INTERVIEWEE: DAVID E. LILIENTHAL

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

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B: This is the interview with David E. Lilienthal. Sir, to begin at the beginning, do you recall when you first met Mr. Johnson? You mention in your journals meeting him at the time he was assigned to the AEC Committee when you were on the AEC Commission.

L: That's the first time I met him that I recall. I have a strong impression, and one that he confirmed, that we were in communication considerably earlier than that time. Whether this was a face-to-face meeting or not I'm not clear.

The circumstances are this way. My recollections were refreshed by him when he was twisting my arm about taking this Viet Nam assignment,* which would be about December of 1967. He recalled that he wanted, while he was administrator of the National Youth Administration in the State of Texas, some kind of services involved in that administration, and I was then in the TVA. And in this half-joking, half-serious way that made him such an interesting man, he recalled that he had stolen as he said--this is facetious--that he had gotten me to release someone, probably a young architect, to do some architectural work for some edifice, some structure, in Texas involved in the Youth Administration. This is the earliest recollection I have.

B: I was wondering, sir, when you were with TVA and when Mr. Johnson was a young congressman in the late '30's, after he was elected to Congress, do you recall by any chance whether or not you counted him

*see Lilienthal's letter.

among the TVA friends in Congress?

L: Yes, very strongly so. Here again, my recollection is vague as to whether or not this involved visits in his office, or how this came about. Later when he was in the Senate--no, I think perhaps it was still in the House--when we were in considerable difficulties in TVA, which was a chronic condition about that time, we did get a great deal of help.

In the House Johnson was increasingly an important figure, though a very young congressman. And this came about because he was so close to the then-speaker.

The relations between Johnson and Sam Rayburn is something we might talk about in the course of this because it is not too well recognized--it has been kind of journalesed--but it was in that connection that Lyndon Johnson was able to be extremely helpful to TVA in some of its appropriation problems. In the early days these were always fraught with difficulty and, usually, it was kind of a last minute saving of the day. So, even though he was in the House, his name was almost constantly before us.

This was also partly because before I came into the federal service, I, as a young Public Service Commissioner in Wisconsin--of that state--had written some articles about public utility holding companies, at the time when they were not particularly recognized as the menace that they became in the public utility field. And then as Commissioner I was responsible for some orders directing operating companies in Wisconsin not to remit sums to their holding companies that would weaken the operating company, which was of course the company that provided the service.

Well, this attracted attention among all those who, in the early '30's, backed the Rayburn Holding Company Bill. So our paths, while they may not have crossed in a literal sense, Lyndon Johnson's name, along with Sam Rayburn's, were part of the almost pre-TVA period in my own public service.

B: What did you see of the relationship between Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson in those days?

L: On this I kind of play it backward. The most poignant illustration of this occurred at the convention in 1960, particularly one particular evening I remember when the Johnson forces were being pretty overwhelmed by the Kennedy blitz. I happened to be strongly for Kennedy at that time, but I found myself at a big party given by Jules Stein of the MCA (Music Corporation of America), who had practically everybody from the film company, as well as from the political arena, at his house, and this a time of a very low period for the Johnson prospects. The look of pain and the bafflement on Sam Rayburn's face, and the reflection of this on his boy--this is the way he referred to him that evening when he took me over to speak to Senator Johnson--revived in my mind earlier episodes of close relation between Rayburn, who was an extraordinary figure--a very earthy man, a great influence. It was Rayburn who took the floor to save a TVA piece of legislation while Johnson was still in the House. And at that time it was Johnson and two or three other younger congressmen--who had been favored by Rayburn who, as speaker, in those days could arrange for committee assignments and the rest--who were on the floor in the lobby getting through the legislation which got through only by Rayburn's doing the almost unprecedented thing of taking the floor, although Speaker,

with Johnson rendering yeoman service among his fellow congressmen.

