INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JACK T. CONWAY

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Conway's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let me start with one question that's not on the list, and that is how did you formulate your views of community organization? Trace briefly your background and the development of your own ideas in this regard.

C: I had spent so many years in the labor unions that I had a fairly good concept of how you organized people into action groups. I had known Saul Alinsky and Clifford Shaw personally back in the thirties and early forties when I was a student at the University of Chicago. Saul Alinsky attempted to get me to go to work for him in Los Angeles when the zoot suit riots took place. I considered it but didn't do it because I had other things I was interested in at the time. He also tried to get me to go to Minneapolis and then subsequently to Cleveland in some community-organizing efforts that he had under way then.

I didn't have any interest in working for Alinsky because I really had a different view of how community organizing should take place. I didn't really develop my conceptual framework until the time that the Community Action Program was being put together, and I resisted the Alinsky approach to community organizing.

G: Did these differences come out of the University of Chicago at all?

C: No, I think essentially I'm motivated by a different set of objectives than Alinsky was. Alinsky was a tactitioner. He organized around the devil theory, in the sense that you had to have an enemy and you had to mobilize people in opposition, and all of the tactics of organizing were really built around the enemy concept. On the other hand, I was an institution builder. I always felt that it was important to organize people into some kind of an instrument which was capable of carrying out an effective program and achieve positive objectives. So there was a rather fundamental contrast.

He also was more concerned about creating a kind of a community involvement through institutional forms, church groups or neighborhood block groups and that sort of stuff, and then some kind of a representation structure that would lead to a public forum, a convention kind of thing. I was a single organization type, rather than a federation type. I guess it was influenced very largely by my experience in the labor movement. A local union is a local union with a set of officers and a membership and a decision-making process, and you formulate your objectives and you carry them out. When you win your objectives you benefit in the results and everybody understands what you've accomplished and so on.

So I just came at things differently than Saul did. A lot of the people that were community organizers, especially out of the Chicago area, I resisted in that early period, when the OEO was being set up. Saul and I met and talked on a couple of occasions. He was very

critical of some of the things that we were doing, thought we were on the wrong track and offered a little gratuitous advice, but we went our own way.

After I left the OEO setting, I formed the Center for Community Change and tested out some of my community-organizing ideas much more carefully and built in a number of communities what we called community unions. The Watts Labor Community Action Committee in Los Angeles and the East Los Angeles Community Union were others in time. They were very effective organizations. I confirmed in my own mind that my approach was better than the Alinsky approach.

Nevertheless, when my son wanted to learn to be a good effective community organizer, I realized that I couldn't train him myself and so I told him I'd put him in the hands of the second best guy in the country. So I arranged for him to go through the Alinsky school in Chicago, and he learned a great deal. It was very good.

G: Do you think that any of the differences between your thinking and his thinking might have been traced to the differences in the two labor organizations, say the United Mine Workers under John L. Lewis as opposed to the UAW?

C: Well, we were operating in the same barnyard, Chicago. That's where my local union was in the UAW. He worked with John Lewis and the CIO in the federation context. I worked with a single union. I suppose that it's traceable to some of those experiences, yes.

G: You've mentioned your discussions with him about the Community Action Program and his criticisms of them.

C: Significantly, he was already making the intellectual transition away from minority groups and toward middle-class ethnic white groups. He had just written the Rules [Reveille] for Radicals, the book, and he makes mention in that about the need to organize white middle-class people as contrasted with disenfranchised people. When I was active as the president of Common Cause a number of years later I met up with him and he said, "You're doing what I talked about doing." Common Cause was a middle-class organization, of course.

So anyway, he was going through transition in his thinking. So was I. But that's not really central to this.

G: Did he have any input at all on the planning of the--?

C: I don't think he had much. Some people who had contact with him--I think Bill Cannon might have been influenced by Alinsky or knew him quite well. I think Dick Boone had some feeling for the Alinsky approach. Dick Boone had come out of Cook County as a captain in the sheriff's department. Anybody who tried to organize in Chicago was up against a major political force in the Cook County Democratic Party organization, so that the Chicago methods were not applicable really in other parts of the country. I always felt that when Alinsky got away from Chicago--although he never really did--but when he got away from it sufficiently to see that the techniques that were applicable in Chicago didn't necessarily work in other places, he began to temper his thinking.

The Woodlawn Organization was an Alinsky group. We funded the Woodlawn Organization in that very early period. It later on became a Center for Community Change group that we worked with, and it was necessary to convert it from the style of organization that it had to a more single purpose, community-based organization for it to be able to carry out effective community development programs. In looking back, my feeling is that the Alinsky influence was not nearly as pervasive as some people might have felt. Although there were some people, as I say, who were influenced by him.

G: How about the writings of other people at the time?

C: Michael Harrington, his book The Other America I think was a very important book, as was Henry [Harry] Caudill's books on the coal miners in the southern towns and so on. But Mike Harrington, in particular. I think that book was a real blockbuster. The guy whose name eludes me [Dwight MacDonald], from Dissent magazine that wrote something about the same time that was also quite influential.

G: Did Harrington's book have an impact on you personally in your work on poverty?

C: Yes, it did, it did. It was a Gestalt kind of thing in the sense that suddenly things kind of came together and had different meaning as a result of reading it. I think it was a very important contribution.

G: Did you ever talk to President Kennedy about the poverty program, or what should be done?

C: I left the Kennedy Administration after two years, in March of 1963, and I went back to the labor movement. My direct personal contact with President Kennedy during that period was limited because of the fact that I had a lot of contact with Ken O'Donnell, other members of the White House staff, and with Bob Kennedy. The March on Washington civil rights thing came on the scene very quickly after I left the government, and I became deeply involved in that. I represented Walter Reuther on the committee, both in New York on the national meetings and here in Washington. So I was in constant contact with the Justice Department people and with the White House staff people, and occasionally with the President but always in the context of other meetings.

