

George Meany Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 07/16/1964
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Biographical Note

George Meany (1894-1980) was the president of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization from 1955 to 1979. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] time as a senator, the labor movement's support for JFK during his presidential campaign, and Meany's personal recollections of JFK, among other topics.

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This is a transcript of a taped interview between George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, and Arthur J. Goldberg, associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The interview took place on two separate occasions (July 16 and August 18, 1964) in Mr. Meany's office in the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D. C. This portion was taped July 16.

GOLDBERG: This is Justice Arthur J. Goldberg of the Supreme Court of the United States. I have the great pleasure of interviewing my old friend and colleague, President George Meany of the AFL-CIO. This interview, of course, is being conducted for the John F. Kennedy Library. George, you and I, of course, were old friends of President Kennedy and I am wondering whether you recall the circumstances under which you first got to know him. Can you identify when that was?

MEANY: Well, actually, I first got to know him when he was a member of the United States Senate and on, of course, the Labor Committee. I did meet him once in the corridor, I was introduced to him by a friend, when he was a member of the House. I guess this would be back in 1948 or 1947. All I recall is, that at the time, I was really astonished at his youth. He looked so real boyish back in those days.

GOLDBERG: George, he was much thinner, wasn't he, in those days?

MEANY: Yes, he was quite thin. But I got to know him, of course, beginning around 1953 when he first came to the Senate.

GOLDBERG: Do you remember, George, when he ran for the House? Was he supported by the labor movement up in Massachusetts; do you remember that?

MEANY: I don't really recall. I imagine that he was supported. I have no record on this but I think he was supported by the local labor people in his district, in Boston. You see he ran for Congress from the district within the city of Boston.

GOLDBERG: Was his record in the House, as you remember, a fairly acceptable record?

MEANY: I would say it was fairly acceptable. I would not say that it was what we would call a pro-labor record. I would say it was the record of a Congressman who was sympathetic to the things that we were looking for in the way of legislation as a general rule. But I certainly have no recollection of it being what you would call an outstanding pro-labor record at that time.

GOLDBERG: Was your impression the same as mine that in this period, (and I don't remember it very well from this period either) that he was kind of learning his way?

MEANY: Yes, and the one outstanding impression of his early days in the Senate, when I went to see him on several occasions on various measures, the outstanding impression I got of him then was that he wanted to know everything there was to know about a subject. He just seemed to have a drive and a craving for knowledge, I would say, about all subjects. I don't recall a member of Congress that applied himself any more diligently to his work than did Senator Kennedy back in his earlier days. Now we didn't always agree with him. In fact, there were cases where we felt that he was taking a wrong approach and we sat down with him. After discussions we found, however, that he was very easy to get along with; that if you had a good case, if you had an argument against what he had in a bill, the minute he saw that argument he

would go along with you and I think he became more useful from a legislative standpoint because of this. Now, of course, I got to know him best I would say around 1956 and 1957, when he was active as a member of the Labor Committee and active on labor legislation.

GOLDBERG: As I remember it he was Chairman of the subcommittee on labor, wasn't that it?

MEANY: Yes, and I appeared before that subcommittee on several occasions on proposals -- legislative proposals.

GOLDBERG: That subcommittee, of course, was the very important subcommittee that dealt directly with labor legislative matters in general.

MEANY: That's right and of course I talked to him and I recall, and I am quite sure that you recall, we had this special committee following up minimum wage legislation. I talked to him at that time about that and he became quite interested in the minimum wage legislation.

GOLDBERG: You know, George, I was trying to recall, also, when I got to be more than casually friendly with him.

MEANY: I think that that would be the time.

GOLDBERG: And I would say, I wonder if your recollection is the same as mine, there were two areas where we really got to know this man, outside of the fact that generally he was a Senator -- an industrious Senator -- one was in the minimum wage and the other was when the labor reform --

MEANY: Labor reform, the anti-corruption legislation, yes.