All these impressions of the earlier period, which were fairly faint in my mind at the time, came back at that fateful evening when it appeared clear that Johnson's aspirations to be the nominee were not going to succeed. I got very much the impression that evening, as I talked to Johnson briefly, and Rayburn more briefly, that they were being given a dirty deal. Politicians don't like to lose any more than anyone else does, and particularly if they feel that the result will be bad for their party. But it revived in my mind all these earlier associations, direct and indirect, that I had had with President Johnson.

B: You often hear that relationship between Rayburn and Johnson described as a father-son relationship. Is that just journalese, or did that seem an accurate representation?

L: A little closer than that of most fathers and sons. It really was an extraordinarily firm, close understanding that very few fathers and sons have.

B: In 1947 while he was still in the House Mr. Johnson was assigned to the Joint AEC committee. You were by that time AEC commissioner. Was that Mr. Rayburn's doing? Giving you a friend on the committee, in effect?

L: Yes, I think so. I had a good many associations with Rayburn, and some of these I think perhaps I recorded. But one of our problems was having people on the Joint Committee, in the House side particularly, who would attend meetings, pay any attention to what we were doing. This was a very grave responsibility we had, a good deal of complaint about how much power had been vested in me and my colleagues, and yet

the watchdog committee just found it tiresome to come to meetings. I complained about this to Rayburn.

I must say that putting Lyndon Johnson on the committee didn't help on this, because he was always a man of many interests, and I don't think his record of attendance was all that good. But I did have a couple of luncheon meetings with him with some of my colleagues. I think his presence on the committee probably was a Rayburn initiative.

B: Let me refresh your recollection. This is a partial quotation from your journals for the period. You describe Mr. Johnson as "an able young man, definitely liberal and shrewd, full of savvy, and a good break for that committee can make or break us." And you go on to describe Mr. Johnson giving you advice apparently about committee members going off on visits. And he mentioned praise for you from Senator Rankin, and also mentioned Senator McKellar. I realize that's many congressmen under the bridge since then.

L: I remember what you quoted because it was published and therefore I read it and reread it in proof, etc. I think the main thrust of Johnson's advice, which is one that we followed, was that our problem with the committee was to involve the individual members of the committee--which is the way he always operated--with the Commission's work rather than assuming, as I'm afraid I must have in a mistaken way, that the bulk of the Commission's work consisted of its appearances before the committee and that the bulk of the committee's work consisted of listening to the Commission. Actually, the AEC reported to the Joint Committee on important secret activities concerning the state of the atomic energy enterprise, at Oak Ridge and Hanford and Los Alamos, dramatic things to which the Joint Committee thus became privy, but which were known to

very few people in government or outside at that time. Reporting on these highly sensitive operating and scientific things was a good way to get the Committee members' interest and participation as responsible members of the Congr

That's what I meant by savvy. This was an understanding of the legislative process. I think there was a tendency in my generation in the public service--at least at the time I was in my 30's and 40's, the '40's being the time I was AEC chairman--a certain residue of resentment, or impatience is perhaps a much better word, with congressional poking into the Executive Branch's work where it took a lot of work and time to understand what they were doing. I never felt that about TVA for some reason. In the first place, there was no security. There was no secrecy. We had a lot of visitors. I think a good many of my scientific friends, and I had to keep them happy--they were among my constituents in an executive sense--were really rather resentful of the time that was spent explaining things to congressmen. I think Johnson pointed the way to overcoming a good deal of that by suggesting having members of the committee visit, and particularly members not of the Joint Committee of Congress but of the Appropriations Committee. He has always been a man, I think, who knew where the vital spots were. And the vital spots were not so much in the Joint Committee at that time--which was an authorization legislative-type committee--because there were very few changes in the law that were required or made, but in the appropriation process. And so his ability, his instinct, to deal with Republicans almost exactly the way he would with Democrats on a public issue stood me very well in good stead in my education on how to deal with this problem.

B: After Mr. Johnson was elected to the Senate in 1948, I believe he

left the AEC Committee, but did you continue to see anything of him? For example, I assume probably the most crucial decision in these years was the decision to go ahead with the H-bomb. Was Mr. Johnson involved in any way in that?

