INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT LAMPMAN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Dr. Lampman's residence, Madison, Wisconsin

Tape 1 of 2

G: Let's start, Dr. Lampman, by asking you to trace the beginning of your involvement with what became the War on Poverty.

L: Well, my involvement was through the Council of Economic Advisers, for which I was a staff member, beginning first as a consultant in 1961 and then coming on board in Washington in June of 1962, where I stayed until the fall of 1963. Prior to 1961 I had gotten involved in the poverty question in doing a paper for Senator Paul Douglas' Joint Economic Committee of the Congress on the question of low income population in the United States. It was a kind of response to John Kenneth Galbraith's book The Affluent Society published in 1958 I believe. In undertaking that I had gotten acquainted with what information there was on the very low income end of the spectrum, who the people were and where they were located, what kind of occupations and ages and so on they had. And that particular paper was used by a certain number of people, including Hubert Humphrey, in some of the campaign preparations at least leading up to the 1960 election.

G: Did Kennedy use it at all?

L: I don't think he did. But it got a certain amount of press, and it was part of the discussion at least that went on among reviewers and

journalists and speech writers. People began to think about the agenda for the 1960s.

One of the people who read it was Walter Heller, whom I had known before and of course was teaching at that time up in the neighboring state of Minnesota. When we talked about my coming to join him as a staff member at the council, he talked about that paper and he talked about the interests I had had in the distribution of wealth, as opposed to income, and my interest in social security and tax questions. So when I got to the council in 1961 I worked first on some consumer packages, consumer legislation, consumer council work.

But by the spring of 1962--well, 1962 was mostly used up with other matters, but by the spring of 1963 Heller's interest turned to the questions of income distribution. Partly this was due to sort of the national media attention to the problem of poverty. One thing I dug out of my file here was something that came to the council from the President's office about letters that had come in response to Howard K. Smith's TV program on poverty. The memorandum I have is dated March 22, 1963. And we were asked to suggest ways that the White House might respond to this rather extraordinary expression of concern. There were other things like that that enabled Heller to open up again his interest in this particular aspect of the American economy.

G: Did you have the impression that Heller was an influence on JFK in going into this matter?

L: Well, at the very least he was very responsive to the notion. And apparently, as I said, Kennedy didn't necessarily approach the issue at the outset in his campaign; apparently it was called to his attention a number of times during the campaign. For one, at the primary level by Senator Humphrey. For another, by his own direct observations of very depressed areas, including some in West Virginia. So for various reasons there were signals early on in the White House about all this. There was of course the Area Redevelopment Administration work. There was attention to the hunger issue as early as this period also. And Heller was, I would say, very quick to note those at least flickers of interest that came along. But of course his big interest and big push in those first years was the innovative tax cut of what he had hoped would be early 1963 and which ended up being 1964, as the date of its beginning. But he was certainly well geared up in his own thinking to the things to do after the tax cut, including, among other things, attention to the special problems of the people passed over, left out, somehow remaining in Depression-like conditions you might say, even though we'd had this great period of prosperity after World War II.

So that's how I got interested and that's how it sort of came on the agenda, as I remember it. The council then carried forward with sort of not only responding to questions from the White House but putting new thoughts forward. I notice in April 25, 1963 I wrote a memorandum to Heller on changes in the distribution of wealth through 1961-1962, distribution of wealth and income. Two days later Heller

wrote back with scrawling on the margins: "This is very illuminating. The President should see a simplified version of it." Then two days later I sent him back a simplified version and he sent it over on May 1, 1963 to President Kennedy, and it was about the point that there was some disappointing performance of the economy with respect to the numbers of people moving out of what could be called poverty, a total money income under three thousand dollars. This was represented in or we generally, as economists, tended to link this up in considerable part to this sort of general slowdown in the economy in the late fifties. This became sort of additional ammunition for the general tax cut, but it also was part of this way to bridge over to the next step you're going to take after that.

So that memorandum did go to the President. I don't have any written notices here of what happened at that point, but my general memory is that Heller got favorable response again from President Kennedy some time after that, and that as they began to gear up for thinking of at least beginning to explore possibilities for the 1964 campaign for re-election, that one of those possibilities might be something about poverty, something about depressed areas, something about the disadvantaged. There were different phrases and slogans that were being passed around. But one of many possibilities that was reviewed was that, with reference to the 1964 campaign.

(Interruption)

Shall I just continue in this sort of stream of consciousness?

G: Yes.

L: In that period, May to June, somewhere along in there, Heller asked me to take part in sort of writing up the possible meaning of an attack on poverty--as I say, lots of different phrases were used--and to coordinate a group of people, meet with a group of people, at kind of the assistant secretary level, around Washington and pick brains and get suggestions and criticisms of the idea. We dealt with people from the Bureau of the Budget, from HEW--Wilbur Cohen was an assistant secretary, as I recall, at that time--from Labor--Pat Moynihan was the assistant secretary--from Agriculture, from Department of Justice.

G: Was it an identifiable group that would meet regularly?

L: No, I would say it was more informal than that. There were just a few meetings, as I recall. We'd meet for an afternoon once every couple of weeks or something like that. It was all very tentative and very low key, at least to start with. People were just speaking their minds. It was almost an academic sort of seminar. Indeed it was interesting how many people there were Ph.D.s or were backed up by a scholar who was associated with the work. And we had represented people from different disciplines. There were people like Moynihan, who was a political scientist--I guess it's right to call him that--and Cohen, who was an old hand in the income maintenance field but who was especially interested in this as an issue. There were statisticians and then there were lawyers. People had very different approaches to the whole question.

G: Where did you generally meet, may I ask?

L: Well, as I recall, we met in the executive offices in a conference kind of setting. Maybe some of those were in the Bureau of the Budget end of the building or somewhere in there. They weren't in the Chairman's office; this was not with Heller present usually, or with the head of the Bureau of the Budget either. So this was all prior to any really formal task force or anything of that sort.

But we would get into discussions about, for example, the definition of poverty. What kind of a concept and what kind of a numbers frame would you have in mind? And some people would say, well, poverty obviously means lack of money income. That had the great merit of being something we had some numbers on. We could say how many people there were above and below some line and where they were and so on. But other people said, well, that's really not what poverty means; poverty is more or sometimes even less than money. It's a spiritual concept, or it's a participation in government concept, or it's a lack of some kind of self esteem, sort of a psychological or image problem that people had. Or people would say, well, it really has to do with race; it has to do with sort of a near caste system in the United States. Still others would say it really has to do with lack of opportunity. It has to do with lack of public facilities like schools and so on, that's what makes people really poor.

So we had pretty long philosophical discussions, at least some of the time. And I think that difference in concept was also later on reflected in the kinds of remedies that people would come up with. For example, the political concept of poverty, of this lack of power

and so on, clearly got its expression in the community action approach as a remedy. But I would say in general there were sort of the economists against the rest of the disciplines. The economists tended to have a more optimistic view that you could do something about it. Sociologists, my impression, generally were very pessimistic about that. These are very deep-rooted social, psychological, attitudinal, value-laden concepts. As people bring their own purposes to the poverty question, you can't change those very rapidly and so on.

