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Oral History of Ralph Dungan AC 74-207

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INTERVIEWEE: RALPH DUNCAN

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

April 18, 1969

M: Let's begin simply by identifying you. You are Ralph Dungan, and you are currently Chancellor of Education of the State of New Jersey.

D: Chancellor of Higher Education.

M: Higher Education, excuse me. Your positions in government during the Johnson Administration were as special assistant from the time Mr. Johnson became President until late in 1964, when you were appointed as Ambassador to Chile, where you remained until 1967 when you took this job.

D: Correct, July of '67, right.

M: Let's go back, beginning with your career with Senator Kennedy in the '50's. Did you have occasion during that time to work with Senator Johnson in his leadership position?

D: Yes, I did. Not so much directly with him, in fact I would say my direct contacts with him in that period were infrequent, although when we got bills to the floor in the labor field, especially minimum wage, Dr. Douglas' Pension and Welfare Fund Bill, and Senator Kennedy's Landrum-Griffin Bill--

M: What turned out to be the Landrum-Griffin Bill.

D: Right. My principal contacts with the office actually were through Jerry Siegel who, as you will recall, then was Secretary of the Majority, and through Walter Jenkins when we dealt directly with Senator Johnson's Texas office. So that my associations with President Johnson at that time were intermittent, let me put it

that way.

M: Were the staff-to-staff relations between the Kennedy staff and the Johnson staff any different than they were with any other senator at that time?

D: Yes, I would say they were not especially good. When I was in the senator's office directly--Senator Kennedy's office--that only really covered a year when I was a legislative assistant. Then I went over to the committee staff. During that year, however, and that was the year '57-'58 roughly, Sorensen was the other principal assistant and his reputation was not long in terms of getting along with other senatorial staffs. So like my predecessor Lee White, I conducted a good deal of the relationships with other staff people, and that was particularly true with the Johnson office.

And of course at that time, obviously, there was some degree of building competition for the presidential nomination in 1960, so the general attitude of the office was in the political context, whereas there was business to get done that required contacts from time to time, and I usually took care of them. And I think Feldman followed me, he did the same thing.

M: What about Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson's personal working together. Did their business require and justify quite a lot of this, or not so much?

D: Oh yes, I think they had a cool, more or less proper relationship. I don't think it was ever what I would call a warm or trusting one. After all, they were contenders after a very big prize.

M: That was fairly clearly understood by both camps?

D: Well I would certainly say that, I can't speak for the Johnson camp,

but it damned sure was true of the Kennedy camp, very true. I mean we recognized him very early in the game as probably the most serious contender in that nomination.

M: That has to influence the relationship.

D: Oh, absolutely. And, as you know, in the Senate, particularly when one of the contenders is Majority Leader, there are all sorts of opportunities to zing anyone who is aspiring to anything.

M: Was there some of that done?

D: Well, you know, what the hell, you always get a little bit paranoid about it. I'm sure there were, and we felt it probably more times than it actually was occurring. Yes, there were. I can't think of specific things, but I can think of the general feeling on our part that you had to watch him like a hawk, and we did!

M: He'd been there a long time, and he knew how to do it too!

D: Yes, that's right.

M: And if any zinging was going to be done, he was going to be doing it!

R: That's absolutely right.

On the other hand, in the conduct of the work of the Senate, I must say, President Johnson really always put that--I always felt --first. Now that isn't to say that his own political predilections or prejudices didn't influence how he manipulated and operated the Senate. But I think, given that caveat, I never had the feeling that he was really using his Senate leadership position, in terms of the Senate's business, really to put anybody in a bad position, schedule us inconveniently.

I remember though that was a problem, particularly during the latter two years immediately preceding the nomination in 1960.

Kennedy was out in the country all the time, and there were times when the Senate's schedule and his schedule didn't exactly coincide. That is one of the areas where I think we used to think (personally, I believe, looking back on it somewhat irrationally) things were not being adjusted to suit our convenience.

M: Right. What about the campaign of 1960? Did you work actively in the preconvention campaign on the Kennedy staff?

D: Yes, I left that Hill around March on April of 1960 and went down the Hill to the S-L (?) Building and became part of the campaign staff at that point.

M: And then stayed with it through the convention, and were at the convention?

D: Right.

M: What kind of detail or recollections can you dredge up of the general decision-making that led to the vice presidency being offered to Mr. Johnson?

D: I don't really recall. I was not involved, except in a secondary or tertiary position. My beat at that convention, as it was many times during the preconvention period (tape interrupted by Mr. Dungan's secretary)--

M: You were talking about what your particular job had been in this convention.

D: I was our principal liaison with labor people, so that I didn't have, as many of my colleagues who were at that convention, a delegation or more, or particular people. I kind of wandered across the whole spectrum with labor delegates and labor leaders who were involved. On the other hand, I cannot say that, since labor was such an

important element in this particular decision we're talking about, that is, the vice presidential candidate, I didn't really have any influence at all. I received the information as to the choice with, I must say, a complete sense of shock and despair knowing--aside from my personal feelings--that the beat that I was covering, I knew that this would make the campaign more difficult.

M: How much trouble did the labor leaders make right at that first shock?

D: Oh, they raised hell. It was a terribly difficult period for many because a lot of them actually had been in the--they were never really terribly fond of John Kennedy, certain of them were, but I would say the labor movement as a whole was not enthusiastic about John Kennedy. He was too independent for them as so forth. And there was the whole Landrum-Griffin--the whole labor reform movement in the late '50's was more or less associated with the Kennedy name and with him personally, so he was not in good shape with labor. And I think the support that he got at the 1960 convention was not a little contributed to by an anxiety about Mr. Johnson, about whom they felt less confident. So that when Kennedy then turned around and made Mr. Johnson his Vice President, they really were tearing their hair out.

M: They really considered Johnson very distinctly anti-labor during that period.

D: Yes, I would say so.

