, even. You know, you saw the story, recently, in *The New York Times*, of how workers are working below the minimum wage. So, we found this.

Now, for example, in Korea, the conditions have improved. They have active, independent free trade unions. Korean companies are now shifting their work off-shore, to other people.

*Q: Indonesia?*

SHEINKMAN: Yeah, Indonesia, Bangladesh. I call this the difference between a race to the bottom and—high road and low road. The low road is, in order to maximize your profits of margin—which I explained to you about Oshkosh-B'-Gosh. The more profit margins, the greater—when you have work done off-shore. And what's going to happen? You take a look in Malaysia, for example—which is a developing country and doing well, relatively speaking. We have a number of American companies there. We try to get Malaysia knocked out of GSP because they have laws forbidding the right to strike in Malaysia. The American companies said, "You change the laws and we're going to leave the country." This is the problem. Our concern is not the erosion of the standard of living which has gone on for twenty years now, of American workers and factory workers, particularly. You don't know what's happened to real wages. And, employers come to us and say, "Look, we got threats of imports, cut your conditions."

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: That's not the way to do it. That's the low road. We had, for example, my union and Xerox. We represent all the workers of Xerox in North America, the production workers. You may ask, "How come?" We were the major union in Rochester.

*Q: A big clothing center, yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: In 1937, when Haloid workers came to us, we've had them on the contract, now, for fifty-eight years. O.K.? So, what happened is, Xerox said, "We want to send a wire harness operation to Mexico, because we can save three million dollars." And we said, "Give us a chance. Let's put a team together of workers, your engineer, your head of the department." We came up with a program that saved the company 3.2 million dollars. And that work is still being made in the U.S.

*Q: Without lowering wages?*

SHEINKMAN: Without lower wages. In fact, every time there's been an improvement in contracts from '82 on, they've gotten the same improvements. So, what we've done, that's the point I'm making.

*Q: How did you do this?*

SHEINKMAN: Well, everybody talks, you know, the administration is talking about training being important. But, you know, the whole concept of Taoism is you treat workers like machines, instead of utilizing their knowledge and know-how. And we've learned, early on in the Xerox experience, which has now spread to a number of other companies that we deal with, that if you can tap that knowledge and know-how, you can produce goods much more productively, more efficiently, and cheaper. And that's how we've done a lot of it. And see, when you go off-shore, even in apparel and textiles, usually you have to make commitments nine months in advance. If we have a quick response system—

*Q: Time is a cost.*

SHEINKMAN: Time is a cost and money is a cost. So, this is the whole point I'm making, is that sure, you're going to lose textiles. But the idea you're going to end up with all high-skilled jobs, even some of those are going off-shore. So, our argument is for two reasons: we don't want to see what you might call harmonization downward, to where we go down to lower levels. We want to see those third-world countries with a harmonization upward. That's why we were opposed to the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] because, even with the labor provisions of the NAFTA that says you're going to enforce Mexican laws, not U.S. laws. In 1993, for the first time, I

negotiated a contract with the Men's Tailored Clothing Industry, which allowed them to go off-shore, up to ten percent, on three conditions: protect your now existing jobs, guarantee a fixed amount of income, which was not a hundred percent, and thirdly, any country or company you sent to, had to meet internationally recognized labor standards. If they didn't meet those labor standards—for example, I got requests for companies to send work to China. I said, "No. Under no condition." And, if we found that work was going to a country or a company that violated those standards, we could come to you, X Company, and say, "You're going to stop, or if you refuse to stop, we take you to arbitration." So, we have sanctions. Under the NAFTA Agreement, it was enforcing Mexican laws. And, I don't have to tell you. It's like Pat Moynihan said, "Mexico is the best example of Leninism still around."

*Q: I'd like to ask you to respond to the more complicated argument made. Remember I told you that I was active in the original off-shore opposition, when we were fighting in the ILG against jobs going to Newark, New Jersey, way across the other river. And, the answer that some of those more sophisticated guys, we were trying to organize, really, women because the men were pretty well organized. They were the cutters. They said, "Look, the only reason we're coming here and fighting for our higher wages is we want to keep the jobs in New York. Your objective is not raising our wages, but raising our wages enough so that the manufacturer on Seventh Avenue will say, 'The hell. Why send it to Newark, New Jersey, and give them jobs when it's going to cost us.'"*

SHEINKMAN: Well, that's the argument you get.

*Q: How do you answer that argument?*

SHEINKMAN: Well, we answer that very simply. First of all, we've had situations where they don't always automatically go up to the same standards when we organize these plants. It takes a period of time. They become unions. They don't automatically get all the same conditions that we have. And, secondly, under our provisions of our contract that I described, you can't send out work unless the work in the existing plant.

*Q: I see.*

SHEINKMAN: And then you have to send it to a unionized plant. So, it's not a question of keeping it so that you can do that. In our situation, I can't tell you about the ILG

because the ILG doesn't have as many manufacturers. The ILG has more jobbers, people who didn't have their own facilities and they always would send the work out, anyhow.