Those are the two areas where I really got to know him better, while we were involved in those areas more than in anything else. Of course, we were in touch with him on other legislation but these were the ones that he was actually closer to because of his chairmanship of this subcommittee.

GOLDBERG: Can you recall some of the experiences you had on this labor reform legislation? He was in a rather difficult position, as a Senator. He was a northern Senator, generally regarded to be friendly, he was both on the labor committee and on the McClellan Committee which did not make it easy for him or the labor movement.

MEANY: Well, I remember those days quite well, in fact, I remember he introduced a bill and I appeared before his subcommittee and I would say this would be maybe in '58, back around there, I appeared before his subcommittee very, very much in opposition to one phase of the bill. In fact, I spoke very sharply about it and he questioned me, he was chairman of this subcommittee, and I can say this, that as a result of that discussion there, and I met with him a day or two later, that he changed this one section of the bill. I recall this quite well, that in this bill, and this was one of the many bills that were put in at the time to try to handle the question of trade union corruption, was provision that would require every one who worked for a trade union to make a disclosure and file it with the federal agency of all your property and all this sort of

thing and this, of course, we felt was entirely unnecessary and the way the bill was worded, and I am sure it was drawn up by staff people, it would have meant that if we hired a stenographer we would have to give her this form to fill out as to how much property she owned and so on and so forth. And, actually, when I got to discussing it with Senator Kennedy he readily saw that the way the bill was drawn that it would have been really unjust and we had no problem on that.

GOLDBERG: George, was this your testimony when you made the famous statement "Save me from my friends."

MEANY: Yes.

GOLDBERG: Well, now, I want to call your attention to that because of what I think, as I recall, was a very important change in President Kennedy and that statement which was somewhat criticized at the time --

MEANY: Yes it was criticized --

GOLDBERG: Turned out to be, in my view, and I wonder if you agree with this very interesting thing, Kennedy, although he had been on the labor committee at that time -- at about that period -- had not developed the friendships, confidence and knowledge of the people like yourself -- that he was relying largely for his advice in these matters on a group of academicians.

MEANY: That's right.

GOLDBERG: Do you remember that?

MEANY: Yes.

GOLDBERG: Now, when you referred to "Save me from my friends" you were not referring to Kennedy, you were referring to these academicians.

MEANY: Yes, who were all more or less friendly with us. I mean the people on the staff of Senator Kennedy and others over there were considered people who had experience in our movement, they were research people or clerks maybe in the committees, who worked their way up. But, they were more or less considered friendly to us.

GOLDBERG: Would you agree with me in this observation, which I recall at the time and this is where I also got involved with you in many discussions, would you agree with me that as a result of this exchange, one of the very beneficial effects was that Kennedy found out -- Senator Kennedy, then -- found out that he could talk to labor people and get dispassionate views about problems in which they were interested. Something which he didn't fully understand up to that point.

MEANY: Yes. I would say that because my relationship with him after that was that any time he had any of these bills he would call me on the phone or I would go over there to see him and we got so that we could just discuss any of these things on a very straight-forward basis and it was quite helpful, I think, to us, and I think it helped him in his career too, because it gave him a knowledge, I think, of the thinking of labor people and of trade unionists that he did not have prior to these contacts.

GOLDBERG: George, as you remember, it's very interesting when you look at the method by which the subsequent legislation was developed as contrasted with the method by which this bill had been developed, didn't you find this to be true growing out of your last statement that from then on, Kennedy, without forfeiting his independence — he had considerable independence — worked out his subsequent legislative matters in this area cooperatively with consultation.