M: With pretty good justification in your view?

D: Well, you know, Mr. Johnson had his constituency too, and Texas was not exactly a warm place. Brown and Root, for instance, a big element

I understand in Texas politics and political money, and hell's bells, things that we were doing that were favorable to the building trades didn't sit well with people like Brown and Root. So, whatever Mr. Johnson's attitudes were on labor questions, I would say that he was more accurately reflecting the attitude of his constituency than Mr. Yarborough, for instance.

M: What about the alleged strain on relations with Robert Kennedy and Mr. Johnson which some people say date from this vice president decision? Was this the first instance of it, or did that go back before then?

D: No. Look, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Robert Kennedy were, I would say, antipathetic personalities. They thought differently, always. I think it probably manifested itself most seriously in terms of political relationships at that period, maybe for the first time, I really don't know. I would think that that probably would have been the first time that it might have, although certainly in connection with the McClellan hearings, it might also, but I don't recall any incidents.

M: This was the earlier hearings when Robert Kennedy was counsel.

D: The Hoffa--

M: Yes. What about after the election and the inauguration of Mr. Johnson as Vice President, did you have occasion to have a close idea of how Mr. Kennedy saw what he wanted Johnson to be doing as Vice President, what role he wanted Johnson to play?

D: No, I think Kennedy belonged in that school of thought that really saw the vice presidency as a non-job. On the other hand, Mr. Kennedy, having that feeling, was very, very concerned about Mr. Johnson's

position and that he be treated with dignity to the extent that that could be done in the context of the job. There were many times when I heard him tell the members of the staff who dealt more directly with the Johnson people than I did--although I had quite a bit to do with them indeed, because of the relationship that I had built up with Walter on the Hill. When there would be sticky points in the White House, where the Johnson office felt they were getting screwed or something had gone awry, Walter would often call me and then I would try to deal with other people on the staff who were a little more hawkish--considerably more hawkish than I was. I felt, I think quite a bit like the President did about Mr. Johnson.

M: You were the liaison man then, in a sense, in addition to your other duties which were considerable.

D: Yes, but you know I would say off and on, it wasn't anything that I spent a lot of time at. There were intermittent situations that would come up and they were usually relatively petty, objectively speaking, but pretty serious and important in terms of Mr. Johnson's perception of them.

M: Did Mr. Johnson generally get included in the really important things, or was he frequently left out for one reason or another?

D: I would say that by and large he was included, although I'm sure there are many times that he was excluded and probably more by inadvertence than deliberately. Again, unless the President really thought, "Gee, I'd better have Lyndon here," nobody else would think about it. That staff was an intensely personally oriented staff, the kind of thing that Johnson tried to get when he became President, but I submit you can't force that kind of thing. That has to come

out of relatively long association. I always felt that the attempt in effect to enforce a 150 percent loyalty and love was his greatest undoing as a politician and as a President in terms of that narrow spectrum of the White House. I know my own reaction was that way, it was complicated obviously by my relationship to President Kennedy. You know, what the hell, my attitude in staying on at his request afterwards was basically, he's the President, and we owe the loyalty to the office and to him. But you can't force the kind of loyalty that he wanted on the kind of people who were in the White House under Kennedy, and I don't think he was very successful, myself, in doing it with the people that came after us.

M: He ultimately, I think, had to go back and get people who had served him for a long time back in the '50's, and perhaps that was why.

D: That's right. Like Tex Goldschmidt, Harry, and all those guys.

M: One of your jobs for President Kennedy was in the area of recruiting executive talent. Did Mr. Johnson get some of his people into positions where he wanted them while Mr. Kennedy was still President?

D: Relatively few. It was always a sweat. I did not handle these. The judgeships were handled from the Justice Department to Kenney O'Donnell and then to the President, mainly because of their highly political nature, and also because of the relationship between the Attorney General and President Kennedy. But I can recall some conversations about judicial appointments that caused all sorts of pain and sweat.

M: Mr. Johnson wanted to be able to continue sort of the patronage arrangements that he'd had before.

D: That's right. And that made it very difficult, I must say. ³In my

opinion this is one place that Mr. Johnson was kind of not living with the vice presidency. He never could recognize that he was no longer senator from Texas, but Vice President of the United States, and his attempt to continue to control the political environment in Texas obviously put him in conflict with Yarborough and Tower and the whole Texas establishment. He just wasn't there anymore. And I must say that this is one thing that Kennedy never really understood--John Kennedy. He always thought of President Johnson as being a very important influence, a very important actor in the whole advancement of the President's program on the Hill. He thought Lyndon ought to be up there really beating their heads in, as Lyndon tried to make Hubert do, you see. And Kennedy never recognized that Lyndon as Vice President didn't have this clout that he had as Majority Leader.

M: You've got to be a member of the club, you can't be an ex-member.

D: That's right. There's nothing so dead as an ex-member. And I think as Johnson imposed unrealistic standards on Humphrey, so did Kennedy on Johnson, although I must say my impression always was that Johnson never really drove himself in that respect--I couldn't see that he ever did anyway. We certainly didn't think that he did.

M: This mention you made of the trouble with Mr. Johnson and the Texas senators is at least part of the background for President Kennedy's last trip.

D: That's right.

M: Was that clearly understood as an errand for Lyndon Johnson?

D: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I was in on the conversations in the weeks prior to the decision to make that trip. And Kennedy made that trip,

I can say for all history and posterity, without any doubt, as a favor to Lyndon Johnson.

M: It was then an errand of that kind?

D: Absolutely.

M: Is that why some of the Kennedy staff apparently were against it, certainly not because they thought it would be dangerous but because they didn't think he ought to be doing chores for Lyndon Johnson?