I knew there was a great deal of thinking going into what to do about a number of these problems. We'd tried some employment programs, the accelerated public works program, when I was in the housing agency. There was a recognized need for something, in addition. The National Service Corps idea was being explored extensively, the juvenile delinquency program was being administered out of the Justice Department with an attachment to HEW. There was a lot of ferment, discussion, in the Bureau of the Budget and so on. But I wasn't personally involved in any of the so-called task force activities, I had met Dick Boone only briefly. I had met Don Ellinger and a few other people on the juvenile delinquency staff. I met that group of people that were working on the Ford Foundation Grey Areas program. Stan Salett and others in that

education area. But I didn't have any direct contact with it other than kind of shepherding some of the programs, or dealing with some of the problems that were the result of the Gross Amendment that I mentioned before we got started, where you couldn't spend any government money on the National Service Corps or anything that traveled under a similar name, any other name. So I was familiar with some of the discussions that were going on.

Then, of course, the assassination came. I was asked by Walter Reuther in effect--he was responding to a request from Lyndon Johnson to help him formulate what he was going to say in his speech to the joint session of Congress. He wanted to get off to the right kind of start. He was very conscious of the state of emotion in the country, and he wanted a bridge from the Kennedy Administration to his own and he did not want to drop things that were in the mill. I was asked if I would put together a number of paragraphs that could be considered to go into his speech.

I was reluctant to do it, because I didn't feel that I could put things in Lyndon's words. It was not my cup of tea anyway. But I did agree to do it, and I wrote about three pages of stuff on the whole question of inner cities and the need to get a whole new fix on economic opportunity. There were whole paragraphs of what I had sent over through Walter that got into the actual speech. I knew it had struck a chord with President Johnson, and I was not at all surprised as the time passed between November and March,

which was my next direct contact with this whole process, that there was an evolution into the War on Poverty in the OEO legislation.

I didn't really get picked up again in the stream until the UAW convention, which took place I think on the week of the fourteenth or fifteenth of March. Lyndon Johnson flew to Atlantic City and spoke to the UAW convention on the very day that he sent the OEO message to the Congress. By this time Sargent Shriver had already been designated as the head of the effort which was now being called the War on Poverty.

I saw President Johnson there at the UAW convention. We spoke just briefly. It was shortly after that, a day maybe, that I got a call from Sargent Shriver asking me to meet with him in Washington when I got back from the convention. I agreed to do that. Shriver had Frank Mankiewicz with him, and they were already testifying before the appropriate House committee. The purpose of the meeting was for Shriver to put the hard sell on me to direct the Community Action Program and to become a part of the task force, which I didn't want to do. I had just left the government. I just didn't have any sense of need to get back into it again, and I resisted very strongly for a week or two. But finally a second and a third effort [convinced me], and I agreed to do it on a short-term basis, just during this planning period.

I think the second serious discussion that I had with Shriver about it was in his office in the Peace Corps, where he had a copy

of the actual bill that he was submitting through the White House. He asked me particularly to pay attention to the Community Action title, which was Title II of the legislation. I read it very carefully. He asked me after I had read it if I thought we could get it passed by the Congress, and I said I thought we could if we low-keyed it. I didn't think we should put a big sell on what it was going to do. [I thought] if we just low-keyed it and finessed it that it would be passable. That if we got it passed it would be a hell of a powerful program. So I got kind of intrigued in the whole business.

G: What did he think of it at that time?

C: I don't know. He was just, as I say, always on the phone and this sort of [thing]. He gave it to me and I read it very carefully. I spent about an hour going over it very carefully, word by word. I expected to have an extended conversation with him but just about the time we got started talking he left the office, and I didn't see him again for another three or four days.

So I agreed to do it, anyway, and I ended up going over and spending a little bit of time over in that Peace Corps office, which was chaos. Shriver's whole pitch was, "I want you to think of this as you would the General Motors Corporation." He said this a hundred times to me. "You've got responsibility for the biggest division of the General Motors Corporation, which is the Chevrolet division. The Community Action Program is the Chevrolet division of the General Motors Corporation, and you're going to be the

president of the Chevrolet division. You're responsible." And you know. "The Job Corps is the other--" and this, that and the other thing. The analogy is what was important. In his mind he viewed this as a divisional effort and the pieces were to be organized and run separately, and he was going to coordinate and direct the operation at the top. So I pretty well accepted that, and I just got myself inside the Community Action Program framework and worked my way through it and figured out how to staff it and how to put it on the boards as a program.

During that time, of course, we all worried about moving it through the Congress. Since it was in the Labor and Education Committees of the Congress--committees that I had a great deal to do with anyway in all of the work that we did in the labor field--I had no difficulty talking on the legislation. And I don't think it was ever really in any serious trouble. There were all kinds of burps, the church-state thing, various questions of that kind that had to be resolved, but they were just like any other piece of legislation. I never thought that it was in serious trouble until the governor's veto came up and that was the first serious challenge to the concept of the Community Action Program, and I worried about that. The whole Adam Yarmolinsky-southern reaction to this thing, civil rights reaction, was involved in this, and I, of course, had been working on the civil rights legislation very actively before, so it's all kind of mixed in my mind. But I never thought that this legislation had any trouble at all.

G: Who drafted the legislation as far as Community Action is concerned?

C: I don't know. I think it came out of the task force. I think Bill Cannon had a lot to do with it, I think Bill Capron had a lot to do with it. Norbert Schlei was finally probably the sign-off guy on it over in the Justice Department. But Kermit Gordon, all of these people had their hand in it. My theory was that it was intact, it was a good piece of draftsmanship, and if we could finesse it through the Congress without any changes that we had a good show. And that's what happened.

