INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 7, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID DUBINSKY

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. Dubinsky's office, 201 West 52nd Street, New York City

Tape 1 of 1

(Interview begins abruptly.)

M: . . . Roosevelt.

D: Hoover--Republicans too.

M: Oh, Republicans too, yes!

D: Hoover, Eisenhower. First of all after Hoover, Roosevelt; and after Roosevelt, Truman; then Eisenhower; Kennedy; Johnson. This is with five, six Presidents. Naturally all this time we had conversations on various topics. I would not say the same thing happened with Hoover or Eisenhower. With Roosevelt we had intimate, political, social conversations, and a personal friendship too, to an extent also with Truman; more so with Kennedy subsequently. But with Johnson, it was a kind of a relationship . . . I just now looked over some of the correspondence that I have since I took over this office when I retired. Then I read it again, and I'm getting more and more inspiration after reading it.

M: Well, good.

D: And how could I say no!

M: I see. Well, we're very happy that that's the case. How far back does your friendship with Mr. Johnson go? Do you recall when it began?

D: I'll tell you. If you remember, I believe one week before he retired from the White House he had a farewell dinner at the Plaza Hotel in the City of New York.

M: Yes, sir.

D: All dignitaries, cabinet members were there. And I happened to be there. And he delivered a speech, it was a very sentimental, touching. Of course I knew it was probably one of his last speeches, and therefore I felt it was very touching, very sentimental, and how shocked and surprised I was when he singled me out as the only one of the audience to be mentioned.

M: Deservedly so, I'm sure.

D: And this was on the topic when he spoke. In 1938 when we were involved--the trade union movement and our union in particular was involved in the question of a minimum wage for the workers in this nation, and I buttonholed congressmen and one of them was Congressman Johnson.

M: A brand new one at that time.

D: A new one. I urged him to support it, and he brought it out at that meeting that I was the starter to prevail upon him. And he related also what happened to some of the other congressmen who were persuaded; they were defeated. He was elected and since then there was more and more. So much so that after the meeting--Arthur Goldberg being there, and he's a close friend of mine, he says, "You so-and-so, you are the only one whom he mentioned by name!"

M: I'm sure that made you feel very good.

D: That made me feel very good, and I wrote him a nice letter afterwards. And the two minutes I had before you coming in, I looked over the correspondence. I want to tell you [it] does your heart and your soul good when you read it. Because, besides all the other talents that he possessed, he was a terrific letter writer. If you read his letters, if you see this here on the wall where he says that--when the union move

for $1.60 was enacted, I was not able to attend the White House when he signed the bill--but he said, "You weren't there, but your spirit was there. You are the father of the law." He calls me the father of that law.

M: I think that's an accurate description, too.

D: And when the President of the United States says that to the young baker boy who came to this country after being in jail in Russia for eighteen months and spending six months in Siberia, who came here and worked as a dishwasher and a kneepants operator and then subsequently became a cutter, and then was advanced to the position of a manager of a union, then vice president, secretary, for thirty-four years, president of the union, and to get that recognition from the President of the United States means an awful lot to me. And of course I cherish it, and I have a certain amount of sentiments about this and the other things that happened.

M: Mr. Johnson wasn't always looked on with a great deal of favor by some of the union people in the 1940s and the 1950s. Did you pretty well maintain your friendship with him through that period?

D: I don't know whether I maintained that in those days. I remember when he was the majority leader of the Senate. I went in there with a group of labor leaders, including Arthur Goldberg at that time, who was lawyer for the AFL-CIO. And we organized a committee to work for an increased minimum wage. At that time we had it already $1.25 because of many years of hard struggle and difficulties. It started in 1938 with 40¢ and then went up to $1.25. I remember under the Eisenhower Administration when we visited Johnson at that time we wanted to get a $1.00. We had at that time 75¢, and we wanted to get $1.00. And we visited President

Johnson and after arguing and everything else, he couldn't see the point clear why it should be $1.00; it would be too much of a substantial increase. Maybe he didn't say it, but I felt that maybe he felt that it was too much for the workers of America to earn $1.00 an hour. And naturally he must have had a lot of opposition from his friends, too. And when we went to visit at that time Johnson as the majority leader of the Senate, I believe Jack [Jacob] Potofsky was with me and Arthur Goldberg, and I think must have been also Alex Rose of the millinery union. There were four of us. We presented our case then. He was very sympathetic, and he related to us his understanding, his knowledge of close relatives living in misery, and therefore he was sympathetic. But he didn't promise us anything.