So there was a kind of sociological theory of poverty with its lack of remedies, I suppose you might say, and the economic theory with easy optimism that you could do something about it all. All you have to do is get money to people somehow, get them a job, get them education maybe, training, something like that. So there was a kind of naive optimism maybe, but at least it was strikingly different from some of the other attitudes expressed. Well, that was one of the preoccupations at one or more meetings of this group. But there was, in general, receptiveness to the idea that was coming from Heller and perhaps via him from the President himself that this might be a good emphasis for a campaign to re-elect.

Now this heated up sometime in the summer of 1963, and Heller got apparently a signal that the number of possible things to be emphasized in a campaign was down to just a few. It wasn't one of twenty different things, it was one of two or three. I don't remember exactly what the others were. But I think one of the ideas had been what we now call the environmental emphasis, but I think it went under the heading

of conservation of resources and conservation of--well, I don't know, what was the other word for the environment?--water and air and neighborhood and so on. So there was a conscious exploration then of who would listen, who would be attracted to this as a political emphasis. And in connection with that, some of these same people I mentioned were drawn in, but more a new group, for me at least, to meet were some of the Irish Mafia from the White House who were Kennedy's very close political advisers. They had to kind of test for themselves the water of poverty as an issue. They pointed out, and other people were quick to see it, too, that the poor don't vote. If you're going to attract them, you aren't going to attract much. And probably any of those who do vote already voted Democratic anyway, or many of them did. So the political interests turned around the question of which parts of the non-poor would be attracted. And from the Howard K. Smith letters and some of these other responses that the President had had, it was concluded this was a good suburban issue politically, because there were a lot of church women and League of Women Voters people, or I guess you might call them opinion leaders in the country who were quite outspoken in interest in this question.

G: Do you recall who the White House people were who came in at that point and suggested--?

L: Well, certainly one of the key ones was Myer Feldman, Mike Feldman--I think I have his first name right--Ken O'Donnell, and of course Ted Sorensen. We had quite a lot of conversation with Ted Sorensen. Now, also in some of these same discussions I recall Kermit Gordon playing

a part. He was I think at that point--yes, by then he was the director of the Bureau of the Budget.

G: Was Bill Cannon involved?

L: Bill Cannon was not part of the White House, but in the Bureau of the Budget a very important figure in this story.

G: Was he meeting with your group?

L: Yes, that's right; I think he was, yes, at that early group. There were other people in the Bureau of the Budget; there's sort of a rotating cast of characters. But Bill Capron, who had been with the council and had moved over to be with Kermit Gordon at the Bureau of the Budget, was in and wearing different hats at different times. So there were a group of people--and I guess I was one of them for a brief period of time--who were spending a good deal of time meeting with and listening to and communicating back and forth about this as a possible theme, as I said, for future legislation, for future campaign slogan use, for future action, perhaps at the departmental level if not at the White House level.

G: As you recall it, what would you say the frequency was, once a week for maybe a couple of hours or twice a week?

L: Well, maybe I've confused some of this in my mind, but there were several things going more or less at the same time. One was carrying out the request by Heller to get in touch with the department people, and we had this group that met a number of times, but not every day or anything like that, but every week or two weeks for part of the summer. Then we had this other kind of reaching out to other individuals, not

the assistant secretaries and so on, but people at the White House or people they would suggest that we talk to, almost all, though, I think in government, as I remember. I don't think we talked to anybody out of government at that point, and we didn't talk to--at least I didn't talk to--any senators or congressmen about this issue, at that period.

G: You must have sifted through a tremendous number of proposals and suggestions.

L: Yes, but as I also think about it, we didn't cover a lot of bases that you might have thought we would. I don't remember that we were encouraged to reach off into some of these things very far. But one of the things--for example, this original group didn't really touch the community action issue much. That was a big surprise to me after, that that came into prominence very late. It was the end of 1963 when that kind of got into the priority list of remedies. There was a little attention through the Attorney General's office. They had been working of course on juvenile delinquency questions and had had a lot to do with the Ford Foundation's efforts in a few cities to get community action against a recognized problem with some federal government help. So that was a different approach than we had talked about, as I recall at least, in those meetings and in formal probings that we had done.

So I guess I sort of think of it this way, that the impetus through the Council of Economic Advisers was much more in the direction of taking going programs that we had in the country and expanding those or extending them in some way to reach people who had been kind

of left out. So there would be new efforts on the unemployment side to reach the very poor among the unemployed with new training programs or new job-seeking programs or something. Then there would be new efforts to get out into the schools where kids from the poorest and most disadvantaged families were to be found. And to use the agricultural extension service in a new way to deal with the noncommercial farmers I guess you might call them. So those were some ideas. Also, one of Pat Moynihan's ideas was to use the Department of Defense to some extent, more than it had been, as a kind of recovery device for kids who were really ineligible for the draft. That was a thought that attracted a lot of people in this initial group.

G: Well, a tremendous number of young people were being rejected.

L: Right, yes. Well, Pat Moynihan, among other people, had had to do with a research project that came out about that time, as I remember, of the percentage of rejectees who were in some sense from very disadvantaged backgrounds.

G: Was the objective of this aspect to make them eligible for the draft or to remedy the conditions that the draft had evidently pointed out or had--?

L: Well, as I remember in talking with Moynihan about it--I was responsive to this--many of these were not just rejectees of the draft but they were people who really wanted to get in the army or the Marine Corps or whatever, and they would be turned down. So you could say it had a kind of a double edge of interest: one was the fact that there was a differential state take-up in military service, and a differential

class representation within the military. That had a certain kind of political interest. Also there was this general view from many young people who [had] not gotten a lot of opportunities out there that the army is a good education. It is a good way to get started in certain skills and other things perhaps. We don't hear so much about that idea now, but that was a more popular idea at that point, that at least some success in the military, that period of time in the military, drafted or on a volunteer basis, can lead to further training later on and to success in the economy.

So I cite that as an example of the sorts of things we were working on. But while this was going on, there was out there in the bushes, so to speak, this other approach, which I think of as the Ford Foundation approach. Mike--his name--

G: Sviridoff?

L: Sviridoff was the great exponent of this idea. It was not initially identified with sort of training individuals. It was more with emphasis on a social problem and a criminal justice problem and so on. For instance it hadn't really come into close touch with this War on Poverty idea, at least in that period of the summer of 1963.

G: How about income maintenance proposals? Did you discuss those?