D: No, I never heard that. I don't really think there was anything of that. Because as it was a favor for Lyndon Johnson, it was also a favor for John F. Kennedy, because it was to his interest that the party in Texas be united in terms of the 1964 election, and Kennedy was interested in it from a self-interest point of view. But that wouldn't have been the place that he would have started to build a party that was loyal to him, except Lyndon's strong urging. As you probably know, Adlai Stevenson had been in Dallas a couple of weeks before and came back and reported that, "boy, that was really a mean town."

M: There had been an incident of some kind.

D: There had been an incident, right. And so there was some of that feeling as a result of Stevenson's trip on the part of the staff, especially Ken O'Donnell and we weren't enthusiastic. My advice wasn't asked for and not given, and I didn't feel that strongly anyway, I didn't know that much about it. But I was in on conversations when I know this point was argued very much, and Kennedy would come back and say, "But Lyndon Johnson really wants me to do it and I've got to do it."

M: What about the immediate aftermath of the assassination? Do you have

any strong impressions that linger on from Mr. Johnson's first hours or first days?

D: Yes, I do. In the first hours and the first days, particularly the first week, I would say he was an extremely lonely and confused man. Everybody was kind of beat and he was beat in a sense, psychologically more than anyone else. He really was distraught as far as the private side of him, as those of us who were around close saw. Terribly dependent! You know, he was the greatest bull-shitter, and is, that ever walked down the pipe. But I remember one night talking to him when the question was whether any of us were going to stay on, it was very uncertain, he said "I need you guys more than he ever needed you." And to me he said, "I don't know anybody." And I said, "Aw, heavens, Mr. President, you know a hundred thousand more people than I'll ever know through the length and breadth of this country." "No," he said, "You don't understand. I really don't know people. I don't know the kinds of people that we're going to need," and so forth. That was genuine. If you took away the exaggeration, I know that was genuine, or I thought it was genuine at the time. I would say that he was a figure that one certainly could have sympathized with.

M: Did this being distraught and beat and so on lead him to make perhaps some mistakes of tactfulness toward the family or toward the Kennedy people that came back to haunt him later on?

D: I never found that. No, I didn't think so. The Kennedy family were pretty shook themselves, pretty sensitive on Lyndon anyway, but I thought he went out of his way, everything I saw, he was going out of his way to be sympathetic, not only to the family but to all

of us.

M: What about the Johnson people right after the transition, the staff people who came with him? Did they throw their weight around in ways that irritated the feelings of the people who were there pretty bad?

D: Oh, they did, I think there was a little--as far as I'm concerned, no--but my observation is that there was the greatest problem with O'Donnell. And I would say that was 90 percent O'Donnell's fault, understandable because of the stress and strain, but also because of his own personality. And Lyndon's attempt to hold him, particularly, he and O'Brien, who had a symbolic value for President Johnson, as well as a practical one--and I think he knew that practical one--the problem is how do you take a guy who had the position physically and otherwise in that operation and at the same time have your own guys right in there making those kinds of decisions!

So there was a long time--long time in a matter of weeks--tension going on there as to who was going to sit in that office right outside the President's office, control of the phone calls and who got into see him and all that business.

M: That can be important, like you say, even though in itself it is not very.

D: Absolutely critical. I mean, if I had been President Johnson, I would have just said, "Out. Kenney, I really want you, you sit over here on the other side of me, or down the hall," or something. And if O'Donnell had been smart, he would have said, "Mr. President, I'm delighted to stay on with you or not" as the case may be, "But in any event I'm not going to sit out here. You need your own guy here."

M: Were the Johnson people pretty good? Did he bring a pretty good staff with him in that first period when you were still there?

D: Well, I must say by and large, yes. Certainly, Walter was the Rock of Gibraltar and a terrific guy with good judgment. He and I worked very closely in that difficult transition period. Busby, I guess, came along a little later.

M: A little bit, right.

D: I would say they were all pretty good people. Let's see, who was it that came in immediately with him?

M: I guess Reedy came with him.

D: George.

M: And Bill Moyers must have come right in there for awhile and then left after that.

D: I would say as far as the Kennedy staff were concerned and certainly as far as I personally am concerned, no strain at all. They were competent guys who picked up as quickly as anybody could in an environment that was completely foreign and strange to them. They worked god-awful hours.

There was one little guy, I remember, who was responsible for Eric Goldman's appointment ultimately, who I thought was a real menace to everybody. I never could figure out why Walter thought he was--

M: Is this Valenti?

D: No, no, no. Not Valenti. Valenti's very sharp, a very good fellow.

M: I was going to say, that would have been a surprise.

D: No, this was a little guy, I even forget his name, he was a Princeton graduate, and pretty fresh out of Princeton, and I guess he had

worked up in the Johnson Senate office at one time or another, and Walter had him around. He was an itch, but not that significant. Insignificant item in history.

M: I get the impression sometimes, talking to various people, and nobody really says so I guess, but that a lot of Mr. Johnson's troubles dated from Walter Jenkins' departure, that he was really a strong rock.

D: Absolutely. There wasn't anybody around who I think knew how to handle, if I can use that expression, Mr. Johnson as well as Walter did. He was sympathetic. As a matter of fact, Mr. Johnson really took from Walter Jenkins his substance. He is that way with people, you're very well aware, and historians have remarked it already so I don't say anything here that people don't know. He really took the substance, the psychological and spiritual substance of people and sucked it right out like a vampire, if you let him. And this was the problem of being loyal to Mr. Johnson, as opposed to being loyal to the President. I would say his greatest defect in character was exactly that, that he could not leave a man whole with his dignity, and his own self-esteem.

M: It's not either, is it, so much a mistreating an individual?

D: Although it sometimes takes that form.

M: By all accounts, at least, there was some mistreatment of close staff aides.

