INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: DAVID DELLINGER

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

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G: Mr. Dellinger, how would you describe your political orientation?

D: Well, I noticed that in this sheet I have in front of me here it says something about being suspicious of labels, and I am. I am just now working on an autobiographical book in which I say even good labels are bad for you because they limit you. I guess I hope I defy all labels. There was a time when I used the label, which is also mentioned here, anarchial pacifist, because even though anarchism had originally meant to me violent bomb-throwers who don't have a respect for human life, I came to feel that there was another stream of anarchism that I was at least related to or learning a lot from.

Then in the middle of the anti-Vietnam War movement, the most visible labeled anarchists were people that I disagreed with tactically and politically, people who, you will forgive the language, organized something called "up against the wall, motherfuckers," and which I thought was symbolic of the deterioration of what I think was a tiny section of the movement, but nonetheless where they just became hostile to other people rather than figuring out, if people support the war and we're against it, why do they support it? During World War II, when I first went to prison as a war objector, if I had been five years

younger, or however many years younger, maybe I would have supported it, too.

So I guess I don't mind trying to say explicitly what I think about any subject, but labels sometimes keep people apart. They say, "Oh, he's a socialist," or "Oh, he's a capitalist," or "Oh, he's a Democrat," or "Oh, he's a Republican," and so I try to avoid them. But I have learned a great deal, let me say, from primitive Christian sects, from the Judaic prophets, from one stream of the anarchist movement, not the stream which was willing to use violence, which I think is actually the denial of anarchism, because anarchism means that every individual should have freedom, and violence takes away their freedom. I learned from the socialist movement, but I also learned from my father, who was chairman of the Republican town committee of Wakefield, Massachusetts, where I grew up, and I always felt that my politics were in a sense a carrying-out of the kind of attitude that he instilled in me toward human beings.

G: Right. All right, sir, let's get down to a specific case then. How did your opposition to official policy in Vietnam evolve over time? When did this become a problem, in your view?

D: Well, I was always opposed to what I would call U.S. attempts to impose the American century on the rest of the world. I have often said that I spent some time studying at New College, Oxford, in the thirties on a fellowship and that at that time, before World War II, England felt that it was carrying the white man's burden. People genuinely felt that they were civilizing, educating, helping the poor natives, but they were also robbing them of their land and their dignity and their self-respect and

their natural resources. After World War II the United States took on that burden, although we called it the democratic man's burden, and I think that a lot of people felt sincerely that they were really helping the Vietnamese, for example. But I guess that it only took, in my mind, knowledge that the United States was involved militarily in Vietnam--much as it is today involved in El Salvador and Honduras, trying to blow up power stations in Nicaragua and that kind of thing--as soon as I knew about it, I was against it automatically.

I remember specifically at an Easter antibomb march, which I think was 1962 but might have been 1963, when I was one of the speakers, and from the platform we saw a group of people raise a lot of posters saying "U.S. Out of Vietnam." At that point, most people didn't think the U.S. was in Vietnam. Or maybe it said, "U.S. Military Advisers Out of Vietnam." The chairperson of the rally said, "Oh, that's not part of the agreed-on--you know, I'm going to tell them to put down their signs," and I said, "Bayard [Rustin], you can't do that, because--are you in favor of having military advisers in Vietnam? You know what it will lead to."

But I remember that as being a time when I felt I should go out and find out more about U.S. advisers in Vietnam. I knew they were there and in theory I was against them, but I hadn't been doing anything. So probably either Easter weekend 1962 or 1963 I began to find out more. Of course, when I investigated, I found out that the United States had intervened in Vietnam as early as 1945 when it actually--well, the British were the technical people responsible for Vietnam in the division of labor, but the United States was consulted and involved

when it took the Japanese fascist troops and gave them arms and had them fight to suppress the forces of Ho Chi Minh. But I didn't know any of that until after 1962 or 1963.

G: Well, it's a blank spot for very many people.

D: Of course now we know that John F. Kennedy, after the Bay of Pigs invasion--and I'm sure there was more to it than this--but where he felt that the United States had been disgraced because it had not used enough military power to win, John F. Kennedy decided to step up U.S. military efforts around the world to show the Soviet Union that it was not going to be defeated again the way it was defeated [in Cuba], and that played a role in his doubling the number of advisers. I hate to call them advisers; that's the official term, but they were doing sabotage and other military, violent activities.

G: What was the genesis of the National Mobilization [Committee] to End the War in Vietnam? How did that get started?

D: Well, it grew out of a number of emergency ad hoc responses to growing U.S. involvement. In my memory the first thing that happened was there was a fall mobilization to stop the war in Vietnam, which was a loose coming together of people in a number of cities who had organized demonstrations against growing U.S. involvement. Then after that, because the war didn't end and because more and more people became conscious of it, there was the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Meanwhile, right around the same time in New York City--where I didn't live but I was a couple of hours away and so I used to come in and take part in activities--there was an organization called the Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee, which had taken over, you see,

from the antibomb peace parades, and now it was Peace Parade Committee Against U.S. Involvement in Vietnam. Similar things were happening in other cities.

G: Is it possible to--I'm sure this is an overgeneralization--how much continuity is there between, let's say, the movement of SANE [National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy] and the National Mobilization movement? Is there a lot of dual membership or transfer of membership?

D: Well, it's quite interesting because, first of all, SANE was a very important factor in the early antibomb movement of the fifties and early sixties, but it was by no means the sole force. Women's Strike for Peace was very important, the War Resister's League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a number of pacifist organizations--it was a coalition.

When the Mobilization Committee was developed, to be very frank about it, SANE was upset, because SANE had been doing a very useful work of educating against militarism in what might be called middle America, and they felt that the Mobilization Committee was a little too, quote, "radical."

Things came to a head, to be quite accurate historically, in I believe it was the fall of 1965. But in April of 1965 there had been the first what we thought at the time was a mass demonstration against the war in Vietnam, which had been initiated by Students for a Democratic Society, which at that time was a little-known adjunct, youth division, of the League for Industrial Democracy, which had what might be called fairly conservative politics, liberal but not in any sense antiestablishment, not pacifist. And it was very successful; it was fifteen, possibly twenty thousand people.