L: Yes, we did. We got different signals from different people. I guess in my own mind I always thought of it as an integral part of any real serious concern for helping the people who are in great trouble, and I like to point out that a lot of the income maintenance programs just didn't reach the poor. Unemployment insurance, hardly anybody got

that in so many states anyway; it was really poor. It had become--and perhaps always was--a program for those firmly attached to the labor force and who had a long record of experience in it and so on. So the beginning youngster from a disadvantaged background is likely to be unemployed but he's not likely to get unemployment insurance. And similarly the great variation from one state to another in the level of welfare benefits meant that some kids were really suffering from malnutrition and all sorts of bad things, and the best way to deal with that directly is through income maintenance or what later came along as a food stamp program.

So income maintenance was a big part of it. But every once in a while somebody would say, "But that isn't going to sell. You aren't going to get a lot of public support for new welfare programs or handout programs." This clearly did get fixed at some point, but I don't remember when, in this sort of moving toward a presentation of a new sort of national emphasis. And President Johnson, of course, was very clear in saying this was not going to be a bunch of handout programs or new welfare programs or anything. He was very hostile to the negative income tax when it came along.

G: Did your group discuss that possibility, a negative income tax?

L: No, no. As I recall that wasn't on the agenda in 1963. Clearly in 1964 it was, but as I recall the timing of all this [it] was a little later.

But anyway, to continue this in sequence, sometime quite late in the summer, perhaps as late as September, Heller moved the thing into

another phase, which was to actually write up a proposal for a campaign program. My file shows here that this moved on in the form of a memorandum to Sorensen, December 20. Let's see. No, there is something else that came before this and I don't have it. There were some communications regarding a more specific kind of a program.

G: What would the approximate date be or time?

L: Well, I'm trying to think of something like October. According to my memory Heller told us that he had talked to Kennedy. When was the assassination?

G: November 22.

L: He had talked to the President in late October or early November, in which he had sort of said move ahead, develop a full-blown kind of picture of this, and he wanted it before long. I had, in the meantime, come back to Madison, Wisconsin, and Heller called me and asked me to come back again and to just commute regularly. So I was in Washington at the time of the assassination, and we had been working as a task force of council and Bureau of the Budget people in forming a finished memorandum. When we heard about the assassination we decided we might as well just finish it, in the tragic moment and so on. And Heller I guess was in the airplane somewhere on the way to Hawaii. He turned around and came back, and he asked us to finish that night with what we were doing, and the next morning he laid that memorandum on the new President's desk. And I guess within a few hours Johnson approved this as a theme for his State of the Union Message, and then this later became a kind of a campaign centerpiece.

G: There is a story that during that period Heller and perhaps Kermit Gordon went to the Ranch with LBJ where he subjected this concept to some scrutiny down there. Do you recall Heller--?

L: No, I don't. Was this after he became president?

G: Right.

L: Yes. Well, there was this time period between November 26 and the State of the Union Message when it certainly was being--I don't think there had been any formal announcement of Johnson's initial decision I gave until the State of the Union Message, or virtually the State of the Union Message. I'm sure of that. I took no part in it. I never met Lyndon Johnson.

My next phase in all this was mainly to work on the chapter to be in the economic report which came out in January of 1964 on poverty in the United States, and I worked very intensively on that while commuting again--I'd come back--with a very first-rate group of people from the council and with some outside people brought in. I thought that was maybe the best sort of applied scholarship I've ever been involved in, was that chapter. I think it was a good chapter.

I also did a little bit of speech writing for Heller and prepared things which were later part of the State of the Union Message, paragraphs or bits and pieces. But essentially I was over, I thought, with all that when the economic report went to press in January, and when the State of the Union Message was presented.

But I hadn't been back here very long when the President announced he was appointing [Sargent] Shriver to work on this. When was that?

G: I think it was--

L: Something you had here showed me that.

G: --late January or early February of 1964. Yes, February 1, I think.

L: Sometime shortly after that Kermit Gordon called me, I remember, and asked me to give some time to Shriver or to people in Shriver's group, and that began a very fitful kind of relationship from my point of view. I did do some work, but I could never figure out what I was doing.

G: Why was that?

L: Well, it was sort of like a campaign train or something. First of all, Shriver was exploring very widely the nature of this charge he was undertaking. He met with all kinds of people, and I was just one of many, I'm sure, I knew all the time I was there. I never was fitted into a particular kind of reporting pattern. I felt a little bit like every time I would get there there would be a different car on the train, sort of a different company. I guess I was sort of on the idea side of the train. By idea people mainly they meant people who were good communicators and who could sell this idea of poverty as a problem and the government as a remedy, and the great merit its achievement would have, the achievement the War on Poverty would have.

So that meant that I would find myself--one time I'd arrive and I'd be talking to Frank Mankiewicz, whom I had never met before and I didn't get to know really. But he was certainly a political expert, a public relations sort of expert I guess, campaign manager sort. And this was to him just like any other sort of promotion problem. He had

a way of digesting material and moving it into TV shorts or into movies. You could almost see him kind of moving it into some kind of a visual presentation. Well, I wasn't any good at that; I didn't understand or appreciate I guess some of this sort of imagery. Then the next time I'd go I'd be there with Paul Jacobs, who was a journalist, novelist, writer. I don't know how to characterize him, poet almost. So I have a list somewhere of the various people I met in this sort of task force phase. They were most extraordinary.

G: Did these meetings tend to be one-on-[one]?

L: No, I wasn't ever in many meetings, as I recall. I would just kind of wander around the halls, or somebody would come wandering into my office or a part of [an office]. I'd have a desk in some office, a different one every time I went to Washington. It was extraordinarily chaotic. I never knew what to expect.

G: When you say chaotic what do you mean by that? How would you describe it?

L: Well, there was some organization I guess, but it seemed more like the organization in a lobby of a big hotel or something to me where you just wander around from one corner of the big room to another, and various things would be going on and you could sit down if you wanted to or you could listen in or raise your hand and say something. And there were various pieces of paper that would float by and then you could comment on those if you wanted to.

G: Did you comment on them?

L: Yes, I did. I got various kinds of [requests]. As I say, I never knew quite to whom I was reporting, but I would get requests for things like "tell us about some of the special problems of poverty in West Virginia" or something like that. And some questions I couldn't answer and some I thought I could say a little bit about. Let's see, I've got here some examples of things I did. One question was we need to know more about the relationship between unemployment and poverty. One was what's the cost to the country of poverty. Some of these things were dated in March and April of 1964. So I did short papers or paragraphs, in some cases pages, made tables. I never quite knew who was going to use these or anything else.

Finally--I don't have a date on this, but I think this was about the last thing I did in that springtime--I wrote up a memo called "Suggestions for Speech Writers." That was in response to what I sort of sensed was not accurate stuff that was floating around this hotel lobby that I was referring to. One of the points made in this memo is there are hazards of simplifying the description of America's poor. Some people would say, well, it's all minorities. Well, that didn't suit. I mean, most of the poor were white. Other people would say, well, it's all old people. So I was trying to correct what I had seen in the way of errors in various pieces of paper that were sort of floating around. Jim Sundquist from Brookings was there and playing an important role I gather, and he expressed some appreciation for this sort of effort to avoid flamboyant statements that sounded good but which weren't necessarily in all aspects correct.