*Q: Jobs\_\_\_\_\_*

SHEINKMAN: That's right. They would send most. They don't have their own facility, necessarily. They would send work to contractors automatically. In our situation, both in the men's tailored clothing and the shirt industry and the pants industry, they don't have jobbers, in that sense. We had manufacturers. So, one of the things we insisted on in our contract, was before work could go out, you had to provide your own facilities for work. And then, if you sent out work, it had to go union. If there were no union facilities that could do it, then you could go non-union.

*Q: Well, it's going to be interesting when your two organizations unite—whether you will try to establish some common.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, we have different—for example, the ILG allowed work to go off-shore long ago. They paid into a penalty fund for it. We don't have that. You've got to remember. We're not going to meld them together because while we are a part of the apparel industry, ours is structured differently. First of all, we have many more bigger companies, as I said to you before. We don't have jobbers. We are a manufacturing industry. In fact, most of our contractors are out of existence today, because there isn't that much work around. For example, 1973, I negotiated a contract in the Men's Tailored Clothing Industry, which I'm now negotiating, for a hundred and two thousand people. 1995, it's thirty-three or thirty-five thousand people. So, you can see the decline. Somebody can say, "You've been a great leader. You went from a hundred and two thousand to thirty-three to thirty-five thousand."

But, it's been a factor of two conditions, three conditions. Imports. Import penetration has increased. I was part of the team that negotiated the first imports during the Kennedy Administration with Arthur Goldberg that allowed twenty-five thousand Japanese suits to come into the U.S. Today, our domestic market is impacted by well over forty to forty-five percent of suits. You're talking about shirts. You're talking about over sixty percent. We also have shoe workers. Back in 1978, imports into the United States were something like fifty percent of shoes. Today, it's eighty-two percent. So, you see what happened.

Then the second aspect is, you've had a change in the nature of the retail industry refunctioning. A lot of these companies were bought out, like Federated, so you have different structure. You have discount stores. Thirdly, you have a change of fashion. You have Friday, you know, we don't dress up Fridays. And, finally too, you have another aspect of it, which is the fact that, in addition to those changes, you have the fact that the industry today, is also—it used to be a lot of hand operations. It moved into to new technology, for example, cutting. We now use laser cutters.

*Q: Really?*

SHEINKMAN: Laser cutters. We use automatic computer cutting.

*Q: You no longer have those long knives?*

SHEINKMAN: Oh, yes. Computer cutting, today. Computerized. So, you have new technology, which is also—

END SIDE 1 OF TAPE

*Q: You've explained part of what I want to cover. The other two are related. And you've covered the politics pretty well. Unless you want to cover something about the WFTU [World Federation of Trade Unions] and getting out. Do you know anything?*

SHEINKMAN: I can't tell you. That, I don't know.

*Q: O.K. That we have to rely on the historical records.*

SHEINKMAN: \_\_\_\_\_ that more, you know, I don't know about that.

*Q: I haven't seen your records up there, but are they indexed in such a way that you want to tell me some names of people whose—*

SHEINKMAN: Well, in terms of the WFTU, I don't know if there's anybody around. All the people that—

*Q: No, I mean within your records. Who was involved at that time? Well, Potofsky,*

*himself.*

SHEINKMAN: Potofsky is the only one that I know of.

*Q: The only one, really?*

SHEINKMAN: That I knew that was involved.

*Q: And the relations with Rudstone and that group?*

SHEINKMAN: Well, Rudstone, I knew.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: Because it involved not only with the ILG but with the AFL.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: And, I knew Jay [Mazur]. Not well, but I knew him. And, you know, I knew the Lufstinities. I had some good friends of mine that were Lufstinities. So, I knew those. But, you've got to remember, when I first came on board, the international aspect of my work was not very—I only got into the international as I moved the traditional—as I told you, legal, organizing, collective bargaining, you know, strike activity. As I moved up the ladder, is when I became an international officer and I started moving into the international sphere. Up until then, I had no role, whatsoever.

*Q: But, it was Potofsky, himself, who really ran international affairs, both in his position within the AFL-CIO Executive Council and there's no staff person or something like that.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, one of the people that did work a little was Milton.

*Q: Freid.*

SHEINKMAN: Yeah, Milton worked with him a little bit on that. But, I had nothing to do with it. Because, Milton, in the early days—you mentioned Art Gundershine.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: Milton started off on the whole trade issue. He was our person doing all the trade work. So, he had a role, and at that point, he would be dealing with Potofsky on this, not with me. Because they were not legal issues, they were policy issues. And that's why I can't speak.

*Q: Is that how Gundershine came in?*

SHEINKMAN: No, Gundershine came in later when I became a top officer. He became one of our assistants. He was an economist. And when Milton died, he was brought in to fill Milton's shoes in that area.

*Q: Well then, let's—*

SHEINKMAN: Well, I can't really give you any, other than what I read. You could read as much as I have.

*Q: Oh, yeah. That's why I wanted\_\_\_\_\_*

SHEINKMAN: I can't really get into that area. I can only tell you my international involvement.