MEANY: Yes, with the greatest cooperation and consultation. In fact, I would say that in 1959 when we got what I think was unfair legislation in the Landrum-Griffin bill, which came over from the House, I'm convinced that if it were not for Senator Kennedy's knowledge of these matters and also his sympathetic approach toward the union and their problems, I think the bill would have been much worse. You recall at that time the exposures of union corruption, and corruption of trade union officials that had come about as a result of the McClellan Committee hearings. These exposures had put the trade union movement in a very bad light in public opinion and almost anything of a punitive nature could have passed except for the fact that we had some friends in Congress who just felt that these situations could be met without ruining the trade union movement. And I would say that Senator Kennedy was one who really stood up with us at that time of real need, because if things had been just let go with the reactions of Congressmen and Senators to public opinion and what the newspapers were printing, we could have

been pretty badly hurt. And I don't think the trade union movement would deserve it because we did what we could to try to stamp out corruption and the record was quite clear on that. But of course there were people on Capitol Hill in those days who felt that this was a great opportunity to harrass the trade union movement, to put legislation on the statute books that would really destroy the whole idea of trade unionism and if we didn't have people like Senator Kennedy who was willing to study these things and to look at it from our point of view I think we would have had some real bad legislation.

GOLDBERG: And you remember, of course, George, that the situation was not helped by the fact that President Eisenhower went on nationwide television and made his appeal for this restricted type of legislation.

MEANY: Yes.

GOLDBERG: So that Senator Kennedy did not have an easy job --

MEANY: He performed a wonderful service at that time. As I said, the bill that we finally got in 1959 -- the Landrum-Griffin bill -- I don't think the bill was fair, but it certainly was a much milder bill than what we would have got except for the actions of Senator Kennedy and others.

GOLDBERG: Would you say a word, George, about what your problems were in dealing with your colleagues in the labor movement during this period with respect to this legislation. I remember there was a good deal of understandable uneasiness about what basic approach to take, whether the labor movement

should try to get the best bill that they could get or whether the labor movement should just kind of boycott the whole business -- not deal with Kennedy?

MEANY: Well, there was some feeling that we should react to this idea of legislation as insulting to us as citizens and so on and so forth. But the opinion in the trade union movement which finally prevailed was that we had to recognize the fact that these people, while we couldn't be considered responsible for everything they had done, these people were part of the trade union movement. These crooks were trade union officials and we had to accept at least responsibility to that extent that they were part of our movement and that the best approach would be for us to say that we felt that this corruption should be eliminated. I think we showed that by the AFL-CIO's actions, insofar as it could go, that this corruption should be eliminated and -- to the extent that legislation could be helpful in eliminating it -- we wanted that legislation.

But, on the other hand, we would oppose, and I think we made statements -- I know I made statements at that time -- that while we were willing to cooperate in writing legislation that would stop corruption, or make it more difficult, we would not agree to punitive legislation that would have the entire labor movement punished, as it were, because of the sins of a few.

GOLDBERG: I remember correctly that you recommended this procedure at a meeting of the Executive Council at Unity House and it must have been, what, August '59?

MEANY: Yes, August '59.

GOLDBERG: I recall in that meeting, where after a discussion, that you said, I think I quote you correctly, that "you would stand against repressive legislation and fight it all out" but that you felt it was an obligation of the trade union movement to get in there more constructively with friends of the trade union movement, including President Kennedy, to try to avoid the catastrophe of a bill that would be overly repressive. Wasn't that your approach?

MEANY: Right, that was our approach. Of course, the Landrum-Griffin bill which was passed after that, as I said, was a bad bill but I am quite sure it would have been much worse except for the support we had from people like President Kennedy, Senator Kennedy at the time, and others.

GOLDBERG: Indeed it was much worse actually when it came from the House. The Senate version passed the Senate conferences. Now, George, if I can turn to another subject. About 1958, 1959, going back to 1956, it became pretty obvious to the public that this young Senator had political ambitions that ran beyond being Senator from Massachusetts. You remember, and I do, in 1956 he was nominated as Vice President.

MEANY: This really brought him national attention as a potential political figure for the future -- the tremendous support he got for the Vice Presidential nomination in 1956. And I recall at the convention it got to the point that he and Senator Kefauver were very close together and he withdrew and

decided to support Senator Kefauver. However, the vote that he got there, which was a tremendously large vote, attracted nationwide attention. And there is no question that this more or less put him before the public.