G: Did you then see it as a political--?

L: It had gotten into a political phase where I felt no special confidence at all, and indeed I was just totally mystified. By that time a lot of things were big surprises to me; the importance of this community action idea, for example, I was quite unprepared for.

G: How did that emerge?

L: Well, it emerged, as I said, not in the Council of Economic Advisers and not in the initial meetings that I had been involved in. It emerged somewhere in the late part of 1963, when I think probably I was engaged in working on that chapter for the economic report, and in January, perhaps somewhere in there. So by the State of the Union Message it was pretty clearly in there, and it assumed a bigger role when the thing moved to the Shriver task force stage.

G: Was it initially, in your observation, sort of an umbrella for a variety of programs or was it a political approach to the--?

L: I think both of those. Clearly Shriver was a good person in this regard, and maybe various people had persuaded him that there was this political magic in this idea, that this was what it was all about. If you were going to have a real war on poverty, you were going to have to attract a lot of grass-roots attention, a lot of grass-roots base of management and of sort of getting a new spirit about it all. So it was clearly a radical thing and some people have called it, of course, a fourth branch of government that was being developed. It was outside local government, outside state government, with federal money but going to sort of circumvent the ordinary channels. And Shriver

was appealed to by this. He liked the idea a lot, and he used it--one of the things he saw [in] it was a way to bring business into the picture, it was a great way to bring church groups in, it was a way to bring cooperatives in, and a way to do a lot with the black communities that had been kind of isolated or ghettoized. So he got a lot of interest and a lot of good feedback on the idea apparently. And I was quite aware at the very first meeting I had when things were at the Shriver shop there on Connecticut Avenue, that that was a new thing and that was really shaking and moving things. I didn't have anything really to say about that. I couldn't even criticize that in its substance.

Now as I understand it Bobby Kennedy was important in that.

G: How do you know that?

L: Well, at least my view of this, and I must say I can't document much of this, is that the initial notion for community action came in through this Ford Foundation experience in the juvenile delinquency programs, and that Bobby Kennedy had found this lively bunch of people and he had some of them working for him. Dick Boone was one. Those people really were politically savvy people. They saw that there was a way to make a direct contact with even such unlikely groups as juvenile gangs in the big cities and so on. This was, in some kind of a frontier way, where political science and the more adventuresome sort of social work people were going.

G: Dave Hackett I guess was one of those.

L: Hackett, yes. Hackett and Boone, those were the two names that Kennedy had, and he sort of made sure that they had a good audience with Shriver. So that was one whole wing of this campaign train that I was talking about that was forming up in the Shriver task force time.

There were other sort of radical kinds of things. One was from the Labor Department side, Willard Wirtz and some of the other people who expected fully to use the War on Poverty as a way to get large-scale job creation. And their stake-out man in the Shriver task force, as I think of it, was Jack Conway, who was bitterly critical of the Council of Economic Advisers. I'm sure you may have run into this elsewhere. Wirtz and other people in the Labor Department and people in the labor movement were very critical of Heller and the Council of Economic Advisers and their emphasis on the tax cut as a way to solve the unemployment problem. [There was a] big argument about whether the high unemployment of that period was due to structural causes or to cyclical causes. Heller of course argued that it wasn't mainly a structural problem but that it would all melt away rapidly if you got the tax cut in place. Well, I don't think Wirtz ever believed that for a minute, and certainly a lot of the labor union people didn't. And a lot of other people thought--for example, Galbraith thought--the thing to do would be to not cut taxes but increase government expenditures for programs like job creation and public works and more education and so on.

Well, anyway, Conway was pushing for a big jobs component in the War on Poverty, and in a sense that was radical. It was certainly different from what actually emerged in the President's initial presentation. So there was a lot of backbiting, a lot of tension among people who believed on the one hand in community action, people who believed on the other hand in direct creation of jobs, and finally the more low-keyed people who were a little bit scared of community action and certainly didn't want to go very far with the job creation thing.

G: Did you yourself identify with one or the other?

L: Yes, I was certainly in the council's stance of mainly working with established programs, trying to make those extend out a little farther than they had, and with some cautious approaches on training and retraining.

G: Where did BOB tend to line up on that?

L: Well, they came out--and I think Bill Cannon was part of this but again I can't document this very well; he was a convert to community action. Does that sound familiar to you? Yes. I don't think Kermit Gordon ever was, but somehow there was a division in that.

G: Did you yourself participate in the discussions about community action?

L: No, not until after. I did some at the Shriver [meeting], but I quickly found that there wasn't much to talk about. The cleavage was pretty deep at that point.

G: Did you sense any internal friction within the Labor Department over the nature of the employment programs? For example, did Moynihan agree with Wirtz? Did he advance the ideas that Wirtz favored?

L: Well, I don't recall his ever speaking against the ideas that Wirtz favored. I don't know that he was initiating them; he may have been. I knew enough people in the Labor Department to know there was division within the Labor Department on this, but I think that the official position and probably the majority position of the appointed people as well as the career people in Labor was that the Council of Economic Advisers was wrong. This was a harsh matter for Heller and [James] Tobin and Kermit Gordon and Gardner Ackley, that they were always out of sync with the Labor Department.

G: I noticed in the list of position papers that was presented at one point that you had done one on poverty and unemployment. Did you see that and that a draft went to Adam Yarmolinsky, or AY as abbreviated?

L: I see. Yes, I've got that one here I think. This may have been the one. I gave some memorandum, a kind of a talk on a memorandum, about this question, about the labor market and poverty, at the Shriver offices. I remember being just attacked mercilessly by critics, and in particular I remember Jack Conway sort of stomping out of the meeting. I was saying even though you got unemployment down successfully, there would still be a lot of people who wouldn't be reached by that. Reducing unemployment was not in itself going to solve the poverty problem.

G: Did Conway seem to feel that was a major solution?

L: Yes, as I recall, that was the general stance. He was of the view, as [were a] certain number of labor people at that time--maybe there aren't quite so many anymore that way--but people from the labor

movement itself who never accepted the notion that there was a tradeoff between inflation and unemployment or that there was any reason why you couldn't have everybody have a job all the time. So I was caught in a way on this in putting what was to them just unacceptable kind of limitations on the goals and what you could expect to achieve within a few years on the labor market side of all this.

But I think Heller saw this emphasis on poverty problems as a kind of compromise with the structuralists in the economics profession, people, well, like Wirtz, who was not himself an economist, but people who talked to Wirtz, like [Charles] Killingsworth. He was saying once we got unemployment back down to 4 per cent or something, or 3 per cent or something like that, then the structuralists' questions come up hard and strong and you deal with them, and you deal with it by retraining and you deal with it by mobility encouragements of various kinds, and you accept the structuralists' view that there is something you have to do beyond just feed the aggregate demand with tax cuts or expenditure increases or fiscal remedies of that sort. Well, making that accommodation or getting some kind of agreement on a new cooperative spirit wasn't easy and it probably would never happen.