D: Reaming them out, but it was his mental image of what loyalty to him meant. I remember a very vulgar expression that he used once to me that expressed it very well in talking of an appointment. He used two of them as a matter of fact. "I want every guy and I want his

pecker in my pocket!" That's one expression. The other expression was, "I want a guy to be 150 percent loyal, kiss my ass in Macy's window, and stand up and say "Boy wasn't that sweet!" Every man in that kind of a political position really wants that. He seldom expresses it as colorfully, or as directly, as Mr. Johnson does, and he very seldom enforces, or tries to enforce, that kind of a standard. He may want it, but Johnson tried. And indeed, he used to test it! You've heard the story, you remember it was all in the press about Bill Moyers either wanting the Bundy job or something, Under Secretary of State or something, and how he put Moyers in his place. There are a thousand stories that have been in the press, and many of them are true, I'm certain. I mean, they ring true to me, I wasn't there. But I saw enough when I was there to know that they just fit completely.

M: Did the relationships with his staff people, yourself and others that you were around, vary depending on his mood? Did you have highs and lows with him, where he'd get off of you for awhile, this type of thing?

D: Yes. But I'll tell you something. In that year with most of the Kennedy staff with him, he was extremely perceptive about the lengths to which he could go with Kennedy staff people. In the early days, I would say the first couple of months after his assuming the presidency, we worked very closely with him. I worked with some variations, substantial but not essential variations, the same way I'd worked with Kennedy, on appointments, for instance. That began to change as his own staff came on. But during all that year, he was very careful not to play the same game with the old Kennedy staff

that he did with his own. We were treated with a great deal of deference. And while he would say for instance what he did to me about people whom we were appointing, he would never have said that to me. Never!

M: Third person.

D: Yes. It was always about somebody else. Psychologically it had the same effect on me, to tell you the truth, and it impaired my ability, speaking personally now, to be of service to him, because I wouldn't go out and recruit a guy for whom I had respect if I thought he was going to come into a situation in which he was going to be denigrated in any way. I mean I couldn't do it in conscience.

M: The Kennedy people began to leave during the year that you were there, and ultimately there seems to have been quite a lot of outside sniping at Mr. Johnson by some of these people. Had that begun in significant amount by the time you left?

D: There were certain people like Schlesinger, for instance, who declared war, I guess the day that John F. went into the ground.

M: Is that pretty important, or is that insignificant?

D: I don't think it's important. I think you could have expected it. What the hell, Schlesinger is a social critic and he has that kind of a temperament. There was some of that going on over the luncheon table over at that place up on 17th Street and so forth, but mostly private, I would say.

M: I was just wondering, these people are the ones who had close contacts with the media and the opinion makers and so on, could they have sold this type of view--

D: I don't think they were trying to sell it. But I do think in certain

cases it came out, and I'm certain I myself was guilty of this, particularly in the latter months that I was in the White House. In a certain sense when you have contact with these people as friends as well as professionals, without being conscious about it you do it. It's a bad thing, and it's nothing to be proud of, but I think one does it, especially if you don't have this sense of loyalty. It's tough not to do it, if the only thing you're loyal to in an institution, like the presidency. So I'm sure we were all guilty of that and will pay for it somewhere along the line.

M: You said your work continued, at least in the beginning, pretty much the same substance work, pretty much the same as it had under President Kennedy, in appointments, as one of the examples. Did Mr. Johnson's requirements or standards change any really from what Mr. Kennedy had expected?

D: Not significantly. But as time went on, and I would say in a month, two, three months afterward I began to find that there would have to be two or three or even half a dozen names for any position that we were seeking to fill. And that I couldn't get decisions. They would get spit back. I didn't deal, in other words, with the same degree of confidence. On most appointments, especially after we became established in the Kennedy days, unless there were special circumstances, all of which I should have known about anyway before I took them up, they got appointed.

M: And you'd just submit one or a few--

D: Or I'd say, "This guy has this strength and this one the other, and there's this political or that political angle to it, and this is what we need." And we'd talk them over and bango! It became more

formalistic with Johnson. There would be a whole dossier, and there wasn't as much give and take about the nature of the job and so forth. And I think quite understandably that Johnson began to feel the need of his own people.

M: I was going to say, was one of the things he wanted to do was, you know, clean house but not really say so? "Get my men into the departments" and this kind of thing.

D: Yes, but it wasn't so much the clean house thing, and I don't think he really ever had that feeling. I think he just wanted his administration to have his stamp on it, and that's perfectly legit and I used to keep saying to him, "God, Mr. President, you've got to have your own guy in here, this is a critical thing, the kind of people that are selected." What really happened was is that I went out of business. I first went out of business on the Latin American area damned fast. So that I was really kind of putting my two-cents in very timorously.

M: Those jobs are not very explicitly defined, anyway and when you start going out of business--

D: You go out of business very gently. All of a sudden there's nobody listening to you.

M: And that's what happened on the appointments business?

D: Yes, that happened too. Then John Macy came in and began to take over a stronger role in the whole thing. Other people got into it. The one I remember with the greatest distaste was Liz Carpenter, who always used to call up and have 50 women--

M: The east wing side?

D: Particularly Liz. And I used to tell her to go to hell, and told her

if she wanted to run the appointments she could come on over and do it, "Well, the President said to me he wants more women," and I said, "Well, bullshit!" There was a lot of that stuff going on.

M: The President didn't ever say to you, for example, that he wanted more women or more of any minority groups people?

D: Oh yes, oh yes, he was very strong on the women's side and I used to have to keep a tabulation of how many women he had appointed and how many of this, and that, and the other thing.

The Kennedy way, and this was because we had all worked with him for so long, you didn't have to make things explicit, you sensed it. Mr. Johnson was a new man. We were new to him and he was new to us and we didn't have that same sense, so that the thing then became more bureaucratic, if you will. Six dossiers for every job, reports on how we stood on this and that and the other thing, and it wasn't as much fun. It wasn't as loose, and neither was it as efficient in terms of rapid movement and decision. Things slowed up, I think the record will show at least on the personnel side and in other areas in the spring of 1964. I think they slowed up a little bit, all sorts of decisions, because he was using fundamentally not only at the White House but otherwise the apparatus of the Kennedy Administration. As he advanced along in time he became more reserved, more skeptical, more unsure that what was being flushed onto him, whether it was a personnel decision or anything else, represented the Johnson point of view. And for awhile in this period, I used to deal a lot through Walter and I'd let Walter carry the ball.