GOLDBERG: Weren't you quite surprised about that?

MEANY: Yes I was, very much surprised. Very much surprised that he would get such a tremendous vote for the vice presidential nomination. And this gave him national attention, I would say, for the first time -- that is, in newspapers, and, of course, comments over the radio and television.

GOLDBERG: I remember I was at the convention lobbying for Hubert Humphrey for vice president and Hubert didn't have much of a chance at that particular convention.

George, when did you become involved in the political and the then Senator Kennedy's ambitions? Do you recall when you had any direct conversations with him about this?

MEANY: Not prior to him actually starting his campaign. You know, he actually started his campaign in the late summer, I would say, of 1959 -- we heard about meetings and that he was going to be an active candidate. Now, prior to that, I don't think I had ever talked to him about political matters at all.

GOLDBERG: Of course, he had a very interesting technique. I wonder if you noticed it, George? I had this experience with him -- he never talked to me about it, either, although at that time I had become quite friendly, and you were quite friendly, but he had a very interesting technique -- I don't

know if he was conscious of it -- he kind of assumed you were a friend of his. Did you notice that? He never directly asked you to be a friend.

MEANY: In fact, I can't ever recall him asking me for political support although -- oh, I met him time and time again, in fact, every time he was traveling and he hit a city where we were having a meeting, there would be a telephone call, a breakfast meeting or something else, and he had the political knack of keeping in contact with people.

GOLDBERG: Without pressing.

MEANY: Yes, without pressuring at any time. Oddly enough, you say that he presumed people supported him and I would say that this was true. I don't recall anybody in our set-up making any speeches or passing any resolutions about John Kennedy but by the time 1960 rolled around, I could say quite safely that he was practically the unanimous choice of our people without anyone having, as I say, passed a resolution or made a speech about it. It just seemed to be one of those things that just sort of came about and everybody knew it.

GOLDBERG: I was thinking about that when I was doing my own interview and it was a very difficult period for the labor movement, wasn't it George, because there were several people who had legitimate ambitions and were quite friendly to the labor movement?

MEANY: Yes. I would say this: even among those who were for other candidates in the early part of 1960, there

seemed to be a feeling that, while they were for other candidates, Senator Kennedy would be quite acceptable, too. There just wasn't anyone that was against him at that time. I am now speaking of the top trade union leaders, of course, who sit on our council and people we come in contact with. As I say, it was rather odd that without anyone passing a resolution, without anyone outwardly promoting his candidacy, we just seemed to have arrived at a point in 1960 when everybody was more or less for him.

GOLDBERG: Now, of course, this upon reflection, turned out to be a great asset for Senator Kennedy.

MEANY: Oh, yes.

GOLDBERG: He was the Democratic candidate. While the labor movement cannot name the President, it is pretty difficult to conceive of a Democratic Party naming a candidate, since Roosevelt, who would be hostile to the labor movement. Wouldn't it?

MEANY: That would be true, yes. I would say that he had real tremendous support in the labor movement. It was more than just the routine support that would be given for a candidate whom we endorse. Of course, as you know, every four years, after the conventions have named their candidates, we meet and endorse a candidate and, of course, we did this in 1960 in the case of Senator Kennedy. However, in a great many cases in the past, these endorsements would be sort of perfunctory endorsements and let it go

at that. They wouldn't do too much about it and not get enthusiastic about it. But with Senator Kennedy, when he was running, not only did we endorse, but our people were enthusiastically supporting him.

GOLDBERG: And that was apparent, wasn't it, George, even before the convention?

MEANY: Oh, yes.

GOLDBERG: How do you explain that? Here we have several people who are very friendly to the labor movement who are aspirants: Hubert Humphrey, obviously a very good friend, Stuart Symington was a very good friend, and here -- you, as I remember it, were very neutral officially.

MEANY: Yes. I took no action at all.

GOLDBERG: And COPE was neutral.