One of the things Heller learned early on and I guess the council did was that the labor movement's interest in this whole poverty question was measured and limited.

G: Oh, really? Why do you say that?

L: Well, the first thing I guess I passed over here in this sequential discussion a little while ago [was that] one of the things Heller tried in the summer of 1963 was to make a speech on poverty to a group, a labor union convention. That was the Communication Workers, June 12, 1963. I helped him write this speech presenting the poverty problem of the country and about the possibility, once we got the tax cut through and so on, that this would be a new kind of emphasis. Well, Heller came back and reported that that part of the speech at least got negative response. They said, "Why are you talking to us about the poverty question? We want to know what are you going to do for us." The Communication Workers didn't see themselves as poor; they thought they were some other guys. So sort of at least at the convention level of a big union, it wasn't something that initially attracted a lot of attention.

Incidentally, that experience entered into the White House review of the political saliency of this set-up: who's going to be interested? And it was not easily said that the labor movement as a whole would rise to the sacrificial pitch that you might hope they would. As I was saying, labor union people had some hurt about all this. Part of the reason is that in much of this literature you find out that labor unions, at least many labor unions, had kind of excluded the poor from their own membership or from their own cooperative circle. That's an old story about labor unions in the literature, that they see the poor as competitive menaces, they see them as rivals rather than as brothers, and that dependable fellowship among workers

can't be extended easily through people who don't have a tradition of job permanency and so on. Well, they were very worried that this meant something about minimum wages, it meant something about apprenticeship standards, it meant something about things that they were serious about, and it might not be in line with traditional union practice. And of course later on when the negative income tax idea came up, they were quick to see that as not a good idea. Even though it would reach the poor it wouldn't do anything for them, and it was going to be a big effort to extend welfare benefits to the working poor, so to speak.

So they didn't like that idea as a group and it never really got the support of the AFL-CIO as an idea. So for various reasons they were suspicious of the various theorists that came out from the woodwork with their various kinds of remedies. They didn't like community action in general, they didn't like a negative income tax or some of the other [proposals]. What they wanted were jobs, because they wanted jobs which would pay union wages and which would go to union members. So right away you're in kind of a scramble about who's going to have a piece of the action or who's going to be in a leadership position with regard to it and so on. They were very worried about moving outside and away from the establishment, because unions were part of the establishment and community action meant you were kind of attacking the establishment.

G: Did the Labor Department reflect this orientation of organized labor here? I mean, did Wirtz--?

L: Yes, I would say that's right, yes. No, I don't know; there probably are exceptions to that, but I think that was what he saw himself doing.

G: Moynihan in his book Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding indicates that he favored a massive manpower program. Why do you think that idea didn't get any farther than it did?

L: By manpower program he meant job creation as well as training?

G: Training, yes.

L: Well, it didn't get anywhere as part of the poverty program I guess. It wasn't in the first budget. It was a big battle about whether it was going to be in there or not and whether you would have special training programs. It did get the Job Corps. It did get the Neighborhood Youth Corps. But you didn't get bigger training programs. Is that what you're--?

G: Right. Right.

L: Well, I think it was a decision made at some very high level, there just weren't going to be any big bucks in this thing. They weren't going to use the poverty program as a way to spend lots of money.

G: And that would have cost?

L: Yes. Any big manpower program would have cost a lot of money, especially when you work out these jobs at full pay or minimum wages at least or better.

(Interruption)

The question of how much money was to be involved, there were guidelines on that, as I understood them, early on, that this was going to

be more in the way of small-scale coordination of existing programs, new ideas flowing out from a center out to the individual departments, efforts to engage the interest of professionals and key leaders in voluntary organizations and so on. It wasn't going to be a new agency at all. It was just going to be a part of the office of the President and so on. So that that collided right away with the notions of really big programs of any kind.

G: Did you feel that the sort of program you just described was adequate for combating poverty?

L: Well, there certainly are two sides to this argument and there still are in a way. But I guess I had thought from the beginning that the really big things would happen in the regular programs. That is, with only a minor change in social security you could have the effect of getting billions of dollars in the hands of the poor. With only a minor change in Agriculture's extension program you could do a lot. You might be diverting money from some people who could probably defend themselves pretty well--commercial agriculture people and so on--but even if you got a part of it you'd get a lot into the hands of [the poor] or into services for people who were being displaced from agriculture and so on.

G: What was wrong with that?

L: So that was my view. To do that required then that you really challenge, if you want to put it that way, the establishment. Say well, now, how come you've been working in this field for forty years and you aren't doing much for the poor yet--or since the New Deal? If the

President said it you could get some action that way, and the Congress could respond. But it would clearly take a lot of strong presidential leadership. So the notion of a presidential theme, a presidential coordinative effort, appealed to me.

Now, on the other hand, there was this other view that that was just fooling around. You weren't going to really do anything. People said, well, we've got this program, like Humphrey had this program where he wanted to revive the Civilian Conservation Corps. That would coordinate well or would fit in well with the President's idea, and it would be a big and visible program. Well, there were these different sides, and sometimes you had the feeling they took whatever was on their list of programs they wanted to have and said this is the way to do it. There was this general pitch out there of the structuralists in the labor market saying that you're never going to get anywhere near full employment with these temporizing measures of fiscal and monetary policy. You're going to have to create a big number of permanent jobs for a lot of people. They're going to have to be special jobs, sort of the Swedish second labor market idea. That idea had been stated back in the thirties by Aubrey Williams and other sort of radicals in the New Deal who had despaired that capitalism could ever provide a satisfactory labor market. So it kind of got everybody's backs up on one side or another of this issue as to how far you would have to go to really substantially change the labor market in favor of the really disadvantaged groups and the just sort of left-out groups.

So we started an argument that nobody could settle. The first big collision was about that budget. Putting together a billion dollars didn't do much for anybody, you might say, because there was some money in there for a couple of things and there was also money in there for this community action thing. Nobody knew how much that was going to cost. And there was money in there for a coordinating role by Shriver.

He had two kind of conflicting roles, as you [know], and other people I'm sure have pointed this out often. He was supposed to do two things: one, he was supposed to try out some new programs on a very small scale, like Project Head Start, that would just be a trial sort of thing, and the Job Corps would be another one. He would run some of these directly, and then he would spin them off to Labor or HEW or wherever, and then he would take up another group and try some more experiments. That was one idea, of sort of a pilot running the ship for trial runs, you might say. The other one was to be the President's coordinator, the President's manager of an antipoverty budget and of sitting in on a budget process with the director of the Bureau of the Budget and asking all along of each department, "What are you doing for the poor? What are you doing for this goal?" Those are somewhat in conflict. On the one hand he's sort of challenging departments, and on the other hand he's supposed to get a message out to the departments.