G: I wonder how Phil Landrum ended up sponsoring the bill in the House?

C: I think Shriver was probably more responsible for that than anybody else. Probably Hank [Henry Hall] Wilson worked with him on it. Maybe Lyndon Johnson asked Landrum, I don't know. I wasn't a party to it, so I don't know.

G: Was Lister Hill asked to sponsor it in the Senate, do you know?

C: I don't know that. The Senate was a much more benign situation and Lister Hill was always a cooperative senator and very much tuned in to the White House.

G: Of course, [Pat] McNamara eventually ended up as the sponsor.

C: Yes, well he was a very close friend of mine. I had direct access to him. He and my father were plumbers together in Detroit.

G: Was there any sort of congressional input before the legislation went to the Hill?

C: I don't know that. I can't supply any accurate information on that, I just don't know. Any analysis of the bill would show that there

was roughly three hundred and sixty-five million dollars of new money in the Community Action Program and all the rest of it was borrowed money from other departments. So Shriver had two problems. One was to explain that it was a billion dollar program when in fact it was a three hundred and sixty-five million dollar program. [There was] almost no extra money other than the Community Action Program. Most of the troubles were negotiating out with the departments of the government: the Small Business Administration, the Agriculture Department, HEW, Labor. Once those were traded out inside the administration with some kind of White House guidance --and I assume this is where the Budget Bureau had strong input-- from that point on, it was a straight-out White House piece of legislation and the President was going to get what he wanted, to a very large extent.

(Interruption)

--so I'm just not the person that can give you the nitty-gritty of that.

G: Anything on the established cabinet departments' role in here? There seems to be a theme running throughout that perhaps they weren't doing the job in attacking poverty, that the Labor Department wasn't reaching them in their Employment Service, et cetera.

G: That is the basis of the legislation, the fact that it required a special effort over and above things that were already being done. I suppose it's the classic argument about whether something like this can be set up and survive, because it's the natural bureaucratic

wars of the departments of government to slice anything up that they can. But it had incredible staying power, I tell you. It had a head of steam up that took a long, long time to mute.

G: How do you account for that, the enthusiasm?

C: Well, it was a social revolution. It had its own dynamics.

G: Was much of that attributable to Shriver himself and the force of his leadership?

C: He was obviously the symbol of the whole thing. It was not without its troubles. And it had the unfortunate problem of being absorbed in a competition with the Vietnam War.

G: If you had had it to do over in hindsight in terms of setting up OEO, would you have done it differently, say, in making it a cabinet department or anything like that?

C: No, I wouldn't have done it differently. I think it was well conceived. I think it would have been much better if the other programs would have had some flesh on the skeleton, and I think it would have been much more effective if Shriver had been able to use the coordinating mechanism that the legislation created. He didn't use it very effectively. He could have been sabotaged by the secretaries of the departments. He didn't use Humphrey as aggressively as he could have. The Vice President could have been a much more effective coordinator. But I don't know why. I don't have the explanations for that. The Community Action mechanism itself could have been effectively used to coordinate and to discipline other program funds moving into cities, but it didn't happen. Even

so, it still was, I think, a very well-conceived program and it served its purpose well.

G: Did Willard Wirtz oppose the--?

C: Willard was a sour grapes guy all the time. I sat in some meetings with him in which he particularly groused about the Community Action Program. He did a lot of grousing, not to my face but around all over the town, so to speak. The reason I think he didn't do it to my face is that we had known each other for years in a different relationship and I never took any guff from him. So he would subside when I was there. Plus the fact that Jack Howard and I had resolved all of our operating problems and Willard Wirtz couldn't complain about the fact that the Labor Department was being cut out, because in fact it wasn't. It was really playing a strong, effective, cooperative coordinating role. But it was being done outside of the Employment Service, which is really what it comes down to. The Labor Department and the labor secretary never has been able to control the Employment Service, never move it, never in a sense guide it. It has a life of its own. That's where most of the grousing came from, and I think Willard was reflecting that.

The HEW people, hell, they were out of it. They never were really in it. A big problem there was to prevent the Office of Education from snuffing out anything that we did in the Head Start and pre-school area and so on.

The programs that made a powerful impact were the Head Start, the neighborhood services, Legal Services program, the jobs program in the Neighborhood Youth Corps--not the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps--and the enfranchisement and the leadership training that occurred as a result of the creating of the Community Action Agency.

G: Did you see that as almost a by-product?

C: Yes. That was the main objective of the Community Action Program, to activate the people in the neighborhoods and communities, and that was the whole concept of the maximum feasible participation of the poor people themselves.

G: Had this experience also happened in the labor movement? Had new leaders developed this way?

C: New leaders develop out of every strike that ever occurs: picket line captains become stewards and committeemen and officers, and within a matter of a year or two there will be a change in leadership that will follow a strike or any kind of a strong action program.

G: Before we turned on the tape you mentioned the people that you worked with in formulating the program, and you said that Lloyd Ohlin, that you didn't consult with him much at all.

C: That's right. I didn't consult with the other guys up in Columbia University either. Their names elude me at the moment, the ones who eventually became the advocates of breaking down the welfare system.

G: Was that [Richard] Cloward?

C: Yes. That team. I didn't agree with them, and as a result had very little communication with them.