L: Not to my recollection. This was very closely held. In fact, this was the chief error in the whole discussion--it was so closely held--as compared with the discussion about the anti-ballistic missile now, which is widely discussed but of no more serious consequence. I don't recall his appearance in this issue. I'm not sure at all he knew the question was being debated within the inner circle.

B: It was that closely held?

L: Very, yes.

B: Do you recall any other dealings with him during these years while he was in the Senate, before 1960?

L: This would be after. Of course, we're now presumably speaking of the period after I left the public service.

B: Yes.

L: The only one that comes to my mind is one that's rather heart-warming. I had established this company, Development Resources Corporation, in 1954, and in 1960 in the course of my work, had visited Nigeria, and had come to be acquainted with the Prime Minister of that country--a Muslim--who was later assassinated along with a lot of other Nigerians.

This Prime Minister came to New York and Washington on a good-will visit, as they say. Senator Johnson was then I think the leader of the Senate.

B: Democratic Majority Leader.

L: Democratic Majority Leader. And he took a great deal of pains with respect to this black leader, complete in his native clothes, to make him welcome in Washington, and arranged a dinner which was held on one of the most historic spots for a lawyer that there exists on the earth--the old Supreme Court chamber. I found this a very affecting thing. I think he probably did this sort of thing with other foreign visitors. But I recall that. I was especially pleased to be invited because I had had dealings with the Prime Minister.

B: Did you have any occasion in those years to call upon Mr. Johnson as Majority Leader for aid? I ask because, again to refresh your memory, there's an item in your journals for the 1957 period. You were talking to Senator Fulbright about one of your projects in Iran, and Mr. Fulbright suggested that you see Lyndon Johnson, "the most influential man in the Senate." I was wondering if you actually did go see him.

L: No, I didn't. At least I don't recall that I did. I'm sure I would have recalled it if I had. An extremely busy man. Of course Fulbright's estimate was exactly right. If he would find time to think about that problem, he would do things about it.

B: That's a particularly interesting quote in view of what happened many years after that between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Fulbright.

L: That's right.

B: Then, sir, you said you went to the Los Angeles convention. Did you go as a John Kennedy partisan?

L: Yes. Not as a delegate or in any kind of official way, but because I did believe in John Kennedy. I had had dealings with Senator Kennedy --this was of course after my public service--in probably 1959, I

expect it would be. I had done some writing about what I thought should be the theme of foreign aid, as it was then miscalled, and he wrote me a note about it or at least he signed a note about it and exhibited interest in it. Then I found his view, I suppose partly because he agreed with me--at least expressed agreement--no, he did agree because in the inaugural message that same theme was to be found. So mostly through others, through Rostow and Bingham--I suppose chiefly Rostow--I did keep up a peripheral kind of relationship with Senator Kennedy and was persuaded that this was a very good man.

B: What was your reaction when Mr. Johnson began to try for the nomination?

L: I had a close friend who was very strong for Johnson. So I had my views kind of aired with him. This was Jim Rowe, a fellow trustee of the Twentieth Century Fund, and a friend from Roosevelt days actually. I couldn't follow his reasoning because my contacts with President Johnson had not persuaded me that he articulated as a teacher would. As a leader, as a forceful man to push people into a place where they had to say, "Yes or No," he was incomparable. But as a teacher, which in a way the presidency is, I didn't react favorably at all. This was not a matter of being opposed to him, but of strongly favoring Kennedy.

Also, I confess the Southwest was too close to being the South. Therefore it seemed to me it presented a political obstacle. I had lived in the South for fourteen years, and I regard the South as my second home. But I didn't think that the South's influence on the Democratic Party just in practical terms was very useful.

These were among the considerations.

B: Did Mr. Rowe have effective arguments for those points?

L: No. I think he probably considered me rather amateurish. I was more impressed with the arguments in favor of Senator Humphrey, whom I think also rose.

B: Incidentally, in that discussion did either you or Mr. Rowe happen to stumble across the idea of a Kennedy-Johnson ticket? Or a Johnson-Kennedy ticket?

L: No. I'm afraid I can't claim any--

B: I ask because there are people now who claim that they thought of the idea.