M: Did it get harder to recruit good men for President Johnson as compared to what had been in your role with Kennedy?

D: There wasn't the same old magic, the country was different, there's no doubt, in attitudes of people in coming to Washington; it was a matter of uncertainty. What was the new President going to be like. But only to that extent. I would say we did not have a significant amount of difficulty in recruiting good people with the advent of Mr. Johnson.

M: You may be able to answer a question that has puzzled me because I've gotten answers on both sides. Were there actual instances of people whose appointment had been decided upon and then undecided upon because of newspaper leaks?

D: Yes, oh yes.

M: That did happen?

D: Oh, yes. That was terribly irritating, and another manifestation of this--you know--"I've got to be at the center of power thing." Oh yes, there were. I can't think of some specific ones, but I can tell you damned sure that there were.

M: And sometimes the individuals themselves probably not the source of the leak involved, a lot of people have to know.

D: Yes. Well, it's so easy to have happen because, when I was doing it anyway, hell, I was doing checks on people--two or three or four people--third persons who I would ask about John Jones, and oftentimes I would say "John Jones is being considered for something." And sometimes Johnson forced or almost made those situations happen that way. He would delay in making the decision and then the contacts or the conversations--as time went on you have to make a decision if you're going to make it, and then you get your announcement out, but if you dilly-dally there are enough people involved that it's

almost morally certain to leak out.

M: Right.

D: And that happened on a couple of occasions.

M: You said you went out of business on Latin America pretty quick. Did that occur in the Panama crunch right at the beginning of the administration?

D: Yes, it did. I was sent down to Panama with Spider--the Under Secretary of Defense--

M: Cyrus Vance?

D: Cy Vance, right. We went down and waded through the muck of that insurrection, or pack, and the gas and all that kind of stuff, so that I wasn't really out of it at that point. But I wasn't really in it, either.

M: Did President Johnson send you or did Mac Bundy send you?

D: No, Johnson.

M: Johnson sent you down there?

D: Yes. But I don't really know what motivated him on that. Maybe this is an area where Kennedy had moved out pretty quickly and he felt that this was an area where he could establish his independence of the old Kennedy policy rather quickly. I don't know, to tell you the truth. But he did, I think, make a very conscious effort to say "Now there's a Johnson Latin American policy."

M: How did you relate to the Bundy operation? You weren't a member of the NSC operation, technically, were you?

D: That's correct. The way I got into the Bundy operation was after Cuba won the Bay of Pigs, which among the Mafia--that is O'Donnell, myself, and O'Brien--we had lunch one day right shortly after that

and Kenny was mas o menos involved in that business, O'Brien wasn't at all, and I was virtually not at all.

M: That was a good thing not to be involved in.

D: Yes. Well, maybe we could have avoided it. But in any event, we decided, the three of us, they two asked me to go to lunch with them and I went and the conversation went something like: "We don't know a damned thing about foreign affairs, you don't know very much more but you know more than we." I knew a hell of a lot more than they thought I knew. And, "Therefore we want you to be one of the inner people who keeps a watch on that thing, and that Goddamned Goodwin and Schlesinger, crazy nuts on Latin America, and why don't you?" So I appointed myself in effect the liaison guy for Africa and Latin American and the White House because the NFC staff was not that highly developed at that point.

M: Bundy didn't have specialists as they later had at that point?

D: That's right. Goodwin was kind of involved in it, and Schlesinger stuck his nose in in Latin America and Africa and anything else he wanted to. So from then on, right after the Bay of Pigs, I used to go to the staff meeting every morning. It also was useful in terms of the head-hunting side of the foreign affairs side, and I got in that way too. So I knew what was going on, what the requirements in various countries were, and that could relate to my responsibility as far as ambassadorial and aid mission director appointments. And I got in on the foreign affairs field backways through that whole personnel side of the operation.

M: And you ultimately had some responsibilities in the foreign aid field, too.

D: Right, same way.

M: But that was more because of the lack of development at that time of the Bundy staff than anything else; in other words you were filling a void that wasn't filled by anybody else then?

D: Yes, also because of my past interests and experience in government. I had worked on that for awhile.

M: What happened to the Bundy operation when Mr. Johnson took over? Was there a fairly sharp change?

D: No, there wasn't. Bundy was, for all intent and purposes, very high on the totem pole. He played it partly out of institutional loyalty and I think partly out of self-interest.

M: You said that you shortly went out of business on Latin America. Was that because of some specific advice that you gave that the President didn't like?

D: Oh no. I think that this was just that this was probably the first area, or one of the first, that Mr. Johnson, in effect, took over.

M: Sometimes people have said in analyzing him that he had some kind of special feel or interest for Latin American affairs generally.

D: Well I think he had kind of a romantic, Tex-Mex view of Latin America, and feeling of special relationship because of the Texas-Mexican proximity. I personally felt that that relationship and that knowledge of the Spanish speaking people, to win the Mexicans down along the border, always really distorted his view of Latin American relations.

M: Well, he certainly got into public relations trouble with Latin American policy fairly soon, Panama and a year later in the Dominican Republic. Was he taking bad advice or was that his predilection that got him into those difficulties?

D: I would say the Panama situation was not at all attributable to Johnson, and indeed if anything that can be laid at the feet of the Kennedy Administration for not having, as we started to do, Carl Kazen and I very early in the game try to square that business away. In a sense that was an accident, like a lot of those little accidents of history, but in another sense it was a failure on our part, on the Kennedy Administration's part, to take enough aggressive action to forestall the kind of situation that arose there. It was a very tinderboxy situation and we knew it, we knew it early in the game; we started to move toward it and set up mechanisms and so forth, but the mechanisms never really delivered reasonable solutions to the pressures that were building up and were always there. So that was strictly something that got dropped in Johnson's lap. I think he began making his mistakes, however, in terms of who he depended on within the government, at that stage in the game.