Then in August of 1965, people out of the civil rights movement and the pacifist movement and SDS had organized an Assembly of Unrepresented People, which, besides workshops and a lot of other multi-issue approaches, included women and prisons and American Indians, a lot of things which later got dropped out for a while, didn't come back until the seventies, maybe. And that caused a stir. Actually we marched to the Capitol and tried to declare peace between the American people and the Vietnamese people.

But SANE, or at least the leadership of SANE, was a little upset that these politics were a little more radical, called into question the capitalist system, or involved a lot more, like the civil rights connection. It was not that SANE wasn't in favor of racial equality in an abstract way, but still that somehow or other this confused things by bringing it into the antiwar struggle. So SANE organized a big march of its own in the fall of 1965 which, to prove its point of view, emphasized that people would carry American flags, and that it would call for negotiations but it would not call for withdrawal of the troops, or withdrawal of the military, from Vietnam. It turned out that the people who came just--well, it also wanted everybody to wear suits and ties and no beards and no jeans. It was quite interesting because there was a whole cultural question that kept coming up in the antiwar movement.

G: Yes, I want to talk about that a little later.

D: Yes. And the people who came were not really SANE people in that sense. I mean, they burst the bonds of the required discipline and whatnot. And when I say that, I don't mean to imply that I necessarily agreed all the way with some of the things that the people did. But basically, I

think that what happened was that--and I don't mean to pin too much on that instance, but the fact that this has often been said, that television was bringing the war in Vietnam into people's living rooms, and step by step you could see things like huts being burned, you know, napalm on children, that kind of thing. And I think there were other reasons for the awakening, too, that had been contributed to by disillusionment with McCarthyism and the narrowness of that period, the repressiveness of it, the development of the things that came out of the civil rights movement. A lot of things were happening.

So what happened was that the antiwar movement of the preceding decades was suddenly swamped by people who sort of came tumbling in. I don't mean to make it sound too automatic or that it happened too rapidly. So it wasn't only SANE, but any organization that tried to impose its etiquette, its politics, its way of operating, even its slogans, on these people found that it was not able to do so.

To some extent this probably happened at a certain stage with the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam also, but much less so. I think that what made the National Mobilization Committee go, and it did become the sort of all-encompassing coalition that organized for a period of years the major demonstrations and activities--not all of them, by any means, but the major national ones--was that it became a new home for new people who came in and didn't like to be told by Reverend So-and-So--whose name I won't mention--of SANE, what they should think and how they should dress and other things. But it wasn't only true of SANE; it was true of all the organizations. Now, the ones that I think were the smartest realized that this was a great strength,

to have these new people coming in, and that they--or I should say we, really, because I was one of them--had as much to learn from new people as they had to learn from us, and there had to be some kind of cross-fertilization process going on. But to be very frank about it, I think SANE was slower in making that adjustment than some of the others and for quite a while got by-passed, and it wasn't until after the war in Vietnam ended that SANE in a sense re-energized, recouped, and began to play a more vital role again.

G: How difficult was it to hold that coalition together under the National Mobilization [Committee]?

D: Extremely. And it went through various stages. But I think that what held it together was the fact that the emergency was so great and the knowledge of what was happening in Vietnam was so overwhelming. And as I say, whatever mistakes we made--and we did, of course, make them--people turned out anyway, people came, because there were historic reasons why the country was step by step turning against the war.

I don't mean to say that the Mobe and other organizations didn't help, by circulating materials and holding teach-ins and meetings and all the rest, but I used to chair--in a way I'm ashamed to say it--all the early meetings of the Mobilization. The reason I'm ashamed to is that somewhere along the line we learned enough to always have two people chair and one of them be a woman. Although I was originally *the* chairman of the organization, at a certain point we didn't have *a* chairman; we had co-chairpeople, and they were blacks and women and young people and older people and so forth. But I did chair all of those early meetings, for I don't know how many years or how long.

I remember there was never a meeting where I wasn't at one point in utter despair, when I concluded the whole thing was going to fly apart, everybody was quarreling over their different viewpoints. I don't mean to make them sound other than just human beings, but people came there with programs of the way they thought we should do something to end the war. Then after a while--I even began to almost feel like it was a trick, and I didn't want to be tricky--but I would look at my watch and I'd say, "Well, we have an hour to go, so I'd better do it now." I mean this is what I'd learned through sad experience. So I would say, "Well, you know, you may be right," to the last speaker, or the person he was disagreeing with might be right, "but the important thing is that we have come in here from all over the country, we have to leave in an hour, and the war is going on"--and depending on what phase of the war it was, I would say--"and two hundred GIs are coming home every day dead, and we have an obligation to them. And if there are two hundred GIs coming home dead, maybe there's two thousand Vietnamese or twenty thousand Vietnamese who are being killed, and we have an obligation to them. So we just have to decide that we can't agree on everything, but that we're going to hold a demonstration, and that we're going to do our best, and the points where we disagree, we'll try to have different speakers express them," one thing or another. And always it worked, because no matter how human, in the negative sense of the word--there are positive senses to it--we all were, there was that pressure of events that was forcing us to stay together.

G: You touched on something a moment ago that fits in here. How important was this cultural cleavage, if you will, about the style that demonstra-

tions should take? One faction wore blue jeans, which was maybe the most polite thing that they did, and another faction--

D: Well, not at the beginning. That was an impolite thing. (Laughter)

G: But toward the end they did much more impolite things.

D: Oh, yes.

G: Was this an important source of contention?

D: Well, it was. I'd have to say that in one sense it predated the Vietnam War, that in the late fifties and early sixties in the civil rights movement, but also in the antibomb movement, it was much more serious a problem. Whatever was causing young people to grow beards, let their hair grow long, come in dirty, sloppy clothes--not necessarily dirty but sometimes dirty--but anyway, clothes that were not conventionally worn in, quote, "polite circles," I mean, that was part of their revolt. They were revolting about being told what to do and how to live and how to wear their hair and everything, by a society that they found not very satisfying. It was a very important revolt before the Vietnam War movement, and a lot of the, quote, "work" had been done of somehow or other integrating or getting people who had that attitude and people who were antibomb from a more historic, conventional point of view together and to realize that somehow or other they both had a lot in common and it was important to work together. Most of that, I would say, had happened before the war.