L: I suppose they do.

B: Then did you have an opportunity in Los Angèles to see the Kennedy group in action at the convention?

L: Yes. I particularly saw Robert Kennedy on the floor. This didn't make a very favorable impression on me looking at it from the gallery or in the lobbies, but I think I probably overdramatized it. The word was spread around--you know, how the emotional temperature is at a convention--that Robert Kennedy was bearing down on people meaning something a little more than just persuasion. Pretty soon in that atmosphere you were where you see a man going from delegation to delegation, you don't think very highly of him.

I think I was most impressed at that convention with the ineptitude of the Stevenson people, and Mrs. Roosevelt's lack of political sagacity, which was a great surprise and a shock to me.

B: There are those that say that the Johnson campaign there was not as well organized as it could have been.

L: Yes. I think that probably is an understatement.

B: Did there develop at the convention any real bitterness between the Kennedy and the Johnson groups?

L: I come back to that evening at that big shindig at the Stein's. To say that Rayburn and Johnson looked daggers is putting it mildly. They were mad as hell--outraged! Their color, their demeanor, the things they said, the short time they stayed.

B: This party was how close to the actual nomination?

L: I think this was the day before the break, but I would have to check that. It was clear what was going to happen. And of course at a time like that a man with a strong partisan feeling, and if he doesn't have that he's not going to be a good candidate, was pretty sore.

B: Were Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Johnson in effect reacting to the same kind of thing you just described in regard to Bobby Kennedy?

L: I think generally, yes. It was kind of a blitz. And by blitz--after all, they'd been through state conventions galore, and they knew how these things were done, and I think they resented it. Really did resent it. But other people would have to confirm that. That was an impression, a strong impression, I must say. Very vivid still.

B: It kind of makes you wonder all the more about this question everybody has speculated on--why did Mr. Johnson accept the number two position?

L: Yes. I don't think he would have that evening.

B: Somewhere along the line apparently his mind was changed.

L: Yes.

B: Then, sir, during Mr. Kennedy's administration, did you see anything of Mr. Johnson as Vice President?

L: Actually, I wonder whether this episode I've referred to about the

Prime Minister of Nigeria was not when he was Vice President.

B: It's the kind of thing we can check quite easily.

L: I think that may well be the case.

B: Mr. Johnson as Vice President did make a number of trips abroad.

L: Yes. Of course, I heard a good deal about that because he went to Iran, we've been working for years, and where his influence was very considerable on the Shah. I didn't see him at the time of that visit, but the repercussions of it were very considerable. I wrote a piece that refers to this for the book of essays called To Unite and to Heal, or something of that sort, and that has some reference to the Vice President's visit to Iran.

B: Did you stay close to the Kennedy Administration?

L: No, I didn't.

B: I know that during these years you were busy with this company.

L: No, I think except in a social way as, say, being invited to a number of White House functions, particularly those where this company had concerns--Iran, the Ivory Coast, Colombia--where I would go to formal dinners when their president or chief of state would come --and of course conversations at such social gatherings with the President, I don't think I was ever in his office during that time he was President.

B: I ask because there has been so much speculation on the relationship between Johnson as Vice President--well, not so much John Kennedy as the Kennedy staff. I was wondering if you were in a position to have seen anything about it.

L: A complete blank. I don't have any recollection of that at all.

B: After the assassination of President Kennedy when Mr. Johnson acceded

to the presidency, within the next few weeks he called a number of leaders in various fields. Were you by any chance among those?

L: No.

B: Do you recall when your first contact with him as President was?

L: My recollection is it first dealt with the postwar development of Viet Nam. That would be along about October, November of 1967.

B: We might as well go into that here, sir. What precisely did Mr. Johnson ask of you?

L: With the encouragement, I suppose perhaps the guidance of his White House staff, not with the State Department in this case, I think, at Manila I believe it was--a conference in Manila--with then Chief of State or President of the Council, General Ky, a communique was issued calling for a joint study of postwar development. Before that meeting in Manila and before the communique, I had had discussions with the Johnson staff--

B: May I ask who would this have been?