M: That early?

D: Yes. I say this, knowing full well that this is with the advice and the assistance of hindsight. It's easier to perceive it now. Let me recite the situation. We had a meeting in the Cabinet room on the Panama situation, both Secretaries McNamara and Rusk were there, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and some others, Bundy and myself, Spider Vance. And as usual Mr. Rusk was playing the Buddha game, and also as usual Mr. McNamara moved in aggressively in the face of a live situation. And he gave an order that day--he gave it, not even the President--the decision was made to do something with respect to the troops or something, and I forget what it was. And McNamara went out and put in the phone calls and gave the command,

which was basically a political command. It involved the Panama command, but it was a political judgment.

M: Everything there does.

D: Right. You're so right. So I would say at that time you began to see the very strong position of Mr. McNamara and the military, and Mr. Johnson fell into it very easily and very comfortably. Again, because in my judgment, now analyzing him a little bit, he dealt fundamentally in raw power. In some sense the subtleties, as great a politician as he is--the subtleties of politics were lost on him. I would summarize it myself by saying that he thought any problem could be solved with more--more people, more money, more food, more whatever. More!

M: More troops.

D: More. It was his basic solution to anything, and you can see it. It cuts across his domestic programs, you know, the way he loved long lists of accomplishments, all these quantitative. And it just so happens, in my opinion anyway, that most of the most difficult problems that we have, whether they're international or domestic, really require qualitative sensitivity and judgments and actions. And that was particularly true, if I may say so, perhaps not at the time that we were involved in the crisis with the gas and the bullets and all that kind of stuff, but underlying whatever you did to react to that physical upheaval was the necessity to have a sense of what the underlying political, and social, and psychological tensions were. And that was, in almost every occasion, completely lost on Lyndon B.

M: You mentioned then Rusk being out of a decision like this. Is it

not true then that Johnson sort of rehabilitated Rusk and the State Department generally as compared to the latter part of the Kennedy Administration?

D: Rehabilitated in the sense that he said often and loud, "My trust is in the Secretary of State and the apparatus of foreign affairs." He said it often--

M: But that didn't make it so?

D: But that's not the way he really operated. I mean the Bundy staff, if anything, grew in importance, particularly after Bundy left. I don't really think he operated essentially much different than Mr. Kennedy, or I think any other contemporary president has to operate, including the present one. You've got to build that cadre of personal staff who can help you be the chief executive.

M: Is it just an incapacity on the part of the State Department bureaucracy to fulfill that kind of role?

D: That's a long, complicated topic. Personally, I believe that the Department of State from an organizational and mostly from its own sense of what it is, that is, partaking more of the characteristics of a bureaucracy like the Civil Service or the ICC than an instrument of presidential--I don't think they have lost the sense of being, in a very special sense, an instrumentality of the presidency in whom responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs is placed.

M: More in between FSO's and civil servants, which used to be fairly clear-cut.

D: They really see themselves more as controllers of foreign policy themselves as an institution, not the President. They don't see themselves, for instance, in the same way that the Budget Bureau

does as a staff arm or an arm of the presidency, and I think that's where the great error comes, and that's the fundamental problem in the State Department. The foreign service and diplomacy goes on and on, we serve impartially every President.

Take the question of appointments, and this was from Mr. Rusk all the way down. "Goddamn it, Dean, the President, whether it's Kennedy or Johnson wants the best possible man for Ambassador to X, given all the requirements of X. He wants you to look through the foreign service first and see what's the best you've got there and stack that guy up against the whole universe of people who might be available. And then he wants your recommendation." The department and Mr. Rusk consistently would never suggest anybody from outside the foreign service, and they used to tell me, "That's yours and the Presidents responsibility to come up with alternate suggestions if you don't like ours from the foreign service."

M: And then they wouldn't be happy if an outsider was appointed?

D: Yes. They didn't want to take on that responsibility. Now, if I put myself in the position of Secretary of State I would look on myself not as another staff adviser to the President competing among others, I would be primus inter pares, practically the Prime Minister.

M: Which is traditionally for historians what the position of the Secretary of the Ship of State has been, or often been, at least.

D: In my opinion Mr. Rusk was just a Goddamned, big, overgrown, good Deputy Assistant Secretary!

M: That's a pretty good summary of qualifications.

D: He was a bureaucrat's bureaucrat. He would have been a very good career office in the military, he probably should have done that.

M: Your other area, before finishing your Latin American service and in winding up, your other area with Mr. Kennedy I believe involved relations with labor which was your older specialty. Did that continue under Mr. Johnson for awhile too?

D: No.

M: You went out of business on that at the time of the transition?

D: I maintained contact with the labor movement, but he moved in very rapidly to establish his own direct relationships, and conduct of business with the labor movement was almost all on the Lyndon Johnson-George Meany level.

M: In other words, he didn't need a liaison man to talk to George Meany, he did that alone. Had labor learned to trust him or tolerate him more by then?

D: By that time the relationship had changed, and it changed in my opinion basically shortly after his taking over the presidency, or moving into the presidency. He had two meetings and they were back to back. One was with the business council and the other one was with the trade union leaders. And I'll never forget it, I sat in on both meetings and I heard practically the same bullshit given to both groups and they both ate it up! He was phenomenal that way, it was pure blarney, but they really--

M: If it works!

D: Yes! Who can knock it, that's right! I found it so incongruous because the both speeches were almost identical.

M: And here the businessmen are suppose to be super sophisticates.

D: They're the worse, believe me, they're the worse ever. They go for it like trouts to flies. Fantastic!

M: Were there any other areas of your domain as a special assistant? You were liaison with the Catholic Church according to Patrick Anderson under Kennedy. Was there a necessity for a liaison with the Catholic Church under Johnson?