What we did is, we put together under Dick Boone a planning program development team, Sandy [Sanford] Kravitz, a number of others. It was out of that team that Head Start came, Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, Upward Bound, most of the substantive programs that lasted. And Fred Hayes, the field services operation was really a top-notch thing. Then we had a team of people that I pulled from the labor movement: Brendon Sexton and Fred Hoehler and Judah Drob and a fellow that we talked about, Tom Cosgrove. These were all labor educators, and just as we had trained illiterate working people to become effective union people, we trained illiterate, inexperienced blacks and chicanos and Indians and you name it to become effective leaders in their own right and to take on responsibilities. That's the permanent contribution in my judgment of the OEO, Community Action Program: the enfranchisement, the enpowerment of literally hundreds and thousands of people who had been out of it before. That was never reversed. As a matter of fact, Marion Barry, the mayor of Washington, and all of the people who are in various places in the Carter Administration come out of the OEO programs. It's all there. It's had its successes, excesses, and in many ways it's run its course, but nevertheless it was a very powerful program in my judgment.

G: If you were to characterize the thinking of the people that you drew together, how would you?

C: They were young activists, smart as hell. They took the essential objective of the program and put it into action.

G: As you discussed where the individuals came from, there don't appear to be as many social scientists as, say, Pat Moynihan would have you believe.

C: No, there were very few. Vernon Jordan was fresh out of law school, was in a law firm in Atlanta. We hired him and turned him loose in the South. There were guys like that that were involved all over the country. They weren't theorists. They were practical, just ordinary folks.

G: In the labor movement, of course, with collective bargaining and the power that that confers, you've got a little better bargaining position because you can strike, you can withhold your labor, discourage people from buying--

C: It's not a direct transfer of tactics and that sort of stuff, but there was a great deal of similarity.

G: But how did you make up for not having that same clout that organized labor naturally has?

C: It was political action basically. You had to formulate what it was you needed, and then you had to be able to go to the local government or the various [sources]--find the resources, get the programs going, you know.

I tell you, you just look at what happened in Mississippi as a result of the Head Start program. It led to the formation of

the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. It just rolled and rolled and rolled right straight through the next few years.

G: Was Community Action thought of in terms of giving blacks participation in the South? Was this a component of it?

C: That was a major part of it. That's why we worried about the governor's veto. Conceivably the program could have been blocked. We worked out a compromise on the governor's veto that allowed the director to proceed after thirty days. In other words, the governor could veto, and if the director felt that it was an improper thing he could go forward. Consciously and deliberately in November after the election and when the law was operative and the department was operating, I put a planning grant on the desk of every southern governor, with thirty-five thousand dollars, fifty thousand dollars, whatever it was. And I gave them a chance to veto it, and none of them did. So I figured that I was home free and so I just kept going. Ross Barnett went out of his mind when we put that big Head Start grant into Mary Holmes Junior College in Mississippi and made it the administrator of the program. But we did that because he would have vetoed that.

G: The Child Development Group?

C: That's right.

G: Well now, was Community Action actually designed to work through the aegis of local government?

C: No. It could, but it wasn't designed to. It could and hopefully would.

G: The juvenile delinquency program had worked under the local government.

C: Community Action agencies could be creatures of the local government, counties, cities, whatever. They could be private groups, and many of them were. They could be a combination. In the case of Los Angeles they were a consolidation of several governmental agencies creating the EYOA [Economic and Youth Opportunities Agencies] or whatever it was, which was the county and the city and the school boards. The joint powers act was used to do this. But my theory was supportive of the proposition that local governments should look at this as an additional tool. But that if local governments refused to, we were not precluded from going in and working out through private agencies, non-profit corporations, programs that were focused on the same things.

G: Did Shriver share this view?

C: I think so. I don't ever think we had any serious disagreements on policy.

G: LBJ in The Vantage Point said that he perceived community action as a means of shaking up existing institutions and asserted that local governments had to be challenged to be awakened. Was this the view that Lyndon Johnson seemed to put forth at the time?

C: I am hesitant to describe what Lyndon Johnson's view was. I always assumed that he knew what was in the legislation and what the law, once it passed, permitted. The only time that I ever sat and talked about what it is we were doing was at the Ranch when we flew down on one of the air force planes and made a direct report to Lyndon

on the progress. This was in November I guess, just about the time we were rolling. I was the last of the people to report; the Job Corps, others, reported first, Sarge did. Then I laid out what we were doing in the cities and counties and in various states and so on. And Lyndon listened very attentively and cautioned me. He didn't admonish me; he cautioned me. He, in effect, said that, "There are a lot of these places where civilization is pretty thin, and you have to be sure you don't ride roughshod over people and create your own problems," something to that effect. I didn't interpret that to mean that he was opposed to what we were doing. He just was fearful that if we hit too hard, too fast and too many places that we'd create our own counterrevolution, so to speak, and give him too many problems to deal with, as well as ourselves. But I assumed that he knew what he was doing.

I think he would have preferred for a lot of the programs to go through state agencies, like the traditional state agencies that he was familiar with from earlier experiences and in Texas. But I think he accepted as something he agreed with, the objectives of the program, to shake it all up. It wasn't going to change unless you did, particularly in the South. And we did shake it up.

G: The question naturally follows is after it did get shaken up and people would come to him and raise hell, would he absorb some of that flak or would he. . . ?

C: There were two or three occasions when the pressure on the White House mounted to the point where I got involved. The first time

there was no explanation for it. I was just going through a straight reception at the White House for something else, and Lyndon saw me fifteen people down the line and I could tell from the look on his face that he was going to scorch my ass when I got there for some reason. I could just tell. Sure enough, he just started talking at me two or three people down the line about the minimum wage. What the hell was I doing on this minimum wage question? Didn't I know that this was a difficult problem, and so on. What I was doing was working out a formula with Jack Howard where we'd combined educational hours with work hours in such a way that we diluted the effect of the minimum wage. We, in effect, were able to say to the labor unions, "We're paying the minimum wage for the hours worked," but the hours required in the program included extra educational hours that diluted the value of the minimum wage. I think there was a little flak building up from John Connally in the state. He was blowing off some of that pressure on me.