L: A telephone call from Robert Komer. That was during the summer, because I remember the call came for me out on Martha's Vineyard, where we go in the summer. I didn't know Komer, had never met him. So I called Walt Rostow to say, "Should I take this seriously? Is this seriously meant, or is this another gambit? I don't want to spend a lot of time on something that doesn't have substance to it." And Rostow gave me a very strong affirmative answer.

Then I think it was sometime in September or October, probably, when I first saw the President, but my notes will indicate that more specifically.

B: In September or October of 1967? Or '66, after the Manila conference?

L: This is '69. '66 is probably right.

B: That would have been right after the Manila conference.

L: Yes, that's right. '66--I'm sorry.

B: When you saw the President, what did he say to you?

L: Here again, I've made a very detailed and almost journalistic or novelistic, description of this in my journals because it was characteristic of a Johnson performance. When he sets out to persuade someone, he doesn't consider the possibility that the answer will be "no" or stay "no." He led up to it by telling me how much he had helped TVA, how he'd helped about my troubles with McKellar and TVA, and so on. I don't think he referred to the AEC, though he might well have. He referred to Tex Goldschmidt, for some reason, as having been someone that was a bond between us, or perhaps it was something he had said to Tex Goldschmidt, "This is something you've got to do, I'm telling you." It was quite an energetic business. He realized that I had already made up my mind I wouldn't do it. I had already told Komer and Rostow I thought it was premature and that there ought to be a group of people doing this--which is essentially a very distasteful kind of a job for a developer.

B: What was he asking you to do? Sort of a TVA of the Mekong--?

L: To head up a joint group with the Vietnamese for developing a strategy, a framework, and if possible a plan for the development of South Viet Nam after the war--and to some extent during the transition period. Finally he just put it to me that, "I'm putting this to you as an American citizen to do because the country needs it, and I think you're the best qualified man, the best one we've got, and I expect you to do it." And, of course, he was right.

He was also right about it not being premature. I had raised the objection that other people had raised, that until you knew how the war was coming out, or even approximately when, until you knew what kind of government there would be in Viet Nam, to be dealing with economic matters which turned so largely on political conditions, was premature. But he waved that aside and turned out to be right. We did put in a report that I presented to President Thieu in May and a couple of weeks later to President Nixon, and the timing is good. It wouldn't have been if I'd listened to my own counsel instead of his on the timing.

B: Had you before that time formed a personal opinion about the Viet Nam war?

L: About the war itself. Well, I did. I revised it considerably after we got into it. But 'way back in 1961, as my journals indicate, I talked with Under Secretary Bowles, Under Secretary as he then was. He was talking to me about the Mekong River, and urging me to be available as Ambassador to Thailand or, in any case, to go out and help develop that river as the real way of bringing some kind of stability to the region. At that time we were in great trouble with the Laotians. I thought that the kind of support we were giving the Laotians, "Well, they weren't really caring whether we supported them or not." They were completely uninterested in a guerrilla warfare. The next thing he'd be doing would be sending in Marines. And if we did that, we begin the process of diluting our--I was going to say power--I really meant our influence in Southeast Asia by being in too many parts of the world at once. So I felt quite uneasy, as we got farther and farther into it.

The Bay of Pigs thing had a great deal to do with my feeling that we were dividing ourselves up in too many pieces, not waiting for the really critical thing. What the Bay of Pigs has to do with the Viet Nam war, I think you probably see. It was one example of pecking away at the perimeter of things. My own feeling was that the Russians were the only real threat. I wrote some pieces in July of 1960, which got me in a great deal of trouble with my so-called liberal friends on this same score--to keep your eye on the main chance, which is the Russians. Don't be kidded about friendly coexistence and all this junk because Khrushchev had just been over here.

So I had a reluctance about the war. But once when we were in the war and in completely, there was a good deal of agony about it--a personal agony because my children felt I should have nothing to do with this idea that President Johnson had urged on me, even as remote as that was from the war. But I resolved these doubts in favor of doing what the President of the United States asked me to do, and asked this company to do.