MEANY: Yes, they were neutral.

GOLDBERG: In Wisconsin, in West Virginia?

MEANY: Even though many of the individuals were for Senator Kennedy and, of course, some were for others too, we took no part in those primaries at all. When I went out to the convention in 1960, I went there, of course, as officially representing the AFL-CIO before the Platform Committee, but I recall, at that time, while I had taken no official position at all -- although I was certainly most interested in Senator Kennedy's candidacy -- I took no official position. And I recall we had several hundred delegates there representing trade unions and somebody in our movement made a survey and it was amazing that practically all of them were for Senator Kennedy, even though,

as you said, Arthur, that there were other very good friends of ours also in the race.

GOLDBERG: And even though, officially, and quite properly, you had to take the position that the organization made no pre-convention endorsement because, after all, it was a Democratic convention and not a labor convention that was going on.

George, what is your best view as to why this was? Why was it that this young man had such a response, even before he became President, among the labor people -- and I presume that the reaction of the leadership pretty much represented their soundings about the rank and file?

MEANY: Well, I attribute this to the unique personality of this man. I mean, this man had a way about him. It was simple, direct. He was very easy to talk to; he had an almost non-political approach. He just didn't agree with you because he wanted to be agreeable. He could disagree with much dignity and charm and grace and he could agree with you in the same manner. I attribute this to a remarkable personality and then I attribute it also to the fact that he was a great man for doing little things that were important. In other words, if you went to see Senator Kennedy about a problem in the midst of a very busy day and he said, "Well, I'll check with you Friday morning," he would check with you Friday morning. If there was a memorandum that was coming, you'd get that memorandum. He was a great one for keeping in touch with details and he also

had a great facility of what I would say in political language would be, touching base, as they say. In other words, keeping in touch with people even though he didn't have any particular business at the moment, he made a practice of keeping in touch with people and letting them know that he was interested in what was going on. I think this is the reason that so many of our people became, really, emotionally on his side in the political end of it.

GOLDBERG: Would you say it was a fair description of this aspect of his personality to say that he did not delegate personal relationships?

MEANY: No, he handled them himself.

GOLDBERG: Even though he had a very good staff, very competent fellows, when it came to his relationship with people, he handled them himself. Wasn't that a very important aspect of his personality?

MEANY: Yes, I would say that. He had this way, as I said, of keeping in touch with people. I recall in 1959 we had a convention in San Francisco. He didn't appear at our convention but he was in San Francisco -- he spoke at one of the department conventions -- but he was in San Francisco at that time and I was busy getting ready for the convention with a great many things to do and he called me up and said, "I will be in San Francisco for about a day and a half and I want to get in touch with you so we can exchange ideas. When could we get together?"

I finally said to him, "Well, I'll tell you, I eat breakfast at about half past seven when I am away like this as a general thing and this looks like the only time." He said, "I'll be there." And there he was at the hotel at half past seven just for the purpose of having breakfast and just chatting. He didn't come to ask me about anything or do anything, but just chatting about problems and things that were going on. And, of course, this was one quality which endeared him to me and I am sure to a great many other people, that he was interested in what people were doing. And he was interested in what was going on even within the trade union movement. This is the quality I referred to before, Arthur, as keeping in touch or touching base.

GOLDBERG: I think later we'll talk about the presidency. But it is a correct statement that he never really departed from that policy.

MEANY: Never.

GOLDBERG: Even as busy as he was.

MEANY: Even after he became President there was still this same quality about him of taking care of the personal relationships himself. I mean there was no question about that.

GOLDBERG: George, you mentioned that by the time the convention took place the labor movement had not taken an official position. The poll of the delegates as I recall,

I was an alternate delegate from Illinois and participated, was overwhelmingly for him.