But then, not to oversimplify it too much, but I would say that there was like a second wave of the countercultural emphasis which came in around the time of the march on the Pentagon in 1967. Now, the early SDS was very, quote, "straight," that is, they were much more inclined

to wear suits and ties and all the rest, and were that way at the April, 1965 demonstration, but as their message reached out and as the news on TV reached out to more and more young people, why, more of the other kind kept coming in. Actually in the organization for the march on the Pentagon in 1967, I, as chairman of the National Mobilization Committee, had recommended that we hire Jerry Rubin to be a project director. He had organized Vietnam Day in Berkeley, which was in the fall of 1965 and had been the largest and longest antiwar demonstration of the day, a very, again, straight event, with Jerry in short hair and all the rest. Then after that [he] had gone on to organize sit-downs in front of troop trains, that kind of thing. But when he came to New York and we were getting ready for the march on the Pentagon, he had begun to develop his Yippie personality, which was to let his hair grow and to talk about smoking dope--he might have smoked it before, I don't know--but to smoke it and talk about it. Actually, there was dissension within the National Mobilization Committee. People said to me, "What did you bring this character here for? All he does is sit around and smoke dope and isn't really being a good organizer." But actually he was not originating so much as reflecting, I think, something that had already begun to happen. And when he came to New York--and probably it happened a little bit outside--and met up with Abbie Hoffman and others who were in that tradition, it swept him off his feet.

So that for the first time, at the march on the Pentagon one of the things that happened was--and I encouraged it, I felt that we had to be all-embracive--and I trusted Jerry's and Abbie's sincerity and dedication, even though their lifestyle was different than my lifestyle

or the people I was used to working with. But they got up, and the Mobe approved--if that's the word for it, but was happy mostly--a thing which called for levitating the Pentagon and for exorcising the evil spirits from the Pentagon. There were a whole series of things which actually enchanted all kinds of young people and either horrified or were begrudgingly accepted by a lot of old people, particularly traditional antiwar people.

But I would say that from then on it became more of a conflict, and when the Mobe actually split, which began to happen in 1969--I am not very good on dates, but I'm thinking about events that would identify it--maybe in 1970, there was a committee formed called the NCAC--the National Action Committee to End the War, something of that kind. You can--

G: We can look it up.

D: --look that up. I think there were other reasons for it, but one of the things in my discussions and arguments with some of those trusted friends and so forth was their objection to the Yippies. They were bringing the movement into disgrace in terms of middle America, the kind of people that SANE had originally done a good job with and that they thought were important.

Now in my own mind, I think that perhaps more important were two other factors--or equally important; all three factors played a part. One was the difference in counterculture, and of course from my own point of view, the extremity of the words, as well as some of the symbolic actions done by the Yippies, like "kill your parents." Now I knew Abbie and Jerry, and they said to me, "Well, you know what it means

is kill your parents' ideas, kill them in you as dominating authoritative figures that are stopping you from being a full person," and that made sense. I mean, any enlightened educator believes in that.

G: But it's not a good slogan to say all that.

D: It was a terrible slogan, and I used to tell them so. Especially since in our violent society every once in a while somebody does take a knife and kill his parent, you know, and this is what it brought up. I personally was in total disagreement with it, but anyway, that was one factor.

But a second factor was something I think for which the government has to take a large, large responsibility. That was the introduction of violence and trashing and what might be called pig-baiting, calling anybody who disagreed with you a pig and treating him as a pig, which never became the dominant mood of the movement by any means but was around the fringes, and in instance after instance was instigated by FBI agents. I could tell you story after story of FBI agents--and not always FBI, sometimes local Red squads or police counter-whatever people--who would come to a demonstration and would bring rocks and hand them to people and say, "Get the pigs!"

G: The French have a word for this, I think, an agent provocateur.

D: Agent provocateur, exactly. Exactly. And that became a very common thing. I myself was on countless occasions told that the movement would be ineffective until it took up bombing and violent methods, told by people who later turned out to be FBI agents. I was offered a means of bombing the amphitheater in which the [1968] Democratic national

convention was going to take place. Rennie Davis and I together were proposed a plan by a man by the name of Irving Bock, who was--

G: How do you spell that last name?

D: B-O-C-K. He was a leader of the Veterans for Peace in Chicago, and he was a member of the national executive committee, representing them, of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. He offered me and Rennie this plan--I forget how many weeks before the convention--and later [in the courtroom of the Chicago Eight trial] he identified himself as an employee of the Chicago Red Squad and the FBI. I could give other instances, and I will, one other, quickly. In the next convention--I mean, these things happened between conventions, too--but in the convention in Miami in 1972, representatives from six different--what were they called? Oh, gosh!--Red--oh, I can't think of the name of them.

G: I can't give it. I don't know.

D: Well, anyway, they were supposedly--Mao was very popular in those days in certain circles, Chairman Mao of China, so it was the Red Star Collectives, I think they were called. Anyway, I could get their name for you. But they showed up, you know, as representing--one from Tampa, one from Gainesville, one from New Orleans, and so forth, and attended our planning meetings. Their message was that we would have to have guns because the police were going to attack us as they had attacked us in Chicago, and only if we were armed could we prevent this. Not only that, but I was told very seriously, and believed it, that Rennie Davis and I were targeted for assassination, that we were going to be assassinated there. And this is not hard to believe because it has come out,

as you know--I mean, not all has come out by any means--but that was the time when the convention was originally going to be held in San Diego, California, and it came out that the Plumbers or whatever, the people involved in Watergate, or behind it, that the plan was to kidnap some of the leaders, which included Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, and myself, and take us to Mexico during the convention. That much is now public knowledge.

But anyway, in that mood and knowing what they did, I was told by a former FBI agent that we [Rennie and I] were going to be assassinated in Miami, and this was circulated quietly amongst a few people. So we were told that we had to have arms, we had to have guns there in order to prevent police riots as had taken place in Chicago. Well, I forget how many years later, but two or three years later, a disillusioned FBI agent broke with the FBI and said that the FBI had organized all of those Red Star Collectives in all of those cities.