But subsequently we were able to put it over on the President--President Eisenhower. I happened to be in the gallery at that time in Congress when the vote took place and the big fight was for a $1.00. And they voted on the question of $1.00, and I believe it was carried by a vote of two in the House of Representatives. And then it was a question of the Senate.

But while he didn't promise us, he made his contribution. He was sympathetic. And the reason why he didn't want to give a promise was because at that time (John P.) Mitchell was Secretary of Labor--he favored it, but evidently he was considered a liberal, and Eisenhower's attitude, and even Nixon in those days. We visited Nixon too. We didn't get any too warm a reception or too friendly a feeling or sympathy. From him, we didn't get a promise, but we got sympathy.

M: Well, at least that was something.

D: That's something. There's a story I know that can't relate to you, a

Jewish story. But it gives something, something it does give. It's something, I don't know what it is.

M: That applied to Johnson.

D: But Johnson applied sympathy at that time, and so much so that Johnson related it several times. He related a very interesting story.

When he was Vice President in 1963, that was, I believe, one or two months before the demise of Kennedy, the Liberal Party in New York invited him for a dinner. You usually have it around September. We felt that he needs a lift, because all kinds of rumors were going around in those days. And we invited him to address our dinner. And he suggested that he wanted to visit the garment district. I took him up to some shops. I forgot to tell you that before that we invited him to address a meeting of trade union people that same day. Evidently when they came to New York, Democratic politicians of the city were not too sympathetic to us, and they were envious of us enjoying the prestige of having the Vice President addressing a meeting of ours.

M: A Democratic Vice President, right.

D: A Democrat. Their candidate, their man, addressing a meeting of a competitive party, because it was the Liberal Party. Yet the Liberal Party had close relations at that time with Roosevelt. We had close relations with Truman. We had it with Kennedy. And we had it with Johnson. Now, if you'll remind me a little bit later, I'll tell you what happened with Johnson when he became Vice President at that convention on the coast.

And in the morning we were told that Johnson will not come to address our meeting--our meeting was supposed to take place about 11 o'clock. I was busy, and Alex Rose tried to persuade him. He said, "It will be a letdown for us, and it will be a letdown for him if he doesn't

come to the meeting." And he finally came to the meeting. And he came to the meeting a little bit late, and I happened to be the speaker when he came in. Because he was late, I had to drag out my speech. And he came in in the midst of my speech. And I gave him an introduction, because I had a certain feeling for him. And he received an ovation that was beyond his expectations. And he delivered a terrific speech, and he related the way I exploited him on the question of many social problems, and problems particularly on minimum wages. Then he related an incident--I cannot, you probably will have to tie into a later story--and he told this story that in Houston, Texas, Maverick was congressman. His name was Maverick, but he was a maverick.

M: Both. Maury Maverick.

D: And he ran for mayor, and because he was a liberal congressman, we wanted to help him. And we sent him $2,000 to help him for his campaign. And Maverick went and he cashed the check, and he took two thousand silver dollars, and he spread it out on the table and he called in the people--those that had to pay a tax dollar in order to be eligible to vote. And he gave each one a dollar in order that he should be able to register for voting. And evidently this turned out to be against the law of the state there, and he had a case in court. And he had to defend himself. He was in trouble. For the mayor of San Antonio to be confronted in a trial!