MEANY: Oh, there were 240 delegates there and I would say that this was no organized labor effort. In other words, there was no one in the labor movement that was following up these labor delegates as such. These delegates from the various populous states, mostly the northern states and there were about 240 of them there at Los Angeles, I would say to the best of my knowledge over 200 were for Senator Kennedy. Now this meant that they came from Michigan, they came from Ohio, they came from Illinois, they came from New York, and some how or other they all arrived at the same place. This was not done, as I say, through any organized effort within the trade union movement.

GOLDBERG: I take it as I remember, George, you'll correct me if I'm wrong, that following the convention then you called a meeting of the General Board for August, I guess it was. The Democratic Convention of 1960 was in July. And at that point the labor movement made an official endorsement.

MEANY: It made the official endorsement and, of course, at that point then the voluntary machinery we have -- the machinery to use voluntary money to foster the candidacy of persons we endorse -- that machinery went to work of course in 1960. And, in addition, this was the first year that we put on a registration drive.

GOLDBERG: I wanted to ask you about that. Do you remember the circumstances of that and what happened at that time?

MEANY: Yes. I remember you came to me. You had talked, I think, to Walter Reuther. . .

GOLDBERG: Alex Rose and Dave Dubinsky.

MEANY: Alex Rose and Dave Dubinsky and you came to me and said that you felt it would be very helpful, although we wouldn't be directly campaigning for Senator Kennedy, but it would be very helpful if we could get more of our people to vote and we put on our first registration drive that year. We put it on in 14 states. We didn't try to do it in every state of the union but we pushed the registration in the industrial districts where our people lived. We pushed it up considerably in all of those states. I recall Senator Kennedy won 12 of those 14 states.

GOLDBERG: From that experience, isn't it a fair statement to say that while in a close election everybody wins, that registration campaign was one of the key campaigns?

MEANY: Yes. I would say because of the closeness of the vote I would think it played quite a part especially in those 14 states.

GOLDBERG: Now, as I recall it, once the official endorsement was made, of course, you were free as the leader of the labor movement to go ahead. As I recall it you participated pretty actively. Would you say perhaps a little more actively than you had in previous campaigns?

MEANY: Yes. I would say so because I was among those who had been exposed to the Kennedy charm and wit and personality and I was really enthusiastically for him and, of course, I think that his conduct in the three short years that he was in the White House certainly would make anyone happy to think that they had played some part in helping him to get to that position.

GOLDBERG: George, isn't it a fair statement also to say that Mrs. Meany was pretty enthusiastic about President Kennedy?

MEANY: Well, let me give you a little story I think you'll find interesting. Of course my wife has been to political conventions before and she was at the Los Angeles convention in 1960. However, when we got off the plane out there I discovered she had a Kennedy hat -- one of those bonnets they were handing out and she wore it all the time and she was very, very enthusiastic. And when we came home from Los Angeles in 1960 she took this hat and she put it in a paper bag and put a clip on it and put it in the attic and she said: "I'm going to have that for the convention in 1964."

GOLDBERG: The reason I asked that question is that she and I have had many conversations. She was not neutral when you were neutral.

MEANY: Oh, no, by no means. She was anything but neutral and I would say this, I think she became more political at that time than at any time in her life. She never took

any great interest in politics I would say. But in 1960 she was an avid John Kennedy rooter.

GOLDBERG: George, am I correct in talking about your own activities in this political campaign to say that it extended to your taking a personal hand within the limits of the law and pursuant to it to help get financing for the campaign of labor people so as to assist. Would it be a correct statement from your perspective of many years of leadership in the labor movement to say that the greatest amount of labor activity took place in this campaign throughout the country?

MEANY: Yes, I would say so. This doesn't mean, of course, that labor didn't enthusiastically support other candidates prior to this time but I would say that by 1960 our machinery for political action had been developed to a greater extent than it ever had before. I remember back in the days of Franklin Roosevelt there would be labor committees and the committees would do a certain amount of work. But it was not until after the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, in 1947, that we really tried to organize a political action arm of the trade union movement that would reach down to the precinct level, and this took quite a bit of time. I think each year there was improvement, it became more effective. But I would say that by 1960 it had reached a point -- far greater point of effectiveness -- than it ever had before and, of course, I think that it would be safe to say that there was greater labor activity on

behalf of President Kennedy in 1960 than there had ever been by labor for anyone prior to that time.