I think when we laid the Child Development thing on Ross Barnett in Mississippi he stormed into the White House and raised hell with the President.

G: And he had two influential senators, too.

C: Oh, yes. So we had to counteract that, and we pulled all those little kids up and sat them down in the House hearing room. It all worked out.

The other one was when Mayor [Richard] Daley of Chicago got himself appointed the head of the Conference of Mayors Task Force

on the War on Poverty, and he used Hubert Humphrey to put the blowtorch on us. Not successfully, we did what we were going to do anyway, and it was proper. But he was mad at us because we had funded the Woodlawn Organization directly. He felt that all that stuff had to go through him and his agency, and we said no, it didn't have to, and we were going to do it this way.

G: He testified in behalf of the legislation in 1964 and made it sound like then that the thing would be under his thumb.

C: Intended it to be.

G: Do you recall any other specifics where OEO and Mayor Daley had to part company?

C: Well, we had our confrontation and I put a good guy in charge of the Community Action Program in Chicago, a good solid Irish Catholic that knew the territory. He was able to keep things in reasonable balance. No, as I say, I knew Daley very well, and he knew me. He went through his ritual and I went through mine, and we just went on doing what we were doing.

Shriver was very good on these things. He stood up every time.

G: Did he?

C: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. As I say, I never had any serious policy disagreements with Sarge at all. We were very different in personality and style, but we had no differences. He never ducked out on any of these things.

G: Let me ask you about the family planning issue that seemed to come up in a lot of the correspondence at the time.

C: It was a very tough issue, and it was a tough issue for Sarge personally because he had the whole personal rationalization process to go through in his own religion and so on. What was finally worked out became ultimately the HEW position. I thought it was a very skillful job. Sarge really sweated it out and did it very well and consulted a lot of people. He deserves a real accolade for that. Skillfully done.

G: It was primarily his work that secured the compromise?

C: Yes. And not only was it a compromise in the sense of the forces that were interested in this, it was a personal compromise in the sense that he had to sort it out himself to come to something that he could support himself. Just like [Joseph] Califano went through the sweats on the abortion thing a couple of years ago, same kind of problem. It's a very emotional issue, a very difficult issue for Catholics to handle.

G: Here I think the formula was something like a married woman could go in and ask for family planning.

C: Advice and assistance and so on. Yes, I thought it was a great compromise.

G: Let me ask you about the urban affairs task force. Are you familiar with this? It was evidently some sort of subgroup. I've seen two references to it. Was there some sort of subgroup on the War on Poverty Task Force that was concerned with urban planning under your chairmanship?

C: Well, no. I think what we did is an awful lot of things with our funds, Community Action funds, working with HUD. Here again, Fred Hayes was the key person in that, having headed up the 701 planning program in HUD before he came over. He knew all the actors. We put together computer information exchange programs, data-based development things, made grants to support these things around. If that's what's referred to there, that was just a regular part of our Community Action operation. No big deal. We used our money as glue money to pull other people into activities that they wouldn't have been able to do themselves, but wanted to have done.

G: Moynihan asserts that after the legislation was submitted and the original task force members had returned to the various departments, the most forceful advocates of Community Action--you and Dick Boone and Kravitz, Hayes, et cetera--sort of presided over a radicalizing of the program. Did this process take place?

C: Well, I didn't even enter the picture until after the other task force was dissolved and until after the legislation had been sent up. I was in charge of the Chevrolet division of the General Motors Corporation. (Laughter) And whatever happened, I'm responsible for. The fellows that worked with me--Boone, Kravitz, Hayes, et cetera--were working under my direction to design and implement a community action program. Nobody told me you can't do this or you can't do that, or this isn't what we planned. I took the law as it was passed; I took the objectives as they were very clearly set out, and we designed a program and put it on the boards and hit

with as strong a mule kick as we could. Now if that's radicalizing it, that's what we did.

G: Well, some of these people--[David] Hackett and perhaps Boone and [Eric] Tolmach and [Harold W.] Horowitz--were around from the very start of the task force I gather. Did they sense that there had been a transformation or was the formulation of the program proceeding as it had from the [beginning]?

C: Well, as I say, there was a break. All the planning and stuff that lead up to the drafting of the legislation, that was submitted by the President was one period. What happened after the President submitted the legislation and the law was passed and put on the boards is another period. I was not associated with the first one. I was associated with the second one.

David Hackett had almost nothing to do with the Community Action Program. He was a part of the earlier thing because he was on the juvenile delinquency program. Eric Tolmach was a stray dog in the sense he had been a reporter with the Newhouse newspapers. He was over in the Labor Department. I don't know whether they knew what to do with him or something. Maybe he rubbed Moynihan the wrong way, I don't know. But I was asked could I absorb him in the staff. I forget who asked me. I put him in the labor training staff that I mentioned earlier and he fitted in nicely, no problems at all. He was with some mature people. As far as I was concerned he was just a nice guy that did what he was expected to do, carried

out his job well, no problems with him, didn't have any serious influence in the scheme of things.

Boone, yes, very important man. Fred Hayes, yes, very important man.

G: And there is some continuity there.

C: Not Hayes, he was a new guy. I brought him in new. One of the reasons, as I say, I made the switch is that I felt that it was important that there be a break and that people not carry out things that they had considered their own.