And I don't know whose idea [it was], but Johnson related at that meeting the way Maverick invited him to create atmosphere, to be a witness, to sit in the front row when the case was to take place and the defense would be made. You remember once there was a connection with Dave Beck. He was able to get a Negro, he needed him to be in the crowd,

and that helped him at that time in that case. Evidently Maverick used at that time Johnson for that purpose. And the defense lawyer delivered a speech, I couldn't repeat it but Johnson repeated it splendidly, and he says, "For years and years, we here in the South were complaining against the Yankees, the way they exploit us; we live in misery, and they live in luxury. They come; they take the money from us, and we have nothing. And suddenly one of us had the wisdom and the judgment to go up to the Yankees and not give them the money, but bring money from them to help our people. Now you're going to convict him for that?" And he said, "That clinched the case!"

And he related the part that I had in it because I gave the $2,000. My name was mentioned there; he related it, and the crowd went wild. And he delivered an excellent speech, so much so that after he finished the speech, Lady Bird called me on the telephone. And Lady Bird says to me, "Mr. Dubinsky, Lyndon told me what you did for him today. He was happy, and so I am happy, and I want to congratulate you and express our appreciation for the way you handled it, for what you did. He is in good spirits since then."

And then he came to the banquet that night. And I took him in the garment districts. He's cute in addition to everything else. He came and he delivered to them a speech. So he told them the story the way we were walking around in the garment district, and the crowd was there, and they saw us, and I was walking with him. He overheard, he said, some people asking one another, "Who is that tall man walking with Dubinsky?"

M: Everybody knew Dubinsky, and the Vice President--who was he!

D: He related the story. You know what happened at that banquet when he related that story. Said they didn't know who Johnson was, but they

knew Dubinsky. He has got a good sense of humor, an excellent sense of humor.

M: Tells a story pretty well.

D: Tells a story excellent. And when I just read the last five minutes his correspondence, I want to tell you, I am amazed and surprised how beautiful it reads, and it sounds that it does to me. And these are some of my experiences with him.

M: You asked me to remind you about the 1960 convention out on the coast. Were you there?

D: That's right. I wasn't there. That's an interesting thing. I don't remember what the writers wrote about part of it, but it wasn't entirely correct. I think for history it probably was typical. I wasn't there. Suddenly I happened to be at my country place at Hampton Bays. I seldom attended Democratic conventions. I probably in all of my life had attended two Democratic and one Republican convention. Because frankly I never voted the Democratic ticket. I was a Socialist until 1932 when Roosevelt was elected President. I voted always Socialist ticket. I came from the old country as a Socialist, I continued it, but in 1932 with the New Deal, you know what happened at that time. Two good people were elected in that year. One is Franklin Roosevelt, and the other one is David Dubinsky--two presidents. He was elected President of the United States, and I was elected president of the union.

And when I was elected at that time, my friends considered me the undertaker of the union. The union was bankrupt, no membership after the crash of 1929 the financial crash, and then the internal fight we had with the communists for six years. We had before in the union 110,000 members and it dwindled down to about 24,000. We were a million

and a half dollars in debt, and at that time a million and a half was fifteen million dollars. Our elevators were shut off because we couldn't pay the electric bill. Our officers went without pay. And somewhere we had to get from somebody ten or fifteen cents for a package of cigarettes. Food was out of the question, but a package of cigarettes. And I became the president. What evidence that I was born under silk shirt, as many people say. And I was fortunate that, together with me, Roosevelt became President, and the New Deal came in. And in 1933, we were one of the first codes, we got an excellent code, and in two or three months our membership grew to over a hundred thousand.

M: From 24,000. That fast.

D: Over a hundred thousand. Now that I have retired, two-and-a-half years ago, I left a membership at 445,000, with funds in various funds: retirement, health and welfare, severence pay, close to $600,000,000--this bankrupt union.

M: That's some kind of undertaking you did.

D: So much so that while I ceased being a member of the party for quite a number of years, in 1936 I felt obligated because as a union officer for all Roosevelt meant for the labor movement and meant for the country that I should support him. We organized at that time the American Labor party, in order that we Socialists don't vote the Democratic ticket for Roosevelt.

M: But you could still vote for Roosevelt?