B: Did you have difficulty also with your liberal friends in that regard?

L: Oh yes. Our efforts to get economists to go out there is a sorry chapter. They not only said "no," except for our chief economist who had quite a different point of view, but a good many of them really wrote quite insulting letters--unnecessary. After all, when a fellow offers you a job, all you had to say was, "no, thank you." You don't have to cast reflections on the motives of the fellow who has asked you to do a professional job. But a good many liberals refused to have anything to do with this. Some of them were Max

Milliken of MIT, for example, whom I wanted very much as an associate. Well, I didn't think the behavior was any too good.

B: The Vietnamese war tended to create that kind of--.

L: Very much.

B: I gather in your own home.

L: Yes, that's right.

B: Did your work on this project change your opinion about the war?

L: It didn't change my opinion--this lacks grace--about the way we stumbled into it, or in any case, the degree to which we went into it on assumptions that it would be just that easy. All the indications about how long guerrilla warfare can be extended, all the things that happened to France, in Algeria and elsewhere, seemed to me warned us that able generals such as Westmoreland knew very little about what this kind of war was about. But once we got in and I got to know the Vietnamese people, it changed my view considerably. The warmth of that feeling and some recognition of how ruthless the opposition to the Vietnamese was among North Vietnamese, and I suppose the fact that I had a responsibility about the future certainly tempered my feeling.

In any case, fellows who are managers as I am can't have a divided mind. If you're going to do something you do it. You don't look back. That's not a very noble way of looking at so serious a thing as a war. I suppose you should continue to be tortured by the division within yourself, but you can't work very effectively that way. So I really resolved my feeling about it.

B: The kind of project you were dealing with would certainly require governmental cooperation and action. Were you impressed by the Thieu

and Ky governments?

L: I'd been very much impressed with the growth of Thieu. Ky is a very attractive man, had a terrible press which he has deserved perhaps, a sturdy fellow. But Thieu may turn out to be the great Asian leader. And I say that because of the last year the change that has occurred in this man--I was in Viet Nam working with him and his cabinet people and others in May of 1968, and then I returned a year later--almost exactly a year. I was there at the time of the May offensive. Warfare was being carried on in the streets of Saigon when I was there. A year later Thieu had developed into a genuine leader, and this influenced me a good deal in the confidence that the country can be rebuilt under that kind of leadership.

B: Did you make any interim reports to Mr. Johnson in writing or orally during the process of this?

L: Yes.

B: How did he receive your opinions?

L: I came in to see him probably after that May meeting, but it may have been earlier--my journals will show--and talked to him and then to the press. It was a Wednesday. I think it was just as casual as that. He asked me to make a similar report to the cabinet, which I did. That's represented by this picture.

I made some other reports. I don't think any of them were in writing, not formal reports. We did make a formal report in November of 1967 to President Thieu.

B: This may be a difficult question to answer, but did you get the impression that Mr. Johnson was sincerely interested in this kind of development and clearly understood the prospects? Or is it possible

that the kind of thing he was asking you to do was kind of a facade for the war effort?

L: A good many people, including some people related to me by blood--not my wife, who isn't related to me by blood--thought I was being used.

B: That then was the gravamen of my question.

L: Yes. I had a name as liberal, et cetera, and that I was considered to be a sincere person, et cetera, and that he was simply making use of me without any real interest in whether these proposals that we were going to make would be carried out.

It's conceivable. The war was a desperate thing, and he was in a desperate state in which you reach for whatever help you can get. I didn't sense that. I didn't think the questions he asked would indicate that.

I do think that his interest in it was far less than his interest in a military victory. I think it was the military people whose opinions he depended on. I'd seen this process with Roosevelt. It was so much easier to lean on a military man who always has a very explicit answer than it is on a fellow, say, like Bill Gaud, the head of AID, who was simply a developer.

And yet he took me to Guam. The Secretary of State called me and asked me to go to Guam for a meeting with the Vietnamese when Thieu was head of state and Ky was head of--I was in all the sessions. I spoke to the Joint Conference. I spoke separately to others. I spoke to him. There certainly was no indication that I was treated as a pawn or a cloak, except this kind of inference on the part of a good many people who knew how a President does have to make use of every device he can.