G: Was it also a problem of competing with them on the one hand and trying to coordinate on the other?

L: Yes, right. So he was spending the money that was appropriated directly for this and kind of elbowing the departments aside. And then out in this community action stuff he was making life miserable for them, that is, organizing protests against the welfare administration in Chicago and the schools in Denver and so on. So you had a bitter kind of a feeling from some people that Shriver and his team of activists that were there were just embarrassing the government at either the federal or the state level. It was a difficult role or set of roles for Shriver to carry off. I guess I had tended to see, before this community action thing came in, this other role of coordinating and of pushing the established agencies as a kind of back room operation, just as the director of the Bureau of the Budget is kind of a back room--I mean, it's a quiet role.

G: How would community action have been administered then?

L: I don't know. I guess I was saying before this came into the picture. No, community action is such an extraordinary thing that it couldn't have been done very well through existing departments, do you think?

G: Did the planners in the task force have an understanding of what community action was all about, what it would do, what the implications were, do you think?

L: I think I said I never really had any part in that community action stuff and I was never invited to criticize or offer comments. But there was only one of several divisions within the task force that one could pick up. The other one was sort of the division with the Labor Department. I don't think Conway was a big community action person.

I may be wrong. I hope you get him on the tapes here. I think of him and Moynihan and Wirtz and so on as pushing for a very different kind of emphasis, namely the manpower training approach, make the labor market work better and push for special kinds of jobs for people and so on. And the community action people were from somewhere else, they were different. I never had direct contact with them and I certainly wasn't in a good position--maybe I was getting tired by then, I don't know--to be a communicator back and forth.

G: What was Yarmolinsky's role in all of this?

L: Well, now I'm coming to the next part of my experience. Gradually Shriver began to form--I think this is after the task force, is it? Do you have a date on the end of the task force?

G: Well, let's see. The task force was begun in February and worked through when the legislation was sent up in March, is that right? March or April?

L: Okay. And then you think of them as sort of done?

G: Well, no. My impression is that it went on through the summer, the spring and [summer]. Let's see when the--I have a chronology here that may help.

L: Okay, good. Is that on what you gave me?

G: Yes. Well, on the legislative, the message was presented in mid-March and so the drafting of the bill was completed. It was then simply a question of getting the legislation through.

L: Right. And that ended up in August or something?

G: That's right.

L: Well, I guess I should mention that I accompanied Shriver to I guess it was the opening hearing at the Labor Committee. Adam Clayton Powell, was that the--?

G: House Education and Labor Committee.

L: House Education and Labor Committee. Yes, I also remember that. That was a time.

G: Tell me about that experience.

L: Well, I had I guess something to do with drafting some of the things he was going to say or had been saying about that period. I can't remember now who all went, but there weren't too many people from the office who went. But I didn't know Shriver really. I was impressed by how he easily went to the Republican side of the table and apparently knew all these people and had been at Yale Law School with half of them I guess. Also with how well he seemed to get along with Adam Clayton Powell and the other side of things. Was it Perkins, the man from Kentucky?

G: Carl Perkins.

L: Carl Perkins, yes. Anyway, this--

G: What are you thinking of in connection with Perkins?

L: Well, I was thinking what a strange world it is where you get people as diverse as Adam Clayton Powell and Perkins. Perkins, early on, wanted to know what it was going to do for the water systems in Kentucky. He thought the way to combat poverty was to build and perfect the water systems and sewage systems and so on in rural, eastern Kentucky. Not a bad idea really. And of course Adam Clayton

Powell had his sort of--what was the name of the Harlem youth organization?

G: HARYOU-Act.

L: HARYOU. Yes. So there were these different kinds of things that Shriver was a master at communicating with these people and of appearing to be on everybody's side in this sort of thing, and I think in some ways he was at that point. I think it was a period of a lot of harmony really, and the Republican opposition was not total at least. It was in a compromising kind of mood it seemed to me.

But anyway, I didn't have a lot to do with that. Shortly, however, I did gradually come to know the people who were being selected by Shriver to run things. One of the first people I met was Adam Yarmolinsky. I found this just extraordinary, that what Shriver did was for direction and expertise and so on, he went to the Pentagon to get people. It hadn't occurred to me that that might happen. (Laughter) But I'm told that he talked to Bob McNamara, and McNamara said, "Well, what you should do is get the smartest people in government who are in the Defense Department, and these are the whiz kids who came out of Rand."

So he gradually filled up the place with people who came out of that kind of experience, and many of them didn't know anything about welfare programs or education or the Labor Department, labor kinds of programs or anything. They were methodologists, you might say; they were benefit-costs experts. They were good statisticians and good with quantitative methods, but they were kind of harsh critics and

open to the idea that the reason we have all this poverty is government, that you don't look to. . . . The first thing that comes to their minds is the programs aren't any good, because we've got a lot of programs, we've got a lot of money, and so you must not be spending it right if you've still got all these poor people. In other words they were outsiders, and I think Shriver deliberately wanted to have that, he liked that idea. And I guess McNamara kind of encouraged him to think that was a good idea, that you go outside and you get a group of experts who are new to the whole problem and who can take a government-wide point of view. They aren't married to any one agency, they aren't married to the unemployment insurance idea or to job training or anything else. And you bring them in and you give them authority and you use them as questioners. You see, a lot of this ties in with that one hat that Shriver was supposed to wear, which is to coordinate, to take the budgeteers' approach to what we're doing and do a careful study of what exists and try to offer alternatives.

G: Who besides Yarmolinsky came from the Defense Department?

L: Well, in my particular sphere the most important person was Joe Kershaw, who had been head of the economics department at Rand. While he wasn't directly at the Pentagon, he was in the group that had spawned HITCH and the whole group of people who were the so-called whiz kids in McNamara's time.

Gradually, in my memory, which isn't really strong in this interval, when I came back again sort of the third time to the poverty question it was to communicate with people like Yarmolinsky and

Kershaw about program and about ways to study the problem. Things had settled down inside there. It wasn't the hotel lobby anymore, it was clear organization, had departments and groups and you knew who was where. And Yarmolinsky clearly was the leading idea person and the leading sort of link with the White House and everything else that you think of as a deputy having. But shortly he got Kershaw and Bob Levine, who was another guy who came out of the Pentagon in this period, as I remember, and that formed a group of economists who became the idea people mainly, in at least this government-wide kind of thing. I guess they never fully made their peace with community action either, so there was a different grouping of community action people somewhat aside.

G: Was this primarily for evaluation?

L: It was called research, plans and evaluation or something, or plans, research and evaluation. So I did come in through the back door, side door, occasionally at least with people on various sort of I guess you might say kind of original--that is, the original scheme of what a war on poverty would be about would be talked about by those people, that wing of Shriver's shop anyway. And how often they got the ear of Shriver I don't know, but I would assume he was hearing from many different groups aside from this group essentially of economists, led by Kershaw.