D: We could still, and ever since then we always voted--[but] not on the Democratic ticket. When it was Roosevelt, when it was Truman, when it was Kennedy, when it was Johnson, when it was Lehman, Liberal Democrats we took on our ticket and our people--and sometimes we were the balance

of power in this state.

Now then the relationship continued that way all the time. And as I told you before, I was not too close to the Democratic party, but I was close to liberal Democrats in the city, in the state, in the country. And I haven't attended conventions. I attended only two Democratic conventions and one Republican. That's the time when Wayne Morse--I asked him how in the world does he belong to the Republican party. And you remember a few years later the change took place because he didn't belong there.

I wasn't at that convention when it was in Los Angeles, the 1960 convention. Suddenly I got a call from Arthur Goldberg. And the first question I asked was, "What's doing?" He says, "It looks that Kennedy wants Johnson for Vice President." I said, "It's terrific!" Listen to this here, I said, "It's terrific." He says, "Yes? But your friends here don't think so."

M: That's what I was--

D: "Your friends here don't think so." So I asked him, "Who are my friends?" He mentioned three names and I will not give you all the three names. I'll mention only two. For obvious reasons, I don't want to cause a dissension of relationships that exists between myself and him. But he mentioned Alex Rose, who is a friend of mine, and he mentions Walter Reuther, with whom I was very close. Then he mentions another important name. So I said, "They're crazy! It's a winning ticket." He said, "Go out and convince your friends." I said, "I will. I'll try."

I make the first call. I call the first one, Alex Rose. And Alex Rose had faith in my judgment; we were close. And while he is outstanding--I consider him one of the best political minds that we have as

a tactician. But he has faith in my judgment and I told him, "Alex,"--him I could tell that Arthur called me and said this, too: "You guys are crazy there."--"Alex, this is a winning ticket. You are nominating a candidate not only because you want him; you want him to be elected. And this will help the ticket." So he says, "You have no problem with me."

M: There's one.

D: "You have no problem with me." I said, "Who's my problem?" He mentions the same names, Walter Reuther and the other one. So he said, "Walter Reuther is sitting next door here and he's dictating a statement against the nomination of Johnson." So I says, "Give him to me on the telephone. I want to talk to him." I was so involved, so intense, that I didn't use my proper judgment, and I'm surprised at myself. He says, "No, you can't call him on this telephone. You make him a special call to his room."

And he was right. That would have been a serious mistake. He would have considered it a conspiracy between Alex Rose and myself.

And I call Walter, and he gives me originally an argument. And I was at that time very friendly with Walter, and I know that I would be able to change Walter so fast. So I said, "Walter, keep calm." I wouldn't tell him [I know] that he's preparing [a statement]. "Keep calm. Think of it. Maybe you'll come to the same conclusion that I did, that this is in the interest of our cause, of our movement, of the nation. Think and don't be harsh, and don't be rushing with statements." Because I knew he has the habit of doing that. And he stopped issuing the statement.

Then I called the third one. The third one was at the swimming

pools, and he was the most important of the three. I began talking to him. So he says, "Yes, you are there and I am here. I know better." That was enough for me. It was a cold shoulder.

But there was a few hours time. And they called a caucus of all the labor leaders. And as a result of that caucus they decided to support Johnson. And the committee went to see Kennedy. I watched television and I saw them coming out from Kennedy's room, where the thing was clinched and settled.

In other words, that telephone call, I consider, from Arthur Goldberg to me was of considerable--I will not say conclusive, but of considerable--importance.

M: Yes.

D: And then when he came in, he knew it evidently, evidently whether Goldberg had at once told Johnson, and he knew it, and that's why when we asked him to come to our meeting, we asked him to come to the labor and that's why he wanted to. And he established close contact with us because he knew that we were dependable, we have no selfish motives, and no political ambitions, none of us are candidates for any office, none of us wanted posts, but we were interested in the welfare of the community, and then the welfare of the labor movement. And since then the relations were excellent, discussing problems, troubles, and we were of help where we could, and we held him in high esteem and admiration, so he had a very good opinion about us.