B: Am I correct in assuming that you and Walt Rostow are friends or acquaintances?

L: Yes, we're acquaintances and kind of professional friends. He was one of the men that Kennedy, before he was President--that is to say, when he was a candidate--asked to get a group together to advise him on a foreign aid program. From that time on I knew him quite well.

B: I was wondering if you had ever discussed the kind of question we've just been talking about with Mr. Rostow, who was apparently very influential with Vietnamese policy.

L: Yes. The call I made after Komer called me in the summer--I don't know why I have some trouble with these dates, it would be early--on in 1966--related to how seriously he, and therefore the President, took this effort when the war was still going on so heavily. Then I called on him a time or two after that. He elevated this effort to the point that I wish it were now elevated and I think it may be; that is, that the prospect of postwar development could become a major factor in the accommodation and settlement of the war.

This is the sort of thing I said on television in a number of interviews a long time ago when I thought that the war would eventuate in an accommodation, and that that accommodation would center around what could be done by both the Viet Cong, the anti-Viet Cong, let's say, and the North Vietnamese about the development of both countries. This was pretty much the line that Rostow took as early-on as that fall we're talking about.

B: Did you see anything in Viet Nam of the work, if any, that had already been done by departments of the U.S. government? The Agriculture Department or AID?

L: Yes. A good deal.

B: Any effect at all?

L: Yes. Some of it very good, very good indeed. I visited in the Delta on this last trip and An Chanh Province where AID has been working with the Vietnamese, mostly on their own. And the agricultural results are very good--and in other places. The organizations involved in the development of the country, or what used to be called the Pacification Program and so on, are conducted by so many groups that it's hard to follow them. But the results are fairly visible on every hand, particularly in the villages. I usually visited half a dozen provinces or maybe a dozen provinces on each trip. And it's in the villages you see this work, frequently done by young soldiers.

B: American?

L: American soldiers. It's done more now by Vietnamese soldiers, but it isn't strictly a civilian activity.

B: Have you heard anything from the Nixon Administration about your report?

L: Yes, I delivered the report to the President about two weeks ago, who asked a lot of very good questions about it, and have since heard from other White House--from Dr. Kissinger, in a very friendly and approving tone. Before that, I talked to the Secretary of State, who is quite an extraordinary man, who saw the importance of the work and arranged the meeting with the President, with his Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Secretary Johnson, and others in the administration.

I don't see any difference at all; indeed if anything there's a little more cordiality and more sense of reality about the consequences

of our postwar work than there was in the latter days of the Johnson Administration for understandable reasons. I think they're closer to the reality of the postwar than the Johnson Administration was. I think we're just that close to something resembling peace.

B: It is to be hoped. Did Mr. Johnson ever call on you for advice or help in his domestic matters, his domestic legislative program?

L: No, I don't think so.

B: You may be in a perfect position to make this kind of commentary. I don't guess you mind being called an old Roosevelt New Deal liberal, do you?

L: No.

B: There are those who say that what Mr. Johnson has done domestically, if you get back off and look at it, is to complete the Roosevelt New Deal program. Do you think that's a fair evaluation?

L: No, I don't think so. He did that, in the sense that any reform program can be considered complete. No, I think this was a brand new effort. Different times, a different style of leadership, a different condition of the country.

Of course the best illustration of this is that whereas Roosevelt stayed as far away from the problem of the South in its most critical and important area--that is, the waste of human resources in our black population--and the political issues that are involved in the South--, he was a prisoner of the Southern wing of the Democratic party--Franklin Roosevelt. He'd made one effort to free himself from this, and he did on the least sensitive ground--Senator George. As soon as he found that was a hot potato, he pulled away from it and he stayed away from it.

Lyndon Johnson, a Southerner--really a Southerner, the fact that he's a Texan doesn't change a thing in this respect at all. He was a man that was looked to by the South as their man, and very rightly. Yet his administration tackled the most serious single social problem and political problem that any President can grapple with. So I really don't think to say he was simply the residuary legatee of the Roosevelt Administration is a good description although a number of things he did were related to that program.