So, anyway, I think the second thing was the violence, some of which came about through the natural impatience and agony of people at Vietnam going on as long as it did, plus the fact that the society says the way to solve political problems is by military and violent means. I think it was misguided, but some of it came indigenously and naturally out of our own ranks, but it was constantly encouraged, exacerbated, and agitated by agents provocateurs. So I think that perhaps played a bigger role in the divisions which gradually overtook the movement.

The third thing actually was something a little different, and that is an argument, which is a very legitimate argument which is going on today in the disarmament movement, that is, in order to get the

largest number of people, whether it's for a voting turnout or to be impressive as a demonstration, don't do anything that will antagonize or frighten or go further than most people are ready to go. Now obviously that would include violence and it would include the extremes of the counterculture, but it also included nonviolent civil disobedience. It also included calling for withdrawal of the troops rather than calling for a negotiated peace. It involved a whole political program. So there did come a time, I guess in 1970, when the Mobilization divided into those who were willing to try to incorporate the counterculture within it and would also include what we considered the more necessary or more radical programs, such as withdrawal of the troops instead of simply [a] negotiated peace, and would also incorporate within its total spectrum some acts of civil disobedience.

G: There were charges that the movement was in danger of being taken over by Communists. What did you make of that at the time?

D: Communists never played an important role in the movement, because of the McCarthy period and because of what I guess I'd call basic political principles. One of the early fights and one of the things that distinguished the Mobilization Committee and made it more relevant to the times than an organization like SANE, was that we fought to include the Communists within the movement. First of all, we weren't afraid of them, because we knew that they were basically weak and quite conservative. Actually, that is the interesting thing, they were always the last ones to agree that we should, for instance, request or demand withdrawal of American troops instead of negotiation. I come back to that because there was a period of at least a couple of years when that

was a big dividing point, you know, that it was just too much to ask that the American troops be withdrawn. The Communists always took the more conservative picture. They never supported civil disobedience, law-breaking, which some of us felt--like burning draft cards or refusing to be drafted or that kind of thing. They gave a certain amount of support to those who did the things after the fact, but they were very conservative.

G: To what do you ascribe that? That's an interesting observation. Why would the Communists have not been in the front rank?

D: Well, I could attribute it partly to a virtue and partly to a vice, if I can use those pejorative words. I think the virtue was that a lot of them had been organizers in the labor movement, organizers in the thirties in some rather important movements in behalf of the unemployed, or farmers who were losing their land or people who were being evicted. They had a certain type of realism which--like some of the impatient kids who got a thrill out of defying their parents by growing a beard or smoking pot or something--they hadn't had that much experience and weren't that realistic. That, I would say, was the virtue.

I don't know, I used the word vice, it might have been a little too strong. But I think the negative part of them was that they had placed their hopes so long on some foreign power outside of our own country and remote from their own lives. Now this wasn't the beginning, probably, with many of them because many of them were fine people who were moved in the Depression and didn't know what else to do, and so they did these fine things about unemployment and hunger and other forms of human suffering. But they came to identify the solution with a

foreign country, the Soviet Union, and it became more and more removed from their own lives. To be accurate, in my experience, more and more of them developed relatively comfortable ways of their own life. It would take more time than we should take now to analyze it, but I would say that gradually they became out of touch with the direct struggle within everyday life and within the society around them. Now, I suppose that McCarthyism and other exaggerated anticommunist views--I always disagreed and opposed them, that was different, but I mean people who really wanted to suppress, persecute, saw them as the devil. Just like they saw the Soviet Union as the savior, other people saw them as the devil, and they became the scapegoat for problems which other people refused to face up to. But I suppose that that kind of pressure, including the arrests, persecutions, loss of jobs and all of that, that happened to them, well, it made them more cautious and less ready to stick their necks out. Whereas a lot of people who, suddenly upset, they saw a TV showing of Vietnamese children being napalmed, or some of the atrocities that were going on in the war, just came rushing in. On the one hand, they did not have the same practical skills that the Communists did; on the other hand, they hadn't the conditioned reflex of "Go slow. Don't antagonize people. Don't say something that will get you into trouble."

I remember that before the Chicago convention of 1968, which was another watershed, as the siege of the Pentagon was, shortly before that, as a matter of fact--almost directly before, the Soviet--
(Interruption)

D: --one thing, that the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia on August 22, 1968, which was almost the beginning of the convention, and the overwhelming attitude of the Yippies, of the, what, traditional peace organizations, of the SDS, of everybody else involved in the protest of the Chicago convention, was contempt and condemnation for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Arnold Johnson, who was the Communist Party representative on the board, sat at this meeting of several hundred people going over where we were going, and tried to sidestep but justify the invasion, and he just got *hooted* absolutely down. So anyway, that also contributed. I mean, that was like the coming to a head, that was the climax of what had been going on for years in his voice.

First of all, I and many other people fought--and we fought, I'll have to say, and I'll say this frankly for history--that Martin Luther King, after he had agreed to come out for the first time against the war in Vietnam and take part in a public demonstration, and was going to march in April of 1967 from the Sheep Meadow, Central Park in New York to the UN and speak, which he eventually did, after he agreed to do that he told me that he was going to have to withdraw unless we eliminated the name of Arnold Johnson, Communist Party, from our long list of sponsors. And we had a terrible time in the committee, because we had been trying for years actually to get Martin Luther King to join the anti-Vietnam War movement, and he had been held back because he had been told by a lot of sincere people, and also by people who supplied a lot of money, and by a variety of sources, that if he added the unpatriotic act of criticizing a war while it was in process, to calling for equal rights for black people, that it would harm the cause of civil rights.