*Q: O.K. Lastly then, about your relations or feelings in your travels. I'm not asking you to be especially critical or praiseworthy of the labor attachés, but what sort of functions did you see that they performed that were good and some that were marginal or what sort of things should we think of in training labor officers, what should they know? How relevant is the whole business of communism, now?*

SHEINKMAN: Well, I don't think that's an issue, today, right now. You've got to remember that when I first learned about labor attachés—in fact, one time I thought I might want to become one, myself. You had a number of trade unionists. Unfortunately, some of the trade unionists were people that the AFL-CIO unions wanted to get rid of. In other words—

*Q: What we called the broken down business agent theory.*



SHEINKMAN: And then, on the other hand, when we started getting State Department types in, they didn't understand enough about unions. And that was one of the negatives. I think you could probably talk about this more, but some of the people I've met in the course of my time in visiting foreign countries really didn't have that kind of background and training that they needed in order to really understand the role. But you've got to remember, the labor attaché, or even the ambassador, doesn't set the policy but, in effect, carries on the policy of the secretary of state and the administration. But, at least, if they had a little better understanding—I did meet some, over a period of time and in different countries that I visited, that were very responsive. Sometimes more responsive than the ambassadors that I met. The trouble is, while they may have been responsible, they ran into problems because the ambassadors, themselves, didn't give them the type of support that they needed. But, I found that after a period of time—for example, you know Howard Samuel.

*Q: Oh, of course.*

SHEINKMAN: Well, Howard worked for us before he went into the Labor Department.

*Q: I know.*

SHEINKMAN: And, he was the deputy undersecretary.

*Q: For International Affairs.*

SHEINKMAN: And we had a person like that going in and doing that kind of work. That had an impact, in terms of getting some of these people a little broader orientation—the same thing you mentioned earlier, during lunch, Ray Marshall. Ray Marshall had a very definite approach when he was Secretary of Labor in this area. So, that had a different kind of impact. I don't think you have the same kind of impact, with all due respect, to some of the Republicans I met that were Secretaries of Labor. And that was the difference, too. So, I think that made a big difference in that regard. And then, of course, as I told you earlier on, because of the question of the Cold War, which dominated even our economic policy, international economic policy, we sometimes would make deals with countries that were far from democratic because they were anti-communist, as part of our Cold War approach. And economic policy took a second seat. The kind of things

I'm talking to you about, you were asking me about, to international political and policy, in terms of the Cold War. We sometimes pursued economic policy that undercut our own country and our own policies at home, to pursue a Cold War policy. And that dominated. The big difference, today, as you see, even—I've talked to some of my friends in the State Department, in the Commerce Department, in USTR [United States Trade Representative] and on the President's Advisory Committee on Trade Negotiations.

*Q: Oh, yeah. That.*

SHEINKMAN: That served during Reagan, Bush and Clinton, was that now we're getting more of an interest in economic policy. Of course, now, the economic policy is free trade overallis without the kind of things I was talking to you about which is worker rights and other aspects. You're protecting international policy and not worker rights policy. You know, everybody's looking for a free market. And contrary to popular belief, which we talked about earlier, we're not protectionist overallis, the Americans. You know, we're not ostriches. We don't live in the past, even though Clinton intimated that during the NAFTA debate that we were living in the past. We are living not in the past. Not that we're opposed to international trade\_\_\_\_\_ We are living in the future. We want to do a different policy.

So, the question you really asked at the outset was—you've now got somebody from the AFL-CIO for example, Jack Otaro, who occupies the seat that Howard Samuel occupied during the Carter years. And I knew a number—as I said to you, my knowledge of all of this activity only grew as I got in from '68 on, not prior to '68. So, in '53, I didn't have much of an international approach.

*Q: Approach. But how do you respond to the argument that it isn't a question of, I'd put it in these terms, of human rights or\_\_\_\_\_ as against trade overallis.*

SHEINKMAN: True.

*Q: Protection overallis. How do you respond to the idea that if you start setting all these standards, there are so many other countries that are willing to contract without?*

SHEINKMAN: That's the point.

*Q: These standards— don't you have to wait until we can negotiate international standards through the U.N., and you know how ineffective that is.*

SHEINKMAN: We tried that at one time.

*Q: Yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: We tried to have codes of conduct for foreign corporations, but even codes of conduct that the administration is pushing—for example, we work with Levi Strauss, where they have codes of conduct that are enforceable. Too many of these codes of conduct are merely PR gimmicks. You get some of these companies to adopt it, but what enforceability do you have? And the issue is, of course, the sanction issue, which came up during the NAFTA debate. So, it's not a question. See, people look upon labor rights as distinctly democracy and human rights. I look upon labor rights and we have not put that into the public mind enough.

*Q: Distinguishing them, yeah.*

SHEINKMAN: Labor rights, as far as we're concerned, are part of democratic rights. We have not left that in the public mind. So, you know, for example, now, we're pushing for labor legislation in the United States. If you call labor legislation special interest, we've not changed our approach. We want to bring democracy into the workplace, which has a different approach in the public mind. So, that's the point I'm trying to make.

*Q: Well, thanks very much. This has been very interesting and insightful.*

SHEINKMAN: Oh, well, thank you.

*End of interview*