G: You might at this point talk about the switching of Boone and Hayes that you mentioned before we turned on--

C: Well, Dick had been, as I mentioned, the captain in a police force. [He] was a pragmatic street guy, he thought, an operator. But he was a good idea man. Instead of having him head up the field operations, which would have been more of the same, I brought him over into the idea side. And I took Fred Hayes, who had been handling in the planning period the program development, and put him in charge of operations. It was an actual switch in the sense of they were doing something that they had never done before, and it worked beautifully. Temperamentally they took to the assignments and in many ways Boone as an operator had a chance to look over the shoulder of Hayes, the planner, who was operating, and vice versa. And they kept each other honest. They both reported to me and we were a team of three. When I added Brendon Sexton as the fourth person in charge of the training side of it, we had a top team. Then we just

filled out the staff, regionalized, found key people and set up the regional offices. Fred Hayes directed that. And we were ready to go.

G: Did you foresee the degree of conflict between Community Action and local government and local establishments?

C: Well, I'd have to say yes to that. But the conflict was isolated. It was in a few places, not many places. In most places the program got off the ground smoothly and with enormous good results right away. It was a very exciting, very--and it was only in Syracuse, New York and Chicago and Mississippi and a few places like that where the cutting edge of the conflict was.

G: There were a lot of examples, I gather, where it would be used as a political football by local militants, let's say, who would attempt to assume a position a little more radical than the guy in charge. Did you see this as a problem?

C: Sure, and that's true in any movement. You have the extremes, you have the militants, you have the emerging leaders, you have the foot-draggers. That was all part of the game, part of the fascination.

G: How did you deal with this particular problem?

C: Well, administratively if there was any misspending of funds, we had to deal with that as you'd deal with it any way. But if there was conflict that had to be resolved before you could go forward, we had staff people who would go in, sit down, help mediate and try to get consensus and so on. That's what the field staff did,

and by and large did a pretty good job. San Francisco was a special problem because Mayor [John Francis] Shelley, former congressman, suddenly had a whole flock of enfranchised minority groups that ran cross-grain in that community. San Francisco is a very tight, organized town, and the blacks and the orientals and the Spanish-speaking, they had no access. This program opened it up, it really opened it up, more than--it's still opening it up, I guess, in the sense of every group getting smaller and smaller and more articulate.

G: Did you think that it was leading to a democratization of the local political system?

C: Well, the whole notion of getting the people involved themselves in the resolution of their problems was a new idea, formally, officially, governmentally-sponsored. The idea of being able to create nonprofit organizations that would help in this process [was] all quite new and experimental. We didn't know where it was going to lead. We had some ideas, and we had some sense of the abuses that could occur, as in Los Angeles, where the community quickly divided between blacks and Mexicans. They struggled for powers as to who was going to control the EYOA. Was it going to be a Mexican organization or a black organization? It eventually ended up a Mexican organization. That was Sam Yorty's choice.

G: Critics would charge that local government itself was actually more democratic because of the small percentages of people that would turn out for some of these elections.

C: Oh, sure. Well, I didn't think the election part of it was very strong. As a matter of fact, I was not an advocate of the election system. It was developed in Philadelphia to an extreme. The guy up there, Bowser [?], who was the guy who emerged, was just in constant warfare with Mayor [James] Tate. But you know, Philadelphia was again a tightly-run machine town, controlled by the Italians and the Irish, and the blacks didn't have a chance. Somebody had to crack it open. If that's what Lyndon Johnson meant when he said that in--well, he was absolutely right. There was just a hell of a lot of tightly-held machines that were broken open, both in rural areas as well as cities.

G: I think Tate went to the White House, too, [inaudible] didn't he?

C: Yes. Well, I used to have to go up to Philadelphia about every week to sit down with Tate. He was a real crybaby. God, he couldn't--dumb, too.

G: In terms of maximum feasible participation, what did it mean to you in terms of representation?

C: Well, it did not mean what it eventually became. People who came on later tried to formalize it and make it subject to rules and tests and all that sort of stuff. My feeling--I developed a three-cornered stool concept which was that the best community action organization had very strong representation from the local government, from the private agencies, and from the people themselves. If you could figure out how you could get this kind of a three-cornered stool stability, that that was the best and that's what we

strove for. The regulation writers eventually took over, as they do in any bureaucracy. Somebody comes along and says, "Well, the best way to achieve this is to have one-third, one-third, one-third. That's ideal." Well, you can't achieve it that rigidly and you have to be flexible. I turned over all of this stuff to Ted Berry and in effect said, "Keep it as flexible as you can. Don't get a whole flock of regulations written. Keep your application forms as simple as possible so that people can write them and they can be read and understood, and the answers that you send out ought to be the same way."

Then I left, and when I came back in May--which was only four months later--Ted was already battling the ossification process. I helped him extensively during the time that I was acting as the deputy director to fend off this kind of thing, and I think that he was able to hold it off for another year or so. But eventually--you know, it's pretty difficult.

G: But ultimately it got into the legislation, didn't it, a third, a third, [a third]?

C: Yes. Yes.

G: Did you see the poor involved in the decision-making as well as the implementation or formulating the program as well as actually serving on the boards?

C: I saw it as serving on boards, helping to formulate objectives, being employed by the programs as much as possible. In other words, wherever you could hire somebody who needed a job to do the job,

do it. To do that you had to fight off the social workers, the M.S.W. types, who wanted to write in job descriptions so that the only people who could direct problems were properly credentialed social workers out of properly directed social work schools and so on. I considered that to be something to be avoided, and that to the maximum extent possible that people who were to be involved ought to be able to work in the programs as well. That was the beautiful part, as I say, between Jack Howard and the Neighborhood Youth Corps. We put an awful lot of young people to work in these programs, three or four hundred thousand people working during that first year or two.

G: Did you ever fear that you were reaching a professional poor rather than the really culturally impoverished who might not be aware of these programs, might not participate in them?