So when he told me that, after he had agreed to march and speak and he found out--he saw the letterhead, of course, he had seen it before, but anyway, I guess they thought about it--that we would have to remove the Communists from it, that would cause a terrible turmoil in the committee. But we decided that as a matter of principle we would not remove Arnold Johnson's name even if we lost Martin Luther King, and that might sound like a little pig-headed. Of course what happened was what we hoped would happen, that Martin Luther King decided to come anyway. We fought to have him there, but he [Arnold Johnson] never had, or anybody else from the Communist movement, any significant influence. It's like the [nuclear] freeze movement now. If anybody can believe, with Ronald Reagan or anybody else, that the fact that there are some pro-Soviet Communists who favor the freeze and I'm sure attend committee meetings occasionally or something else, although they're even weaker now than they were in those days, that that is why 285, if that's the right number, in my home state of Vermont town meetings voted for the freeze, I mean, it's just ridiculous.

G: You don't believe that Montana is in any danger of being taken over by the Communist Party because of the way they voted on the freeze?

D: I don't know. Vermont might be the one state where there aren't any Communists. But I have been to meetings in New York where I am sure that there was somebody who was a member of the Communist Party openly, and maybe one or two who weren't openly, but again, they have no power at all over that turbulent, tumultuous, heterogeneous movement, and they tend, again, to be a little bit behind the movement, a little bit out of step. The ones who are asking the movement a) to become violent, or b)

to become anti-American in some way, or to do something which will go against the underlying interests of the majority of the American people or which will frighten them, those are almost always agents of the government, agent provocateurs. When somebody in the sixties and to this day says to me, "Well, Dave, it's nice to be a pacifist, but if you're going to be serious, you've got to pick up the gun," I immediately watch that person to find out whether he or she is not an agent. And when somebody--actually, when one Vermonter I was working with for the nuclear freeze began telling me what a great place the Soviet Union was, I began to think that that person could very well be an agent who was trying to introduce that line in order to discredit the movement. Actually, I don't know to this day; now that person is being very anti-Soviet because I think that he has decided it is the only way that he can have an influence, and that makes me all the more think that he may be an agent. (Laughter)

G: Was government surveillance much of a--well, I don't know if "problem" is the right word. How pervasive was it? We know it existed. How pervasive was it and how aware of it were you?

D: Well, I think I've indicated--when you consider that they organized, I don't remember whether it was six or eight Red Star Collectives before the Miami convention, and it wasn't just that six people came and that there wasn't any collective. There were actually collectives existing. They were all in the South. So that gives some idea perhaps of the extensiveness of it. But I mean, there are even laughable instances. One--again, what should I say? FBI defector, that is, somebody who became disillusioned and left, has talked about the fact that they

didn't know the other agents in the National Mobilization Committee, and so they were writing reports on the other agents as being the most violent and obstreperous persons. (Laughter)

It became a problem, I think, because in my view the strongest undergirding for a sound movement for peace involves openness, trust, ability to listen to people that you disagree with, work things out. And two things happened. First, I've already indicated, the FBI would come in and act contrary, and I want to give one more example of that. When we held a counterinaugural--in 1969, it would have been--to the first inauguration of Richard Nixon, a wounded Vietnam veteran who was not supposed to leave the hospital sneaked out of the hospital--against doctors' orders--in Virginia and came across the river to speak to that convention. It was a heroic act on his part because he was facially disfigured, and he had never faced people since this had happened to him. And when he stood up to speak--and I was chairing the rally--this same Irving Bock who offered a means of bombing the amphitheater and was surrounded by a group of veterans--I don't know how many were fooled by him or how many were like him--started chanting, "Cut the bullshit. Into the streets! Cut the bullshit. Into the streets!" and basically humiliated this guy. First of all, he spoke in a weak voice; he was hardly alive. It was just a very, very difficult thing. As I say, then later it turned out that he [Bock] was an employee of the FBI.

So the first thing that they did was to try to destroy the spirit of trust and cooperation and patience and human sensitivity, without which no movement can grapple with difficult problems or build a different kind of spirit. But the second thing was that, as increasing-

ly people who had been in meetings turned up as informants, as witnesses at trials, and that one began to find out just how much we had been infiltrated, and somebody that you'd marched with or been arrested with or been in the same cell in jail with then turned out to be a government informer and testified at a political trial, it led to a form of disillusionment where people were afraid to express themselves, and where people began to have secret meetings outside the regular meeting to decide what would happen in the regular meeting, or to decide what they would do even if the regular meeting had made another decision. It began to destroy, it began to corrupt the movement. I don't mean to overstate it because it never, of course, totally corrupted it. But, nonetheless, good people became so paranoid or so afraid that they wouldn't really present their point of view, and the movement was definitely weakened by it. So numerically, you know, I think it was--and there are ways, I guess, of finding out, up to a point at least--statistically it was very pervasive, but spiritually and politically there is no question about how pervasive and destructive it was.

G: Were you personally aware of any surveillance? Wiretaps, phone taps?

D: Well, yes. You see, a fascinating thing, what we found out in one of our discovery motions, I guess, in the trial of the Chicago Eight, or Seven as it later became, was that they didn't just tap our phones. At a certain point there was a direct line from the phone company to the FBI, so that when my number rang, it rang in the FBI. Now, when we were told this in some government document, it didn't come as a surprise to me, because there were a number of times when I picked up the phone and I could hear people talking in the background, not the kind of cross-

wire thing that one normally gets, but somebody in the FBI had apparently forgotten to turn a switch or something, and I could hear them talking about me.

G: You could hear the office noise?

D: Yes. I could hear them talking about me. This happened way back, so it didn't come as any surprise to me. Then of course as I say, I had experiences like Irving Bock turning up at the trial, testifying dishonestly, and denying that he had offered us. . . .

G: Did anybody in the Johnson Administration ever attempt what might be called conciliation or negotiation with the Mobilization movement?

D: I'm trying to remember if they did.

G: I don't know that they did. That's not a loaded question.

D: No, no, no. I'm taking it very seriously but don't want to just off the top of my mind answer when there might have been something that I don't remember. I have to say that mostly it was--well, Bobby Kennedy was attorney general under Johnson. Yes, well, we definitely received overtures from the Kennedy forces, a great many overtures.

G: What form? What was the approach?