B: Would you consider Mr. Johnson a liberal by your definition--to quote just one of the several times you've defined it--one who believes in freedom for the individual to grow and develop?

L: Yes, I think I would rate him a little bit higher than the traditional definition of liberal, which is a fairly abstract type of person. I think some new word has to be invented for what Johnson represents in terms of the history of liberalism or freedom. It is a much more modern concept, I think progressive would come as close to it as I can think of.

But even there, Progressive used to mean an isolationist. Let's face it. My first contact with Progressives in Wisconsin--I was from Illinois, but I was appointed by Phil LaFollette whose father, along with Teddy Roosevelt, had a kind of a patent on the name Progressive. And yet Progressive to them meant fighting the railroads and fighting the utilities and this and that, but closing the door around us as far as the rest of the world is concerned.

In that context Johnson doesn't fit as a Progressive either. This is as nearly a man not earthbound, not nationalistic, as anyone since Woodrow Wilson, I'd say.

So the term liberal, I think, is somewhat misapplied to him. I think it's misapplied to me.

B: I think the terms liberal and conservative are pretty near useless by now.

L: Yes, they've been "chawed" to pieces.

B: All they do is give us a great deal of difficulty nowadays.

L: Yes.

B: Sir, have you seen any of the side of Lyndon Johnson that causes some people to resent him so?

L: Oh yes. A man who, unlike the girl in the variation--the girl who can't say "no"--anyone whom he wants to do something just simply can't say "no." I saw him at a White House dinner--it was in honor of the head of some state--spending most of the dinner reaching across the table and practically pounding Mike Monroney about some bill he wanted to get out of a committee--and his table manners and things like that seem to me completely unimportant. It's almost like saying that Andrew Jackson wasn't a good President because probably he blew his nose in public, some asinine things. But to a good many people, this really offended them.

B: As you said in your conversations in 1960 with Mr. Rowe, the teaching function of the presidency is an important one. It apparently did give Mr. Johnson a great deal of trouble.

L: A great deal of trouble. He was a bad public speaker using the modern media. He was very poor in press conferences. I didn't realize to what extent it's almost literally a teaching job, which is a great function in the world.

But your question related to antagonisms to him, which carries

a little farther than that. His lack of the teaching ability and his bearing down on people made him a poor teacher. But also he had characteristics which actually made enemies, or disenchanted and even sorely antagonized people who agreed with his ideas.

B: What sort of characteristics were those, sir?

L: Well, he's a kind of a whirlwind. It never bothered me, I must say, partly because he was extremely considerate to me. If I didn't think he believed what he said, I would say he was a flatterer. But, in my case, he elevated what I had done in TVA and AEC, and what I was trying to do in this company, which is a unique kind of an effort. So I started out being disposed to ignore relatively limited personal characteristics.

The people who worked with him found that here was a man with energy so great as to overwhelm them. He not only had great energy, which lots of people have had, but he expressed it sometimes in rather crude language, gestures. He was a great actor--not a good actor, but a great actor. These personal characteristics held him back a good deal. And I think this led him to lean on people who would butter him up, or in any case would be lacking in complete candor, or would put him into things when he should have stayed out of them.

I think the story of Abe Fortas may fit that category. I knew Abe of course years ago, and he's a great fellow for telling you what you wanted to hear. That's why he went over so big with Harold Ickes, who was in some ways very much like Lyndon Johnson.

But in any case, those who buttered him up rarely became

very personally warm or close to the President. These physical characteristics of great energy should have been construed by people as simply his way of explaining things. But a lot of people either were driven off, or just simply said, "Aye, aye, sir."

B: Sir, I've taken more than the time you allotted. Is there anything else you feel should be on this kind of record?

L: No. I think if we add the things I've recorded in my personal journals it pretty well covers it.

B: All right, sir. Thank you.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Gift of Personal Statement

By David Lilienthal

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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, David E. Lilienthal, 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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