C: In the cities the danger was that you would get the self-anointed institutional, organizational types. But that was usually associated with situations in which you had to pit this kind of thing against a tightly-controlled political organization in a city. In other words, some of the civil rights leaders moved over and became involved in this. But all you had to do was to go through the South and my God, the people that got involved in these programs were the most--they were poverty stricken in ways that you can't describe. This was the release for them. They had jobs, they had income. They were able to do things, and they learned. Really a

remarkable result. So I think the negatives were offset, especially in the early period, by the positives, you know, a hundred to one.

G: Let me ask you some questions about the legislative phase here. I gather you worked on the Hill in helping the Economic Opportunity Act become law. Is that right?

C: Yes. The particular thing that I was concerned about is that it was a one-year bill. Adam Clayton Powell had a strangle hold on the legislation and the authorization process. He came to a meeting that I chaired in which he shook his finger in my face and said in effect, "You've only got one year to shape up, and if you don't shape up we're going to take it away from you," or do something, some threat like that in front of three or four hundred people. Well, I dealt with this guy before when I was in the housing agency and he was trying to blackjack us in various ways.

G: Didn't he want a big grant for Harlem?

C: Yes, sure, all sorts of things. I knew him like a book. I just said, "Fine. We'll just come back up and justify what we're doing." So the second time around, when I was deputy director, I took personal responsibility for the legislation on the Hill and I hung right in there until we got our reauthorization and our second go-around on the appropriations. I handled the appropriations both times, because I had done that before and I was quite experienced at that.

But again, it was a question of how do you deal with these guys in a power sense. Since they had dumped Yarmolinsky that

first time around, the second time the New York delegation wanted to dump Bill Haddad. I had to go up and meet with the New York delegation and just stand toe to toe with them and just say, "Under no conditions. We're just not going to yield to this sort of thing." [James J.] Delaney was the wild man and [Leonard] Farbstein. Haddad, the son of a bitch, ended up running against him a year later and Farbstein was right, Haddad was screwing around in his district and so on. But anyway, it was a tough go-through. But we protected everything and got through in good shape.

G: What was Powell's role here in the 1964 legislation? Did he in effect hold it hostage until he had assurance for a large grant for HARYOU-ACT?

C: No, we didn't. We didn't yield to him on anything. He was the chairman of the committee, so he had enormous power. But [Carl D.] Perkins was the key guy, and we dealt primarily with Perkins. Of course, we had some other guys on that committee that we could work through.

G: Here is the list.

C: Yes. They were all very good guys. Perkins, Landrum. Edith Green was a problem. Jimmy Roosevelt was great. [Frank] Thompson, no problem. [Elmer J.] Holland was good. [John H.] Dent and [Roman C.] Pucinski and [Dominick V.] Daniels, [John] Brademas, those are all guys that I knew intimately. Hugh Carey, Gus Hawkins, Carl Sickles, Sam Gibbons, Tom Gill, George Brown, they were all-- [Peter] Frelinghuysen was in opposition, but not very effective.

In the subcommittee, Perkins, Landrum, Green--Green was a problem, Landrum was a sponsor. [Albert] Quie fooled around, tried to get his own stuff, but unsuccessfully. [Charles] Goodell was very cooperative. We didn't really have any trouble with any. We had the votes.

G: Shriver must have done a good deal of lobbying.

C: He did a lot of lobbying in the general sense, not as far as the --he did his job, he did whatever was necessary. But the next time around Gillis Long was already on the staff, the congressional legislative staff, and Gillis did a good job. Gillis was a good personality. The guy from the Job Corps that I mentioned earlier, McCarthy. . . .

G: George McCarthy.

C: George McCarthy was very helpful, from Montana, close friend of [Mike] Mansfield, and was very helpful. But again, the Senate committees, the same way, I just knew every one of them personally and had worked with them in many capacities in the labor movement.

G: Did Congress understand the Community Action Program?

C: I would hate to say no, but I think you'd have to say they didn't really comprehend what was involved. We didn't trick them or anything like that. My whole theory, the first time through, was to finesse it, not to make a big deal out of it, and give it the general--this was Lyndon Johnson's commitment to eliminate poverty in the country, and put all the statistics out and that sort of stuff, the job that needed to be done. When we went back the

second time we had to deal with some of the problems. But they were all manageable.

G: Did congressmen themselves feel threatened by the new power that you were creating?

C: No. I think only indirectly were they hostile when they were representing something, if they were representing the mayors or in Edith Green's case, the educators or educational establishment.

G: Some Senate aide said at the time, "If Congress understands Community Action they'll never get it through."

C: Well. . . .

G: Let's start with the committee. Do you think that Sam Gibbons and people like that--

C: Sam was very cooperative.

G: Did he understand how Community Action was supposed to work and how it probably would work?

C: Well, I think he did. I made a particular point of visiting with him on a number of occasions. I found him one of the better supporters. He was very positive. Frank Thompson was excellent. The two guys from New Jersey, hell, they were very supportive, Dominick Daniels and Thompson.

G: Why did [Barry] Goldwater abstain on the Prouty Amendment? Do you know? This was the one that would give governors veto. His vote was absolutely critical.

C: I don't know. I don't know who got it. I just don't know.

G: Now, there were some occurrences there in the legislation that hurt Community Action to some extent, I guess. One, a provision for comprehensive planning was cut back. Do you recall that?

C: I think this was an Edith Green concern, again, stemming from the juvenile delinquency program. When we reassured her that we had no intentions of requiring that kind of comprehensive planning she was satisfied with whatever it was that we worked out. I was involved in the meeting with her on that. I think Sarge and I went up together on that. But it wasn't a big enough deal for it to have stuck in my mind as being something that was crippling.

See, I had a lot of experience in dealing with these congressmen on the whole business of urban planning and so on, because I had been the deputy administrator of the housing agency and where we were doing all this sort of stuff and talking with them on other matters. So it was my milieu. I knew what their concerns were. But I don't particularly recall it as being a problem.