And we were frequently in touch, very much so when I had troubles. When I read the letters now, I see he is not only a President but a close, hardy, intimate, sincere friend.

M: You were kind of anticipating my question. He did call you frequently

while he was President?

D: Very frequently. I hate to tell you what he did to me once.

M: Do so.

D: Let's shut it off for a minute.

M: All right, sir.

Repeat that--you were swimming at Miami Beach, you say?

D: No. Hampton Bays. I happen to go for summers, part of the summers at least, to Hampton Bays. I have a house there. And one day was swimming. The guard there screams for Dubinsky. Evidently someone was swimming out too far. And he calls me out and he wears his uniform, so I thought that must be what it is. Maybe I killed somebody and somebody got drowned, and I'm responsible for it. He said, "The President is on the telephone!" And I go to the telephone, and I still don't know how he was able to locate me, and how they were able to locate me when I'm in the swimming pool.

And at that time it was a proposition that where he wanted to have a meeting in New York where the minimum wage bill would be signed in New York and in the garment district, and he was tried to persuade me at that time. And I said, "I'll consider it." But once an idea comes to his mind--well, you know how he is--he's persistent, he wouldn't follow me only in the swimming pool but God knows where else! He'd pull me out. And I was pulled out. And then later on we were able to persuade him. He sent Arthur Goldberg, too, to talk to us and have a meeting on that. We had a meeting of a number of leaders on it. And we came to the conclusion that it would not be appropriate to have it in the garment district because we didn't want . . . it's for the nation. The garment district should be the center of it, because he knew that

we'll get the people. That's why he called me. That's why he sent Arthur Goldberg.

And naturally since then my name and prestige in Hampton Bays, I could almost have got the house for half the price. Everybody in the town knew that the President pulled me out of the swimming pool.

But at that time he realized, too, that probably we were right. He sometimes gives you a little bit. He's persistent, he's stubborn, and determined, and everything else, but he yielded to our judgment on that, in this instance.

M: What did he say to you when the Liberal Party found it necessary to support a Republican candidate, such as Mayor Lindsay? I believe you all supported his race for mayor.

D: He did not give us any argument. He has a lot of respect and consideration for our judgment, and he knows--because at that time it was already a result of a deal; that's the one I started to tell you before. And O'Connor was supposed to be president of the [city] council with a promise of being governor, to withdraw. And [Abraham] Beame was a candidate for mayor on the Democratic ticket, whom we couldn't take because while in the post when he was there he did very well, but as far as a mayor, we had doubts whether he was the right man for it.

And I happened to be in the hospital at that time when the Liberal Party had a committee to interview Lindsay. And two of my vice presidents who had turned against it came to me in the hospital to tell me what an impression he made, a terrific impression. We got an outstanding man, liberal, determined, and everything else, so naturally I had a high feeling for him before. And instead of me persuading them, they persuaded me. That is a better game.

And of course when he came to the meeting, there was some sentiment against, and I happened to deliver at that time a speech that some of my own people, others who were not involved in this group but in another group opposed it, and their contention was he was a Republican. And they recognized that they couldn't take Beame. So they wanted an independent candidate, our own candidate. Now our own ticket means electing Beame. So I was able to persuade, and overwhelmingly they supported my position.

(Interruption)

M: How his presidency turned out, as far as trade union movements are concerned, some of the things he wanted to do, he did; some, he didn't do. Did he keep in close touch as far as the programs--?

D: I've omitted that. At that meeting that originally was reluctant to come and he came he made that speech at that time in addition to what he told about Maverick. He also related, and he related several times since then, he says: "When Dave came to see me and spoke to me and tried to impress me of the great need for unanimity in the workers' interest and of the nation, I didn't make any promises to him. But Dave knows that without promises I delivered." The crowd went wild, because they know it, and we got it, and everything else. A lot of things he was reluctant to make promises. And that's right, by the way. As long as his heart was in the right place and as long as he had a feeling and as long as he had the courage to do it.