D: Well, I can remember that pretty early, probably I would say 1966, after we had held a couple of pretty significant--I mean the numbers were growing. They were not big in terms of later, but the kind of demonstrations that people hadn't expected in the middle of a war. It seems to me that when we were planning a demonstration--national, we called it; it was simultaneous on the East and West Coasts--in Central Park in the spring of 1966 that, whether authorized by Bobby Kennedy or not I

don't know, somebody from his office came and proposed that Bobby Kennedy be a speaker.

G: Do you remember who that was?

D: No, I'm sorry. I would have ways of finding out, probably, but I do not know. Again, we had a big debate. That was even before the Mobilization. I think that was the Spring Mobilization Committee and the Vietnam peace parade committee, Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee. We had a big discussion and decided not to accept the invitation.

G: What was the grounds?

D: That he wasn't reliable, not as a personal matter, but that anybody involved in the Senate and in administration would have to give a watered down--you know, sort of like [what] happens in the freeze movement today. "I'm against nuclear war, but don't mention El Salvador," or "I'm against nuclear war, but leave it to Congress. Don't organize independent activities."

G: Right.

D: And I think a feeling that the movement was gaining strength and that--it wasn't just that--I mean, we had to alter it. There was no speaker that everybody agreed with, probably. We invited speakers from a range of views, but that given the Kennedy glamour and the name and the position, that it would be misleading to new people who came to the thing, basically that it would in a certain sense deactivate them or would prevent them from becoming more active and relying more on building an independent movement.

G: Any sense of not wanting to give the idea that the movement was being captured by Kennedy?

D: Yes.

G: I'm not trying to lead you.

D: No, no. You're just more precise and succinct than I was. (Laughter) That's really a summary of what I was trying to say. Yes.

G: Okay. Well, I wasn't sure. Okay.

D: Yes, you've got it down right.

G: I have the sense that the movement of the Mobilization was not happy with the kind of coverage the media was giving. I have come across some critical comments. What was the sense of that?

D: Well, it varied at different times, but this same spring, 1966 demonstration at which we decided not to invite Kennedy to speak--and by the way, as I say, I don't even know if he would have accepted, but somebody made the overtures to us--the only phone in the Central Park area where we were, the Sheep Meadow, was in the bandstand, the platform from which the speeches were made, and I heard a reporter for a major New York paper, the ***New York Daily News***, call in, and I may not have the figures exactly right, but I think I even have the figures right--and say that there are three hundred thousand people here demonstrating. And on my way home after the meeting, I picked up the ***Daily News***, and the headline said a hundred and fifty thousand people demonstrated in Sheep Meadow. So that was part of it, but also, particularly in the latter stages when trashing, you know, breaking windows and that kind of thing, which I always opposed and the Mobe always opposed but which took place around the edges of a number of demonstrations in the late sixties and seventies, that would become the focus of the newspaper story rather than the fact that 99 per cent of the people there were nonviolent.

G: Well, that was news.

D: Well, that's the conception of news. Yes.

G: I find that ironic because people in the administration were also unhappy with the kind of coverage that they were getting.

D: Well, you see, I never thought--I mean some people might have had what I'd consider a simplistic view that the media was in the pocket of the administration. It never has been, in my mind. I think that through release of leaked material, of off-the-record briefings, of memoranda of news, in Vietnam the fact that in order to travel anywhere you had to get on the government plane--there are a lot of ways in which the government stacks the news and unduly influences it, but there's no doubt in my mind that the media has an emphasis on maintaining as much independence as possible within its own perspective. Now, I think its perspective is one which is not a sound one in terms of what makes news and what doesn't often, and I think its perspective is influenced by the lifestyle, the incomes, the fact that increasingly today it's a billion-dollar operation to run a big news-gathering machine, and I think this inevitably influences their views, and I can give many personal examples.

But also in terms of the press, you see, I had personal experiences with it, and I have to say right off that I could tell you the names of a lot of correspondents for major networks that I knew personally during those years, maybe still do, that I think are fine human beings and were trying to do an honest job. But I can also tell you that--let me try to get my years straight--about 1967 a number of them began to

come to me and say, "You know, we know this, but the word has come down now that we mustn't publish it."

G: Can you recall any specific examples?

D: I can, specifically. A reporter for ***Newsweek*** and a correspondent for one of the networks, the three of us were talking once, and they had pictures of some GIs having a barbecue or a picnic or something on a hill in Vietnam, their rifles stacked up with their bayonets, and the heads, the severed heads of Vietnamese on the bayonets. And they said, "Last year we could have published those pictures. This year we can't because there is a feeling"--and you know the charge, that the media had provoked the antiwar movement by its coverage.

I can tell you of an instance when I was in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and a correspondent was very excited--professionally he was excited and was otherwise horrified--that he had gotten pictures of an instance in which a plane had dropped napalm, or phosphorous, and the winds had shifted or it had dropped a little wrong, and he had pictures of it burning the American GIs, and it never appeared. He was very excited about it. Then I probably saw him two or three months later, I remember, in an elevator going into the Overseas Press Club, I think it was, for some press conference we were holding, and asked him what happened. Somebody decided it was too much to use.

G: You don't care to divulge who this was, or do you remember?

D: I mean I would think of his name, but I won't, I guess. I don't know whether I should or shouldn't, but I guess [I won't], not without consulting with him.

G: I only asked because it is a lead for me, another interview to get.

D: Yes. I'll think about that. I'll try to remember his name.

G: All right, if you don't care to put it on tape, if you'd write it on a slip--

D: Well, for the moment I don't remember his name, but I knew him well enough so that I--and that was a moving enough experience.

G: All right. How and when did you become associated with Lord [Bertrand] Russell's war crimes tribunal?

D: Well, I think I was approached at some demonstration. I mean, what always happened, I was talking to him about marching across to the Pentagon with Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis in 1967, and they're talking to me about becoming active in the antiwar movement, which they had not been up to that time for a variety of reasons. And I remember marching in New York and Ralph Schoenman, who was Lord Russell's secretary, telling me about the tribunal and asking me if I would consider being a member. And I remember saying, "Well, I would, but the most appropriate thing, it would be better if you asked A. J. Muste." And he said, well, he'd think about that. But anyway, so in one of those marches, and I don't--

G: I'm just thinking. When did Muste die?