So by 1965 these guys produced I think one of the most interesting documents of the War on Poverty period, [which] was that so-called antipoverty budget presented by Shriver to Lyndon Johnson in the

summer of 1965. And that produced a proposal of how to spend, I don't know, ten billion dollars a year or something like that I guess was the number. But that included among other things the negative income tax, it included the various changes in income maintenance programs, it included new kinds of training and job creation efforts. And it had a series of things to do in a whole range, from Agriculture through Defense, the set of going departments, and it was a kind of very broad view of possible remedies for the federal government to take. And they had made some kind of peace with community action and they tried to bring it into some kind of pattern where they could say that this was more clearly specific projects aimed at specific aspects of the poverty problem. That's not what some people had thought community action was going to be; they'd seen it as more clearly kind of open-ended grants to groups to do whatever they wanted to do, the more outside of government the better almost. So that's a contest going on. I think that that's a transition that I can't document very much, but I saw it before there was this move of economists into the picture nearby Shriver and then after they came into it.

Now, the next phase of involvement I had indirectly was again through Kershaw in his establishing here on this campus an institute for research on poverty, and I don't know if that's part of this story or not.

G: Sure. What year was that?

L: In 1965 they began to talk about it seriously, and the actual grant or contract was made with the University of Wisconsin in the spring of

1966, and the institute was actually under way with its permanent director, Harold Watts, in the early summer, June, I guess, of 1966. All that's remarkable I suppose about that is that instead of having OEO with all of its research being done in-house, Kershaw early decided they would have to go outside. They couldn't have a big enough research staff and good enough research staff perhaps to do everything in his own branch or division of the OEO. When he began to talk about going outside, his memory immediately went to the Rand model. He said they should have the Rand research and development outfit outside government, outside Washington, with some kind of think tank freedom that you can't have in the ordinary organization of government. So they explored the various ways to establish something like Rand, maybe even Rand itself could form a separate department. But for various reasons they decided they wouldn't do that and they would go to a university somewhere, and then they entered into discussions with five or so universities and finally settled on Wisconsin.

What they did was make a block grant, not a specific grant for specific researchers, but a block grant to an institute which would then recruit its own staff and select its own specific research topics. Well, that was started and it was meant to be funded on a more than one-year basis with some permanence. It was carefully negotiated by Chancellor Robben Fleming, then here at Wisconsin, and he was very cautious. The faculty advisory committee, of which I was a member, was very cautious that the university not get into something it couldn't deliver on or that wouldn't work out well. So there's an

interesting sort of meeting of minds that occurred finally between Shriver and Fleming. As far as I know, no other federal government agency has had quite that kind of relationship with a think tank in the social sciences or the social fields. That is where you essentially delegate a certain kind of responsibility to organize a research program and maintain it over a rather long period. That's not so unusual in agriculture or in medicine, I guess, or in some of the defense-related things. Our closest model here at that time was the Mathematics Research Center, which was a think tank for the Department of the Army. But obviously there are real differences when you move into a more politically-ridden topic like poverty.

G: Was the institute's mission evaluative in nature, to evaluate the programs of the war on poverty?

L: Well, it was supposed to be, according to the block grant sort of a charter that was developed, to explore the nature, causes and cures of poverty in the United States. So it was partly to help the OEO and other interested government agencies, or more substantive agencies, to deal with problems of measurement, problems of identification, of concepts even that relate to the measurement of poverty, definition, measurement, and then to look for whatever kind of evidence you could of what caused poverty to persist and why people keep falling into poverty, and then to explore the various possible policies or remedies, public, private, whatever.

This does involve evaluation then, and it was thought that that would be an important thing that the institute could do, to help

to help people do evaluations. The argument for having a special institute was that this was an understudied area. There were not a lot of people in the country who had done much in this, in economics or in sociology or in law or political science, social work. So it would be a useful thing to have a sort of critical mass developed here of specialists who could then help train graduate students and who could perhaps have post docs and other visitors here, and that you would gradually develop a larger reservoir of trained talent. I might say that I think in that latter regard the institute has been notably successful in having had a part in training a lot of the people who are now in government agencies and working in specialized ways. They're also loading up all these consulting firms that deal with poverty-related questions, the private consulting firms. So that everywhere you go now around the country there are a lot of people who have spent at least some time here in the Wisconsin institute.

So Kershaw was arguing that for various reasons it was important to have a) a think tank that was located at a university rather than in a Rand-type operation, and b) that it be a block grant and not just a little one-project-at-a-time thing.

Also, an interesting kind of an aspect to this. The institute just got formed and just got ready to go and along came the negative income tax idea, and Kershaw was the person who kicked that off the ground into operation as an experiment in 1966. So the first thing the institute did of any big scope at least was serve as the research design contractor, design and research manager I guess you could say,

for the New Jersey experiment on the negative income tax. So that began seriously here in 1967 and occupied the institute leadership, Harold Watts in particular, for at least three years pretty much. That was the biggest single experiment conducted in the social sciences up to that time. Big field study, had a long continuing sample of families.

So Shriver got a lot of interest in that and he made use of that. Even though President Johnson was never for it, the negative income tax idea was sort of floating around and much in the public eye from 1967 to 1972 roughly. Shriver apparently became an advocate of this in 1965, and one might say that's a remarkable shift from having been one of the most outspoken people to say the War on Poverty was not about income maintenance, it wasn't about giving money to people, it was about something else. Well, he converted within a year and a half, roughly, to being an advocate, at least in private that is, in this budget document, which was not circulated, that they gave to President Johnson.

G: Do you think it was primarily a political problem with the income maintenance program that kept it from going farther?

L: Well, sure. It was a radical kind of a thing. It was hard to make people understand. And Johnson wanted no part of it from the outset. That was always a strange bedfellows business from the beginning, who was for it and who was against it. Wilbur Cohen, for example--

L: I was saying the negative income tax idea was a radical one. It was not acceptable to people who believed in social insurance, not acceptable to people who believed in sort of minimum wage and regulation of the labor market approaches. It was a direct challenge and an affront, you might say, to categorical public assistance. So for many reasons it had a hard time finding any proponents. Milton Friedman, of course, was one of the earlier people to talk affirmatively about it, and he saw it as a substitute for all these other programs. If you just introduced negative income tax you could abolish everything else on the social welfare side. Well, that got it off to a bad start in some regards in the Democratic Party, but it did pick up supporters here and there. One of the early supporters was Governor [Nelson] Rockefeller; another was Mel Laird, then the congressman from here in Wisconsin, and the Ripon Society that he was associated with. Economists as a group all bought it without much trouble; they all thought it sounded good. And so you had leading people. In addition to Friedman you had Jim Tobin and Joe Pechman and a number of people who by 1967 anyway were on board in favor of this idea. Among the early advocates was Joe Kershaw, whom I mentioned. He came into this field cold and that looked to him like the best idea floating around, so he was all for it apparently. And it didn't bother him that this was going to be badly received at HEW or anywhere else.