G: Another change that the report on the pending legislation put forth as a congressional change that was undesirable was watering down CAP to allow for assistance to local public or private groups for noncomprehensive, noncoordinated programs, rather than a tight packaged deal.

C: Watering it down and allowing it.

G: Yes. How did this happen?

C: Well, I think that this was the product of the single program organizations resisting being required to work through a Community Action

agency. Some of the congressmen wanted to be able to get their particular group considered.

G: Did you oppose this?

C: I don't recall whether we opposed it or not. If it was passed we probably agreed to it.

G: At one point.

C: Yes.

G: Anything else on the legislation, not specifically dealing with Community Action, but the land reform proposal and--?

C: Don't know anything about the land reform proposal, because that was all traded off and argued out before the final legislation went up, I think. The Agriculture Department part of the legislation was very anemic, that and the Small Business Administration. Those two in effect dealt themselves out. What we attempted to do was to offset that by bringing over some of the better people from the Department of Agriculture and trying to develop a rural areas program which used Community Action funds. Small Business Administration, I was able to get a fellow named Ben Goldstein [?] taken on in the SBA, to head up the relationships with the Community Action organization. Ben later became the director of the National Committee for Equal Business Opportunity, a Ford Foundation-funded thing, and he's done a lot of work since then in the private, non-profit capacity, working with minority businesses and so on. But the Small Business Administration just kind of dealt themselves out of the picture by and large. There wasn't too much activity there.

G: And the Congress I guess eliminated that loan provision.

C: Yes, that's right. That's right. And the Small Business Administration probably went up and encouraged them to do it. John Horne, if I recall, was the SBA director, I knew him very well, a nice guy from Alabama, but a very weak individual. There wasn't a lot of strength there.

G: How about the Adam Yarmolinsky incident?

C: Well, Adam was, as I say, a real tragic victim of this whole thing. It took a toll on him personally. He went back to the Defense Department and worked directly for [Robert] McNamara for a while, worked in the White House on a special assignment. I was very angry at that whole thing and refused to take the deputy director position. I just said, "I won't scab on anybody. That's his job as far as I'm concerned. I'm not going to do that." There were a lot of people that worked on me to do it, and I just refused. Finally Adam called me and asked me to do it. I said, "Adam, if I do this, that's the end of your ability to straighten this problem out." Because what he was trying to do was to get an appointment that would require Senate confirmation so he could go before the Senate and clear his name and all that sort of stuff. I said, "If I do it, that's the end. You'll never get an appointment that will allow you to do what you want to do." "Oh, no," he'd been promised he said. He'd been cleared by Bill Moyers, promised by McNamara, cleared by this guy or that guy in the White House, so on. So I finally said, "All right, I'll do it. But I

just want you to know that it's against my better judgment, and I hope that it doesn't hurt you too much." Of course, what I said was going to happen, happened. As soon as I took it, the pressure was off. So I did it from May until October, which I had a pre-set date that I had worked out with Shriver that I had to leave and go back to my job by that date. When that date came I just left. By then I'd gotten both the legislation and the appropriation through the second time.

G: Did the people in the War on Poverty blame Shriver for the dumping of Yarmolinsky?

C: No, it was a shock that went through the key staff people, but it wasn't all that well known that Adam was slated to be the deputy director.

G: He had in fact been, hadn't he, sort of a de facto [appointment]?

C: Yes. We were all acting in these various jobs. There was no law. We were all carrying them out in one form or another. I was still working for the AFL-CIO industrial union department. This was all volunteer stuff for me. I was stuck with the problem of when finally the Treasury signed off and we had a law and an agency, no director. How to proceed? So that's where this very complex set of maneuvers occurred. I was put on the payroll as a GS-18 and designated then as the acting Community Action director. I functioned for the six weeks or so during that period of time in that form. I had to do that in order to be able to sign off on the grants and to do the things that were involved, to have a

legal standing. So I was on a formal leave of absence from my job at the time.

Adam was doubling in brass. He was being paid for one job and doing the second one, and he wanted to be the deputy director and Sargent Shriver wanted him, and when it didn't happen because of the North Carolina thing it was a shocking thing to maybe twenty-five people. Very depressing thing as far as their morale was concerned. But like all these things, it doesn't last forever.

G: They didn't blame Shriver? They didn't blame LBJ presumably?

C: They didn't blame LBJ at all. There were a few of us who were just stunned when we found out that Shriver had agreed to this. You never offer anybody's head up in that kind of a scene.

G: I guess Powell among others told Shriver that they couldn't pass the legislation without it?

C: You mean without the North Carolina delegation?

G: Yes.

C: Yes. That was the price that he had to pay. I didn't know about it until after it had happened. We were all gathering at somebody's house, somebody's apartment, for kind of a party celebrating the passage of the legislation. It was while we were sitting there getting ready to have a drink that the word came in that Adam had been sacrificed. So that's the. . . .

G: As it turned out I guess you had the votes anyway without them.

C: Well, that's a second guess. I don't know.

G: Well, I don't want to keep you too long today, but is there anything else that we need to cover in this phase before we go on?

C: No, I think that most of the things that you can get from other people would be much more accurate than from me because I had two windows, which I in a sense went through, looked through, was involved in, the period setting it all up, the first instance, in running it for six weeks, and then I went away and came back for that second period as the deputy director. That was a period in which I took on certain clear responsibilities, did it, and got back out again. In each case, I did what I agreed to do and then went back and did what I had to do. I had another job that I was running, and that was my principal interest.

G: Well, I certainly do appreciate the time today, and I hope I can come back subsequently.

C: Sure. What would be helpful? Send me the transcript.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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