You know, I was a great admirer of Roosevelt, I was a great admirer of Kennedy, an admirer of Truman, but I think he has done in the field of social welfare, of civil rights, and domestic problems, that is no match for anyone else. And if not for the unfortunate thing of the

Vietnam situation that happens, not that he was wrong; he turned out to be wrong. But in my book, my judgment, my understanding of him, he had a good heart, a good soul, a good understanding, good way of putting through most important legislation, speaking in a way most beneficial, and that's why he established himself, that name, that reputation, in the entire labor movement.

Many, many Republicans switched at this time to Humphrey because of their consideration for and because of the record of Johnson. Many Republicans on the executive council of the AFL-CIO never voted Democratic, this time voted Democratic.

M: Because of Johnson's record?

D: Because of Johnson's record. There was no doubt that Humphrey would follow at least this record a hundred percent, his record and entire history of Humphrey--he was the starter. I remember when Humphrey addressed our convention in 1947 when he was mayor of Minneapolis, and then subsequently the AFL convention. And the reason why they invited him as a mayor--this never happened--to address the convention [was] because of his record that he established himself then. Now, as a candidate for President, actually they have full faith that not only will he follow in Johnson's footsteps, but probably go even further in many instances.

M: It didn't hurt that the attempt to repeal 14-B, for example, had failed?

D: Well, yes. There were certain things. Take, for instance, the Landrum Griffin Bill was enacted, and then the veto by Truman, and then it was carried in Congress. I had just set aside my opinion about certain things. [?] And the Social Security. I was the other day in the White House. We had a conference with Nixon, and the question of Social

Security came up. Someone turned to him and said, "President Johnson, before he stepped out, recommended 10 percent Social Security. Wilbur Mills, the chairman of the committee, recommended 10 percent. You, Mr. President, are stingy. You have recommended only 7 percent." And I have faith, although it wouldn't be this year because they're all waiting; both parties, the Democratic and the Republican party, want to do it in an election year. And I have faith that Wilbur Mills will be more successful than President Nixon.

M: Wilbur Mills is my congressman, Mr. Dubinsky.

D: On this call, he'll be more because he's sincere and he's intent; he'll be able to carry it because after all it's a Democratic Congress. And Wilbur Mills being for it, which means part of the South at least, will be with him. At least part of it. And on top of the minimum wage bill, they'll feel different, they'll vote different. That's the trouble. That's why Nixon is so cautious about a minimum wage, because he has certain obligations to the South. But on Social Security, I think there's a good chance. The President has a lot of influence, surely he has influence with his party--mainly with his party, influence with the country, and influence with some Democratic legislators that have domestic problems and have got to yield to the wishes of the people of their own communities. But nevertheless there are certain powerful sources when it comes to a question of this sort. I have faith that we're going to get a good Social Security, maybe not as good as we want, but it will be better than President Nixon recommends.

(interruption)

M: Any more recollections, any other instances with Mr. Johnson that stand out in your mind that you think might be interesting to recall here, Mr. Dubinsky?

D: Naturally was discussions about Vietnam.

M: He discussed Vietnam with the labor people?

D: Oh, yes, very much so. Vietnam, politics, general problems, of course we were discussing. And he was interested in getting our view. You know, the labor movement supported him a hundred percent. Our union was one of the first unions that came out with an endorsement of that. And naturally he knew, not only because we were his friends, but we believe because--even with Nixon the other day when I was there: I wouldn't say who, but there are some of us that know Russia a little bit better than some of these big statesmen.

M: Certainly you have reason to.

D: Some of us. And I know one of them told them, "You'd better look out. Don't believe everything they say. They've other motives, and they're shrewd people, I want to tell you something." And you know what I know? I know that Averell Harriman when he was ambassador to Russia, he was the first one who knew the Russian people and the Russian situation. Even my old friend Franklin Roosevelt--he was taken for a ride and he recognized it a little bit too late.

M: But Governor Harriman knew?

D: Governor Harriman knew.

M: And Mr. Johnson made good use of Governor Harriman.