I don't know how far you want to go in this direction of exploring the negative income tax. There's a whole great big subject matter there, some of which took place outside the OEO context, I guess.

G: Well, I really do want to go into detail on this. I think perhaps we might do it at the next session.

L: Oh, I see.

G: But I don't want to skip over anything that you have documents for and recollections of in terms of the task force. Have we skipped over anything?

L: Well, I do have curious little memories and I don't know how important they are. But I remember in that period things like this. One day I was seated there writing on some memorandum and Isador Lubin came in, a real old man at that point, a former commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a much respected and close confidant I think of Averell Harriman. He came in to talk about the New York program; it was called "Harriman's Attack on Poverty" when he was governor. Those were just precious moments for me. I always had a lot of respect for Isador Lubin. I'd never met him.

So there were people of different ages, and while I suggested it was a kooky period, it was just like a campaign train or something, the thing that was remarkable and memorable about it was not only this great enthusiasm and infectious spirit of Sargent Shriver, but all the people who came out of the woodwork to give a cheer for this sort of thing. There were ministers of the gospel and radicals like Paul Jacobs, people from all persuasions it seemed who would volunteer--they'd go out of their way to come and say what a good idea this was and what an important thing it was for a rich country to do. So I want to just say that is the leading memory I have of that task force

period. It was a period of kind of unusual harmony, even though there were people who wouldn't speak to me and so on, or I felt they wouldn't anyway. And where there were fundamental disagreements about ways to go about it, there was still a belief some of it was important to say. That was what the President had said, namely that this is a problem and it merits our best efforts and so on.

G: Did Michael Harrington play a role?

L: Yes. Well, he was even of less use than I, I think. I did know him and I did talk to him at that point. But he never offered I think anything programmatic. He didn't try to. He didn't see that as his role, I think. There were other people like that around there. They just didn't. . . .

G: Did you ever have a sense of what the White House wanted in all of this?

L: Well, that was part of the bewilderment for me. I felt I had lost my line with the White House. I mean, my line had been through Heller. I don't think, I felt, that I could sit there in Shriver's building and call Heller. It wasn't an appropriate thing to do. If Shriver wanted to call Heller, he could call him. So I felt a little bit cut off. As I mentioned, I had gone home; I had done what I thought I could do. And when I came back in that task force phase, I didn't know who I was supposed to report to. I guess I had been an underling so much that I felt I needed somebody to report to. I couldn't report to Shriver; he was so busy, and I wasn't asked to come and do that. I

was asked to just come and do something, but with whom and in what form never became very clear to me.

G: As a rule did representatives of the task force tend to represent the departments from which they came?

L: Well, yes, there were people I guess who were doing that. I was impressed by the variety of people I met who were not part of the establishment. They weren't department people. Maybe the list you've got there--I guess you had two kinds of lists in a way, didn't you? And I recognized a lot of those names, but some I didn't recognize at all. But there were people who would show up, like a vice president of some big Fortune 500 company would be there, and then around the hall would be a guy from the movie industry or something. I remember sitting with a black leader from Michigan; I never figured out what he was doing there. I'd go around the corner and I'd meet Michael Harrington or somebody else. There were a lot of nonestablishment, nongovernment people. There were a lot of Republicans wandering around the place and big business leaders, as I mentioned, and idea people from higher education who hadn't ever had much to do with poverty stuff as far as I know. I spent a considerable amount of time with Vernon Alden at one point. He was president of Ohio University.

G: He was working on employment also, wasn't he?

L: I was trying to remember. Was he on the--well, I can't remember which program it was. He did head one of the programs for Shriver briefly at least.

G: Well, I think he was in on the planning of the Job Corps but I don't think he actually--

L: Job Corps, okay. Yes, I think it was Job Corps that he was involved in.

G: Let me ask you a question about the Job Corps in this connection. It seems from reading the press accounts during this phase that initially the Defense Department was going to play a much larger role in the Job Corps. There must have been some negative reaction for one reason or another and the Defense Department's role was really reduced in a hurry. Do you remember that controversy?

L: No, I wasn't part of that. There were a lot of things in your list like that, questions that I had never had anything to do with. The questions of the roles of mayors and of various departments and the turf battles between Labor and HEW and between Agriculture I heard vaguely about but I didn't have any direct involvement in at all. I guess to the extent that when things settled down enough for me to do something, I was writing on these memoranda that I mentioned and on questions that came up in connection with speeches and press conferences and so on and presentation to the Congress. I was vaguely aware there was just this seething cauldron of organizational questions, of political questions, and of all this whole community action thing that I never got inside of, never understood.

G: One of the turf battles that seems to have been quite prominent was who would operate the Job Corps, the Labor Department or--

L: Yes, right. I'm sure that was a problem, yes.

G: Did you observe this at all?

L: No.

G: Is there anything else on this phase that we haven't discussed?

L: No, I guess I would just like to underline that I don't claim to have a good picture at all of that task force phase and of the initial Shriver leadership. I just know some things from reading about it. I'm sure it's politically of great interest and it was an experiment with a new kind of politics. I guess I didn't appreciate how novel it was until I went to England, and everybody I met in the Labour Party wanted to know about this community action stuff, how it worked and so on. So it had a great influence around the world; it's innovative where a big government involves voluntary organizations, reaches out to organize an opposition to itself, as I mentioned, this fourth branch idea. And I never really knew how to make sense out of it. I did read Moynihan's book, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding I guess. I can see the basis for criticism from different sides. I think I mellowed a bit on it all now as I look back on it. I've met a lot of alumni from those community action organizations and it meant a lot to them individually in many cases. I think a surprising number of the successful black politicians in the country kind of started out with the community action experience. Have you run into that?

G: There's a notion or theory that the real value of community action was a training ground for indigenous politicians.

L: Yes, right. Yes. Well, maybe they would have found some other training ground, but at least this was one for many of them, yes.

Well, part of the perspective on all this, the Civilian Conservation Corps alumni group is a distinguished alumni group. I've run into people, when they got talking about that, they'd say, "Well, I know this guy over there who was in the CCC and it was the greatest thing that ever happened to him." So that these things do have long run sort of repercussions that sometimes weren't in the original plan maybe.

I guess I told you a story about my own academic kind of background in getting into a place where suddenly I was writing stuff that was very close to policy in the sense that it was in the President's economic report. But at many points I felt very out of my depth in trying to imagine how this would ever get passed into a law or how it would be administered at any level. So I guess I came at that point to see that there were real limits as to what a university professor in one discipline can do in some of these very fast-moving, innovative efforts.

G: Amazing.

L: So I was glad to step out and continue some more detached research.

G: Well, I certainly appreciate it.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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