GOLDBERG: Would it also be fair to say that while there was the United Labor Movement in 1956 it was so newly united that the full force of the unity didn't become apparent before the 1960 campaign?

MEANY: That is true although labor endorsed -- enthusiastically endorsed -- Adlai Stevenson in 1956. This came so soon after our merger in December of 1955 that we had not yet developed the effective political arm that we did within four years of that time.

GOLDBERG: Now, George, let's turn for a minute to how the campaign went on, he was elected, and all of us who supported him were very happy about it. Let's turn and address your attention to John F. Kennedy as a President of the United States. I would like to ask you some rather personal questions. Did you see him often when he was President?

MEANY: Yes, very often.

GOLDBERG: And how did this come about?

MEANY: Well, it would come about mostly when I would want to see him about a particular problem. But quite often it would come about on his initiative when he had messages going to Congress, or when particular legislation was being discussed by his staff in the White House. He would call me and I would go over sometimes alone and sometimes I would take our legislative representative, Andy Biemiller, with me

and we would sit and talk to the President just the same as I am sitting with you now.

GOLDBERG: When he called you, George, did he call you himself or did he have a staff man call you?

MEANY: Always called me himself. Sometimes -- rarely -- I would get a message from Ralph Dungan. But, in most cases, he would call himself and, of course, when I wanted an appointment I would call Kenneth O'Donnell and get my appointment in that way.

GOLDBERG: You never had any difficulty communicating.

MEANY: None whatsoever, and I would say that during his years as President I had absolutely no problem of communicating at all.

GOLDBERG: George, was he the first president who addressed an AFL-CIO convention? I mean, I don't remember now, I know Kennedy had addressed prior AFL-CIO conventions. I don't remember whether a president addressed a convention.

MEANY: No.

GOLDBERG: So he would have been the first to, the first president of the United States.

MEANY: First president -- actually as president -- who addressed an AFL-CIO convention. We had others, as you say, as candidates.

GOLDBERG: But I don't recall Roosevelt. He addressed a Teamsters group once, as I remember, for Tobin, a dinner. And, I don't remember Harry Truman ever addressed a convention after he became president.

MEANY: Well, Harry, President Truman, addressed an AFL-CIO convention after he had ceased being president.

GOLDBERG: And President Eisenhower addressed you when he was a candidate.

MEANY: Yes, he addressed us as a candidate in 1952.

GOLDBERG: So that in a real sense Kennedy was the first.

MEANY: Yes, the first president who I would say really addressed an AFL-CIO convention was President Kennedy and, of course, he did that in December of 1961 and, of course, in November of 1963 just prior to his assassination.

GOLDBERG: So that he did it on two occasions.

MEANY: Yes.

GOLDBERG: This is a rather interesting commentary isn't it on both Kennedy and the labor movement to show the changes that have taken place in American life?

MEANY: Yes, I would say this indicates a real change which, of course, is continued right up to the present moment. We have a much closer relationship, I would say, with the White House now than we ever had back in the days of Franklin Roosevelt and, of course, I was here during the Roosevelt Administration and I knew President Roosevelt before I came here. I knew him when he was Governor of New York. Mr. Green and I used to go over to see him once in a while. But we never had the contact and I would say this, we never had the consultations on current affairs of all types that developed during the Kennedy Administration.

I mean he believed in consulting with, I'm sure, people from many walks of life and keeping them abreast of all problems. I recall him talking to me about the Cuban crisis. Now, I had no direct involvement as the head of the trade union movement in the Cuban crisis but, of course, as a citizen and as the head of an organization that numbered millions of other citizens, he felt, I suppose, that I should, as head of the movement, be aware of what was going on. He telephoned me himself prior to the so-called Cuban crisis, at a time when he was getting ready to blockade, just to fill me in with what was going on. As I say, as a trade unionist, this was not our business, in a sense, but as the president of an organization which comprised a large number of American citizens, I suppose the President felt I should know what was going on. This, I am quite sure, applied to other groups, not just labor.