D: Muste? Oh, God--he died in 1968.

G: No, I think it was before. I think he died in 1966. It wasn't that early?

D: No, it wasn't 1966, because I went to Vietnam for the first time in October, or the fall--September, October, November, somewhere in there--of 1966, and that was the time when the Fall Mobilization Committee was being organized. And A. J. had not been--and one of the

things that I did in Vietnam was to urge upon them bringing a lot of other people to Vietnam, and one of them being that they should have a feminist trip or a trip of women, which--

G: That was the genesis of this other question.

D: I see that other question. I also, by the way, said, "Look, I'm going to go back and I'm going to talk about this, and it will be very important"--and this will relate to your question on the media--"but it will not get the coverage in the media. They will say"--and this is literally what happened--"'Longtime peace activist claims civilian homes and hospitals bombed in Vietnam' on page 18 or 28 or 32 of the ***New York Times*** and the ***Washington Post***." And I urged upon them that they invite over some established member of the mass media, and it was in the course of that that Harrison Salisbury's name came up, amongst others, and that at least contributed to something which they might have done anyway, but I don't know. I didn't even know Harrison Salisbury, but I thought of him as a person who would probably report honestly what he saw. And I said, "All you need is for somebody to see it, and it's so horrifying and so contrary to what is claimed, namely that the U.S. is bombing steel and concrete and that's all, that it would be very important." Well, I also proposed that A. J. Muste come over, and so it was at least a year after that I believe that he did go. I think it was the following fall, 1967, or maybe it was January of 1968. Is that true? I'm sorry. But whatever it was.

G: Well, I can check.

D: Yes, but actually I think the trip killed him.

G: He died in a February. I seem to remember that.

D: He died in February? I know I was in Pittsburgh at a conference when I got the word, and he had gotten back in January, I believe, from that trip.

G: And you think the trip was too much for him?

D: Yes.

G: How rigorous a trip was that in those days?

D: Terrible.

G: Tell me how you did it. I find it fascinating.

D: Well, I'll tell you what happened to me once. I went to Japan in August of 1966. I was invited over for Hiroshima Day, but I would not go because we had major activities here. But their activities continued afterwards, so I left shortly afterwards. Actually there was a whole conference of the Japanese--the Beheiren--well, the anti-Vietnam war committee. I guess it occurred to me that I am so close, and I don't really know what was happening in Vietnam. I don't know who to believe. The United States says it's only bombing steel and concrete. At that time China was saying that Hanoi had been leveled or was in ashes and so forth. I felt that I didn't know and that it was important for us to know what was actually happening and not to accept either word, the worst or the best, you might say. So I began making inquiries, somewhat naively. I had no contact with the Vietnamese, of course. I don't know if anybody did, but I went to the embassy in Tokyo.

G: The North Vietnamese embassy?

D: Yes, and told them that I wanted to go. I also planned to go to Saigon, which I did, but that was easier to accomplish at that point. I mean I didn't need a visa, as I remember, or if I did it was automatic, or very

easy. They showed some interest, and they knew my name or were told who I was, that I was chairman of this committee and active and so forth. I forget if they suggested it or not, but I got a number of people to send telegrams endorsing the importance of my going to Vietnam. They included Lord Russell, based I think on this earlier conversation I had where I had been invited to be a part of that committee, and A. J. Muste and Staughton Lynd, who had made--his was the last trip before mine, which was over a year earlier. In fact, I had been invited to go on that trip, but with family responsibilities and so forth I couldn't go at that time. Anyway, I got a range of people who sent telegrams saying how important it was. But when I was in Phnom Penh, the ICC plane went twice a week, and I was told that I could not fly in, I would have to go to Moscow and come through China. The reason was that shortly before that an ICC plane had gone down and had never been found. I always found the Vietnamese very sensitive in that respect. I believe that they were sincere. They said, "We do not want to risk your life going on this plane."

G: Well, I've heard horror stories about the ICC aircraft.

D: Yes. So anyway I went to Moscow. First of all, I--

G: Straight from Phnom Penh?

D: No, I stopped in Cairo, actually, I mean India, then Cairo, waiting to get a visa to go into Moscow, which wasn't all that easy. But one way or another, I finally got it. I went to Moscow and I waited a week, and the approval didn't come to go through China; I had to get permission from China. I actually came all the way back to New York, and it developed that the day I left Moscow--because I had responsibilities at

home, family and everything--apparently the word came through from the Chinese approving it. Anyway, I went back, but it was a long, difficult trip. Later I did go on the ICC plane, by the way, which was even more hairy. I mean, you fly in over the lines, you might say, in a small plane. Well, it's nothing compared to what people put up with all the time.

Then you land and what was more serious, of course, was the bombing. I mean, I found out. It wasn't just a question of bombing civilian structures and hospitals and so forth, but the thing that was universal everywhere I went into the countryside was that the planes strafed people. One of the attempts of the American government was to wipe out the ecology and the economic and agricultural base of Vietnam, and one of the ways of doing that was to destroy the water buffalo. So when the planes swooped in, they would strafe the water buffalo. I mean, this happens to be one of those things that moved me very deeply because what I observed and, of course, later talked with people, was that you never saw a water buffalo without a small boy or a small girl being at the end of a rope--because you didn't have fences--taking it to pasture and so forth.

So I had a lot of experiences which are common to any[one who went to Vietnam]. I mean, nowadays, I just saw a film of the massacre in Lebanon last night--I was speaking on the Middle East. So it seems like nothing, but it brought home to me what the war was like. I traveled into the southern part of North Vietnam in a jeep at night without a light, with branches over the roof, camouflaged, and we'd go a few miles and the planes would come, not always that often but often enough. And

I shall never forget the first time when the planes [came]. All of a sudden--I didn't even know there were planes there--in this total darkness, it was as bright as midday. The planes had dropped flares, and then they were swooping in, so we lay in a little ditch by the side of the road hoping they wouldn't strafe us. So [did] I think most of the people who went to Vietnam.