D: Only once did that come up big, and it wasn't so much the Catholic Church. There was an awful lot of pressure being put on by the Jewish community. At that time you will recall Vatican Council II was going full steam, and the question was on Jewish responsibility in the Catholic creed or in some part of the canon law that put the responsibility on the Jew for killing Christ. And it was a hell of a lot of pressure on some parts, on behalf of some parts of the Jewish community, the AJC part, if that means anything to you. There were many others within the Jewish community who felt that the United States government ought to stay the hell out of it, and that there were plenty of Jewish organizations that had direct access into church people and that it could be done that way.

I happen to feel very strongly on that. I am a Catholic, but, boy, you know, it's a curious thing. Kennedy was a hell of a lot more tough on separation of church and state than any Protestant would ever be, or Jew as far as that goes. And yet my colleague Myer Feldman at that time was carrying the load for the AJC on this question of getting the President to exert his influence on the churchmen in Rome to fix this particular thing up. I was screaming like hell "Stay out of it Mr. President, it's none of your business, you're going to get a lot of people down on you on both sides. And the Protestant community particularly are going to be down on your ear."

M: And he did stay out of it, didn't he?

D: And he did stay out of it. But, boy, that was a really rough little hassle between me and Feldman for the President's ear, and I was going around enlisting everybody's support that I could possibly get, short of Mrs. Johnson.

M: You'd been there long enough to know how to play the game by then too!

D: There's always that among staff people, you know.

M: There's no real passion for anonymity, is there?

D: Well, it's a question of not so much the outside world, it's a question of getting the ear of the boss.

M: Right, being the man that's important.

D: And we didn't have too much striving like that in either the Kennedy or Johnson staff, but there were issues. Feldman was a particularly persistent son-of-a-bitch, particularly on an issue that had some relationship to his influence in the Jewish community. He really was! I mean, if I'm described as the liaison or representative of Catholic interests in the White House, my God--about the most I ever did was to show priests and nuns through the President's office on visiting day. But Feldman was right in there, very strong on jets to Israel, or this kind of an issue.

M: Of course they have a lobby that's pretty good domestically.

D: Yes. The only thing I never could figure out really was it seemed to me that any presidential assistant, this is criticism of my friend Feldman, really ought to have been more objective than he was on this question. On the Jewish question he was for the Jew, he was not working for the President. And I said that to Johnson one time.

M: That goes outside the definition of an assistant, really.

D: And that was not true of many of my other Jewish colleagues. For instance, a guy like Lee White was meticulous, but I wouldn't say that of Mike.

M: What about then toward the end of '64, was it this feeling that you had that you were going out of business on various things that led you to accept the appointment as Ambassador to Chile?

D: Oh no. As a matter of fact, each of us had made a private agreement with the President, and I think they were all pretty much the same, those of us who stayed around, Larry O'Brien's I know was the same as mine, which was "Okay, Mr. President we'll stay until after the election," which was all that he asked. He said "All I want you to do is to stay with me until--." I kept saying, "Mr. President, you need your own staff, you don't want us around here, we're a bunch of has-beens. You need people that are loyal to you." And I made this speech a week after the assassination. And he went into his speech, you know, "I need you more than Jack Kennedy did," and all that kind of stuff, and he said, "Well, at least you can stay around until after the election." I said, "Okay, that's perfectly valid, in terms of the external world, and maybe what we can help you with, fine. You can depend on me. I'll stay here as long as you need me, and certainly until after the election." So that was the deal.

M: I see. So that was fairly explicitly understood. What were the circumstances of your appointment then?

D: Well, that was the deal that was made then in January. And then things got a little fuzzier as time went on, and it was really not clear that

I or anybody else was going to leave at a precise date. Those kinds of agreements are not that hard anyway. I had made up my mind that he really did need his own people, and more and more I was not underemployed, but not employed in the way that I wanted to be.

And then the Chilean election occurred in September, and people with whom I had maintained liaison with, the Christian democrats precisely, it became kind of a natural for people around town and in the department and elsewhere to think of me. I was trying to make career decisions and it was a comfortable, easy exit out of a situation that could have been for him difficult. You know, I obviously don't go and ask him. The word got to him indirectly. One night he said to me, "I understand you want to be Ambassador to Chile," and I said, "As a matter of fact, I would be interested in it." He said, "What the hell do you want to do that for? You make and break more ambassadors in a week than"--which also bothered me. But he had that attitude toward ambassadors, too, "they're out at the end of the string." But I said, "Yes, I know, but there's a time for people to go, and I think it's time for me to go from here. I have never done this kind of work and I'm interested in these people and I think I can do some good for our country and I would find it interesting." He said, "Okay, if you want to do it, fine."

M: Did that pretty well end your close personal contact with him, when you took that post and went to Chile?

D: I came back and I saw him once, very briefly, on one of my excursions back to the United States. Very brief conversation.

M: But he didn't consult you specially, as compared to other ambassadors, this type of thing because of your--?

D: No. I would not say that our relationship was ever that cozy. It was always pleasant and polite--more than that, warmish. But after you subtracted out the Lyndon Johnson blarney, I was just another guy around the place, frankly. I didn't have any special position under President Johnson.

M: You had one major flap, I believe, in Chile while you were there, the exposure of Camelot.

D: I had two.

M: Was there another?

D: The one's not very well known. The Camelot one was really not my fault. I had sent a secret cable up raising hell, but it was leaked out of the State Department for reasons that were less known--well, I know what the reasons were, in order to participate the thing as a public discussion thing. And as it turned out it happened just the way whoever figured it out--

M: It was purposely leaked.

D: It was purposely leaked, no doubt of it, and I've never been able to find out exactly who did it, although I have a pretty good idea. And it was done for essentially a good purpose, and it turned out right. It elevated the whole thing up to the presidential level and he set up a board, and so the effect was good. My role in it however was just an irate guy operating within the normal channels. I didn't have any intention of blowing it into a big national issue.