D: He made good use of him. Because I remember in 1948 when he came back from Moscow in a confidential meeting of the executive council of the AFL, and he related the experiences and his views. And those of us who knew the Russian revolution and the history of each individual in those days, we saw--at least I and a few more of us saw--a man that knew the Russian situation as no one else in those days, back in '48. That's

twenty-one years ago. Now you'll find many more, and others do. Knew Russia better than any one of the statesmen and any one of the diplomats and any one of the government officials. Averell Harriman.

And when he spoke when he was at a dinner the other day at Franklin D. Roosevelt March of Dimes, he said, "We don't know the Russians well enough."

M: Still learning.

D: Yes, still learning. "We don't know the Russians well enough."

M: Do you think Mr. Johnson understood this?

D: I don't know whether he understood it so well, the Russians, because he didn't have close contact with them.

M: But he took advice of people who--

D: But, yes, he knew people. He knew quite a number of people that knew the Russian situation very well, and no doubt they had a certain influence on him.

M: Did he consult with you and other labor leaders about the 1968 political situation?

D: No.

M: You didn't know in advance.

D: His statement--I think I saw him in the White House about three weeks before he made the statement, or two weeks, I don't remember now. There was no indication whatsoever.

M: So you were as surprised as the nation was?

D: Quite. No indication whatsoever. It may have been on his mind already, and probably there was no decision by then, but it may have been on his mind, but no indication whatsoever.

M: Did he ever give you any indication of why he decided to do that?

D: No. Since then I did not see him.

M: That was the last time?

D: I saw him at a dinner, and we have correspondence going on between us. I just received two days ago a note from him. He read an article about me, and he said my friend Hubert Humphrey sent it to him because he knew that L. B. Johnson would want to read it. "And I read it with great interest, and I hope I'll sometimes be as productive as you are."

M: I think he's keeping busy down in Texas. He has got quite a group of people down there. I certainly don't want to stop your recollections. You can just tell stories about instances where you've been involved with the President as long as you will.

D: You're interested in Johnson.

M: Yes.

D: As I told you before, when they asked me for interviews about the others, I managed to be excused. I was able to manage that, that I should be excused. But in Johnson's case, I couldn't attempt even to do it.

M: I want you to know that we greatly appreciate it, and I think that in the future maybe somebody who looks back can take advantage of these things some years down the line, and will be very glad that you did agree to do so this time.

D: Because I received the honors, degrees from universities, medals even from foreign countries, and some of the letters and the medal that he gave me before he stepped out of the White House I consider the most honorable thing that happened in my life. And the fact that at that meeting he mentioned my name and singled me out is another indication of the feeling that he has for me, and he knows my feeling for him. And that's all. He knows that I was loyal, I was devoted, and was helpful.

And the position that we took on Vietnam originally because our unions are viewed with prestige and certain standing in the community. In many instances, we gave the guideline for the labor movement.

M: Yes, you did, and have for many years.

D: Because of the Marshall Plan. The labor movement had no position, and at that time the CIO was in existence, and they were leftist and some communistically inclined, and they were against the Marshall Plan. It was our resolution that we introduced to the AFL--at that time there was no AFL-CIO. They adopted the Marshall Plan. And then in 1949 when there was an international labor conference on the Marshall Plan, and I happened to be one of the two delegates that attended that conference, and then General Clay, when he was the administrator of West Berlin, sent a plane for us there to visit.

It is only the last twenty years, I would say, probably, that the labor movement became politically and internationally conscious. Up until that time there were a limited number of unions, so-called progressive unions, of that view and that conception and that philosophy. And you remember, sometimes when we advocated unemployment insurance or Social Security or Minimum Wages, we were considered anarchists. And at that time Communists were not in existence. So you were considered Bolsheviks, couldn't pronounce it even Bolsheviks.

M: Just for wanting a decent minimum wage.

D: That's right. Then Roosevelt came, and it became the law of the land. It became a respectable thing.

M: Things have changed a great deal.