And I had a terrible time, the Vietnamese did not want me to leave Hanoi which, although it was attacked periodically, they thought was safer. I had to practically go on strike, active nonviolent--no, really, say I forget what, but I'd say, "Well, I'm not going to go to the meeting," or "I won't do this," or "I won't--unless you let me go where things are happening."

G: Who decided where you could go? How was that arrived at? Did they have a [inaudible]?

D: Well, I had a somebody from the--originally it was called the Vietnam Peace Committee, later I think it was changed to the Committee on Solidarity between the Vietnamese and the American People. I want to say something about that. In this first trip one of the things that happened was that I was invited to meet with what they called the heads of mass organizations, so that there were two people from the women's organization, the Vietnam women's union, and there were labor leaders, and there were youth leaders, and there were educators, and maybe about forty people, and they asked me a lot of questions about the United States and the American peace movement. One of them was the very question we've discussed here about the Communists, and I told them frankly that the Communists were sort of the laughingstock of the

American peace movement. And by the way, when I say that, you know, I should say that some people like Arnold Johnson, that mild, conservative old man, [he] was a lovable gent, but still he was politically the laughingstock. And I told them that.

Then because I had been reading up on my way there, and I had read Bernard Fall's book, whatever it was called at the time--

G: ***The Two Vietnams***.

D: I was going to say ***The Two Vietnams***, and that was it. In that, if you remember, he had talked about all the people who were killed in the agricultural reform act of--

G: Yes, in the middle fifties, I think, yes.

D: Yes. Right. And [he] said that even Ho Chi Minh had admitted this. Anyway, in the course of this interview--and I sort of interviewed them, too; I said, "Well, I want to ask you some questions"--I raised the worst accusations that I knew against the Vietnamese government, including that one. And they answered them, and they said, well, it had been exaggerated, and that there were some deaths and that Ho Chi Minh had regretted them, but that they were mostly a case of angry farmers or peasants who had been fed up for years and had taken up revenge and that the government had tried to prevent it, and one thing and another.

Well, the day before I left I was taken for an interview with the prime minister, Pham Van Dong, and we talked for half an hour or an hour. Then there was a little stir, and I looked up and Ho Chi Minh walked in, and I had a long visit with him and Dong. There were two things I want to report from that meeting. One is that he said, "I have listened to the tapes from your meeting with the leaders of mass

organizations, and I found them very helpful and very good, and I'm glad that you asked such searching questions." When I left I was given a copy of Ho Chi Minh's collected works, four volumes, I believe. When I opened one of them, it was as if it was planned, it opened to Ho's statement on the massacres in agriculture, and I found that Bernard Fall had very inaccurately--had given a dishonest impression of what he had actually said.

G: In what way?

D: Well, it simply--he talked about all these deaths. You know, this is from memory now, but I think this is pretty accurate. He gave the figures, which we now know were done by a man working with the CIA; I think his name was Chi, a CIA Vietnamese. [He] had invented the figures, and when challenged he was forced to say that, well, he extrapolated from his knowledge that five people were killed in a particular village, and there were this many villages. I mean, he had some lame excuse, because it was proven that it was false. Anyway, what Fall had done, as I remember--it would be easy to check him--was to give the worst figures and then say that Ho Chi Minh admitted this and then gave a statement from Ho Chi Minh where he had apologized or regretted or something. But Ho Chi Minh had not admitted or for a minute countenanced the picture that Fall had given, and this sentence taken out of the whole picture implied that he had, whereas if you put it in the context, what he said was that there were regrettable incidents in which some farmers, some peasants, did what they shouldn't have. But it made it appear as if he had said the government had done it.

So the other thing I wanted to say from that is that the night before I left, or sometime the week before I left for Japan and ultimately for Vietnam, I had been at a meeting at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, at which there was a bomb scare. We all went out and they searched, and when we came back the front rows were occupied by ROTC in uniform, you know, ROTCs. I sat there looking at them, wondering if they were going to charge the platform or not, because in those days it was before the Vietnam veterans and the GIs turned against the war. To condense it, the speaker just before me got up and attacked them as a bunch of fascists, you know, and robots and one thing or another, which was. . . . I was trying to figure out how I could explain to them that they were trying to defend America by ways that I didn't think would work and that they had been misled and that they were going to be victims, too, and so forth.

Anyway, when I got there--and this experience was very unhappy to me, having this attack on them in this mindless way--Ho started talking about how sorry he felt. I brought up the POWs, as I always did, you know, that there were rumors that they were being mistreated, that *Life* magazine had said they were driven through the streets, and that this was a terrible thing and, you know, one thing and another. I had raised this in the mass meeting, and I raised it again with Ho, and Ho said, "You know, I feel sorry for the GIs. They have been brought up to believe that communism is some terrible evil," and he kind of laughed at that point, kind of a nervous laugh, I thought, like he had to concede it but. . . . I tried to figure out what did he mean by the way he laughed, but it wasn't scorn. And he said, "They come over here, and

they find out that even the South Vietnamese, even the ones who are against communism, don't want them over here." And I knew that was true because I had been in Saigon twice by then and had found that out, that the people who hated communism still didn't want the GIs there. They were destroying the country, they were [doing] all kind of things, corrupting it and so forth. Then he said, "I don't have to tell you"--or maybe I think he said this first, "I don't have to tell you they've done terrible things over here, the POWs. You've seen it. You've seen the hospitals, the churches, the houses, the schools and so forth. But," he said, "I feel sorry for them, and we would like them to go back and be better Americans."

Anyway, he had an attitude which was much better than a lot of people, some people, in the anti-Vietnam war movement. And I've never forgotten that. I'm sure I disagreed with Ho on a lot of things politically, and it would be easy secondhand to think, "Well, that was a good line," you know. They always said that, that we make a distinction between the American people and the Vietnamese people. But I felt with both him and Dong, and with a lot of the Vietnamese that I met, that they really did feel it. That doesn't mean that they might not do things that I would oppose, and they would, you know. But I do believe there was an element of humanity there that I have not found in a lot of--in some other communist bureaucrats I have met in other countries. (Laughter)

G: That brings up an interesting point.

D: How are we doing on time?

G: Well--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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