M: But you had discovered it, the Camelot operation, suddenly and inadvertantly as far as the operation was concerned, so it was going on without the knowledge of the chief of mission at the time?

D: That's right.

M: What about the President? Was it being carried on with or without his knowledge? Do you have any way of knowing that?

D: Oh, I don't think he would have known. I mean, this is not the kind of thing that he would normally have had any occasion to know about. It was handled, unfortunately, as a very routine thing within the Department of the Army and their R and I, Research and Intelligence.

M: Do you have anything else that might be important to say about Camelot?

D: No. But the other issue that I referred to was one that I think is a little more significant in historical terms as far as the President is concerned. There was a big price increase in copper in '75, and I got a cable one day saying--a very top-secret cable--from Bundy, saying, "Use any combination of carrots and sticks to get the Chileans committed to 100,000 tons of copper at thirty-six cents." And by this time the price of copper, the world price, was up climbing to fifty and it was going up. And I fired a cable back saying, "Have you really thought of all the implications of such a move?" I knew that the cable, or the direction for the cable, had come right from the President.

M: Why was this?

D: Because it had come from Bundy, and because of the circuit that it had come on. And I even think the content of the cable suggested that that's where it had come from. All I did was fire back and say, "Have you really thought it out?" And I got another cable back late in the night saying, "Harriman and Tony Solomon will be arriving on Jet Star number so and so, arrange clearances, meet--secret meeting." So in effect what the President did was just say "out, screw around, we don't want this soft head bothering us."

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M: Then they were able to force the Chileans down?

D: Yes, they did.

M: Does this kind of thing leave a lingering aftereffect?

D: Sure. And I myself thought the Chileans were stupid. They should not have done it, and we should not have insisted that they do it. We could have done other things. And they did try and make a deal and we did make a deal. We guaranteed them certain XM loans; in effect, we kept the price down but we paid for it in other ways. The Anaconda (?) Company paid for it actually in terms of some tax payments, so it was kind of a screwy deal. I was really afraid of the political impact of it.

M: You mean on the Frei government, not in America.

D: No, between U.S.-Chilean relations. I thought the Frei government would balk at it and they didn't. Inexplicable reasons on the part of the imperialism syndrome. I just figured they didn't think they were strong enough to do it. And I must say, it didn't create a lot of whoopla. That happened incidentally, that trip happened --a curious little anecdote here that's not important to anything, but at the same time that Harriman and Solomon were there, Bobby Kennedy was there. They were down there at the same time that Bobby Kennedy was passing through on his Southern trip, which was very convenient for me, because I didn't have to accompany Bobby Kennedy anywhere. All I had to do was to put up with him around the house, which this was wild enough. But the funny thing was that the night Harriman arrived Bobby Kennedy was out in the public living room with all the press, you know, all the New Yorkers and Washington guys were along, lots of friends of mine and all sharp newspapermen,

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and Harriman was sitting right next door in the family living room. We were conducting our business and they never tumbled to it.

M: Which was a real coup.

D: Right. And kind of fun. I always enjoyed putting it over on the press.

M: You don't get away with too much with them, and when you do get away you can treasure that moment. What then, circumstances if any of any special note, led to your decision to take this job and leave that position in 1967? Was there some policy matter involved here?

D: No, no policy matter. I must say I didn't feel that our Latin American policy as a whole was going very well, it really deteriorated --except for Punta del Esta where I thought the President was masterful, myself, I really thought he did a hell of a job, considering the lost ground that he had as a result of the DR and so forth. But as far as Chile was concerned, I had no complaints at all. It was fine, the government supported our activities down there all the way. No, it was not dissatisfaction either with the administration or any serious dissatisfaction with the policies or general policy, or policy toward Chile. It was basically because I was beginning to be rather uncomfortable, representing the United States on lots of issues where we were preaching and attempting to move the Chileans and others along, and at the same time back home things seemed to be, at least to me, falling apart. This was the summer of the bad riots, and I really felt that what talents I had might better--I had been thinking about this for some time--that my talents really, governmental and otherwise, ought to be put to work in my own country and not abroad. It seemed to me a little inconsistent.

Then a friend of mine, a congressman from this district, called me and said, "I've been talking to some of your friends up here, Bob Dohene (?), and Kazen and we all think you'd be perfect for this job." I said, "I'm happy, I don't want to leave really, maybe in another couple of years, yeah, but not now." But I was coming up to take a degree somewhere, so I said I'd come by and see the governor, and I did. And he talked me into it. But no dissatisfaction in my job, I was very happy. I think reasonably successful, at least I thought so, so that it was just a basic decision to come back and do something on the domestic side.

M: Again, don't let me limit you. Are there areas of your contact that are important that I had no way of knowing about, or episodes, anecdotal or otherwise, that you would like to put in?

D: There's one thing that I could tell you about, and I'll just mention that there is an important thing that led me to draw certain conclusions about Mr. Johnson and his character and personality, which I have tucked away in my private files, and they're not even going into your very sacred tape.

M: Will you make sure that they go somewhere sometime? Either as a bequest or--?

D: They'll go somewhere sometime, but maybe by the time they go, that'll be when I die and nobody will be interested in it.

M: Just so they don't get burned up in an attic somewhere, or something like that.

D: No, they won't.

M: Do you have personal papers that you might be putting in the Johnson collection?

D: I'm holding onto my papers at this point.

M: Well, thank you very much for all your time, it was very, very nice
of you.

D: I enjoyed it.

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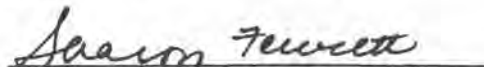
RALPH A. DUNGAN

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Ralph A. Dungan, of St. John, Barbados, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted with me on April 18, 1969, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Ralph A. Dungan, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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