D: And I happen to be of that generation that lived this part of it. And I've lived to see the change that took place in the labor movement that

we advocated sixty years ago. It became the law of the land, and the way of life, the general policy. And you remember, probably, when Roosevelt came in with the New Deal, and Landon was a candidate in 1936, and he was supposed to have been elected on a platform to oppose the social reform, his criticism was they weren't good enough because he wanted to get votes. His criticism was they weren't good enough, that was at that time. And they all had to do it; they all had to follow. But in a limited way, a more restricted way, even Nixon now, even Nixon. He probably wouldn't go very far; he will probably be slow, and give a little bit here, and a little bit there, but will not be what it was before.

M: You have a whole department in Washington dedicated to your welfare, at least. Did Johnson's Labor Department do a good job for--?

D: Oh, yes. Naturally, there was a bureaucracy there, and I wouldn't say that everything was well, that everything was perfect. This you have in a democracy, and you have it under Johnson. You have bad fellows that made him bad reputations. Some of it probably are partially responsible for not knowing the people with whom they surrounded themselves, and I don't mention any names, but it's Washington and New York or in the states. And the same thing will happen with anyone that will be there. But as long as the proper leadership is being provided, and the intentions are good, and the intelligence is there, and they're willing to serve the purpose and the cause, you've got to allow for some of their mistakes, too.

M: One of Mr. Johnson's false starts or mistakes maybe was didn't he suggest one time merging the Commerce and Labor Departments? Did you ever talk to him about that?

D: He did. And he got the opposition of the labor movement, and he dropped it.

M: He talked to you about that?

D: He talked to the executive council, not only to me, to all of us.

M: And the executive council advised him not to?

D: They advised him--their lieutenants and committees for the President and everything else and he realized that it was not because we were stubborn. We were sensitive, but the problem was increased because the labor movement is a big slice of the population of the nation and entitled, just as the same as you had a Department of Commerce, entitled. And if you merged it, you'll have chaos and confusion and dissension. One will watch the other one, and one will blame the other one. Gradually, they were convinced on that.

M: Wasn't it the railroads that went on strike when he first became President?

D: Yes.

M: Some of his critics said that Mr. Johnson handled it in such a way that it was going to destroy collective bargaining. Did you think that was--?

D: It's the general policy of the labor movement to have freedom of action without interference of government. The fact of the matter was that Gompers was opposed to any kind of legislation, even Social Security and unemployment insurance. That was the philosophy in those days of the labor movement. But ours were different. Our side won.

And then in 1934 for the first time, at an AFL Convention, they came out for unemployment insurance. They deviated, and they changed their policy. And of course Gompers was no more president. Gompers died in 1935, but this was 1934. But the New Deal, Roosevelt put it on the map of the nation. And the labor movement had to fall in line. If the

President of the United States advocated it, how could a representative of labor be against it!

M: Right. When it's for labor's benefit.

D: And if it wasn't for labor's benefit, who was it for? And so, in many other fields.

M: I certainly thank you for your time, sir. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

D: No, unless you have any further questions.

M: You've been most cooperative and delightful. It's a real honor to get a chance to meet you and listen to you, and we certainly appreciate it.

D: Listen, you could talk of Johnson . . . Some things should be made public. In some things it will be up to him, what he wants, surely I would respect his wishes. And I want to be frank with you. I don't think I have any secrets through it all, because there was no conspiracy between us. There was always mutual admiration and mutual respect for one another, and cooperation. And things that I believe in, and my friends and my people, that we have presented, we went all out for it. Things that I did not believe, most of the time he respected it. Sometimes for political reasons, he had to insist, but he knew that I have a right to my opinion as he has a right to his. And I had to consider not only him, I had to consider also my position. I had to consider my relations with my men, with the union, and with the party that I was affiliated, and what I think is for the best interest, let's say, of the city or the state. National, he is the expert.

M: And, as you said, he at least gave sympathy when he couldn't give--

D: That's right. I had understanding for him, and he had understanding for me.

M: That's about as good a summary of a relationship as I think anybody could ever give, Mr. Dubinsky, and we certainly thank you.

D: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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By DAVID DUBINSKY

to the

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