GOLDBERG: Won't you agree with me that this kind of relationship, which was really unique -- although there have been friendly relationships with Roosevelt and with President Truman and, of course, official relationship with President Eisenhower when you went over many times -- weren't there two aspects of this, and perhaps you would like to comment on them, that were particularly interesting? One is: President Kennedy, in his appearances before the AFL-CIO and other public statements, never hesitated to acknowledge the indebtedness that his administration owed

to the support that he got from the labor movement for his programs. Wasn't that so?

MEANY: Yes, he mentioned that.

GOLDBERG: Publicly?

MEANY: Oh, yes, mentioned it publicly, that he had this support. I would say that this in itself is a big change over the years because as a general rule, politicians -- and I say this in a good sense -- didn't give credit to any particular group.

GOLDBERG: George, wasn't it also a kind of a unique thing for a President and a government to enter into a kind of partnership with the labor movement in projects such as the Latin American project? Have you ever recalled anything like that? This is also public and open.

MEANY: No, I have never recalled anything like that and, of course, I think this is one of the things President Kennedy has left us which is going to be productive of a great deal of good for our country, and, of course, for Latin America. You will recall that he launched the Alliance for Progress shortly after he became President and when we suggested to him that the trade union movement had a real part to play in this -- and, of course, you were Secretary of Labor and you recall this quite well -- that he recognized this immediately and agreed that we should cooperate, that we should be in the picture with AID and he approved of the establishment of our American Institute in which American labor and American business have joined for free trade union development in Latin America and, of course, as you

say, he did this quite openly and quite frankly by saying that he felt the labor movement had a part to play. In a sense, he was ahead of a lot of other people but today the big business people who know of the American Institute, very frankly admit that the labor movement had a part to play. But I don't think they would have said that three years ago when President Kennedy openly took the position that we had a part to play because we were not only Americans but we were trade unionists and that trade unionists could develop contacts in these countries with worker organizations that no one with the official badge of government on them could make. Because in Latin America, -- a good many of the people of Latin America -- their whole attitude toward government is antagonistic because all of the experience they have ever had with any government has been bad. I mean this type of government or that type of government -- while they might change leaders from the viewpoint of the worker, every experience they had with government was bad.

This makes them suspicious of any government, even a government like the government of the United States. We discussed, as I say, this phase with President Kennedy and he recognized that the trade unionists of the United States, because they were trade unionists and because workers of other countries would have a little more trust and faith in them, they could play a prominent part in the Alliance for Progress. I can say to you, Arthur, that events have certainly justified

his faith in what he felt we could do because I think we are playing a very important part in the Alliance for Progress all over Latin America.

GOLDBERG: You know, George, I remember back when he called me over -- and urged me -- urged me -- to get in touch with you for this program. This was not a matter of being compelled to do it, he really, in a real sense . . . you, of course, had been talking about it, but he, in a real sense, was one of the originators.

MEANY: Yes, he was.

GOLDBERG: Originators of this concept. Wouldn't you agree to that?

MEANY: Yes. Well, this, of course, was inherent in his original proposal for the Alliance for Progress because it was quite obvious if we were going to help the countries of Latin America just through the established society they had, this wouldn't do any good for the people. In other words, it wouldn't do much good to help the businessmen of Latin America get a little more profits and this would apply, of course, even to American businessmen. What the President meant, in speaking of progress in Latin America, was in human terms and I think he made this quite clear that what he wanted to do was to see the living standards of the people of these countries improve. And, of course, this is where the trade union movement could play a part and he recognized this immediately. And of course, this is where we are now playing a part down there.

GOLDBERG: George, I think we have done about as much as we can do today, so I will bring this particular interview to a close and we will resume again at an early date.