INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 18, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE L. MEHREN

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

PLACE: Mr. Mehren's office, The Agribusiness Council, Inc., Park Avenue, New York City

Tape 1 of 2

B: This is an interview with Dr. George L. Mehren. Sir, let me summarize your background briefly, leaving out a number of things, I'm afraid. You were born in 1913 in Sacramento; bachelor's degree from Cal Tech in 1938.

M: No, University of California.

B: And a Ph.D.in '42. Is that from California?

M: Yes, also Berkeley.

B: And you taught agricultural economics at the University of California from '46 on, and were head of the department there from '57 on. You have an impressive list of advisory and consultant posts.

M: I was also Director of the Giannini Foundation, which is the major research activity in agricultural resources and that sort of thing for the campuses of the University.

B: As I've said, you've been a consultant to state, national, and international bodies even before you joined the Department of Agriculture. And then, in 1963, you became an assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture; in '65, the additional duty of Science and Education . . .

M: No, I became Assistant Secretary, not assistant to the Secretary.

B: I'm sorry, sir. It's a point.

Some more general background material: before 1963, had you had any contact with Mr. Johnson?

M: I had met Mr. Johnson, but only casually, and primarily through mutual acquaintances in the University System of Texas, and also through quite a few of his friends in the cattle business. [I] called on him when he was Senator and as Vice President.

B: These were strictly agricultural-type connections?

M: There are very few Texans I know who are strictly agricultural. The agricultural people generally are involved in a half-dozen other things. But some of them were rather intimate friends of Mr. Johnson.

B: In the fifties, when Mr. Johnson was majority leader, you were with the OPS. Did you have any contact with him then?

M: No, I did not. That was a rather highly technical job there. I ended up as the Deputy Director when Mike DiSalle was director of the Office of Price Stabilization. We operated primarily with the Treasury and Federal Reserve System, the Department of Agriculture, and Commerce, but very little with the White House or the Congress, directly.

B: I was wondering if the question of controls on the products like beef had come up, and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rayburn had gotten involved in it.

M: No, I think everybody else literally, with no intent to be flippant, was involved in that, but I don't recall Mr. Rayburn or Mr. Johnson having intervened in this matter. They did, subsequently, in similar matters involving beef.

B: Did you ever visit Mr. Johnson at the Ranch?

M: Yes, I've been to the Ranch.

B: Had you formed any opinions on Mr. Johnson in that period?

M; Yes, I think I had formed essentially the same opinion which I have now and which has been highly fortified.

B: What is that, sir?

M: I regard Mr. Johnson as one of the immensely impressive people I've known, or with whom I've worked, or to whose work I've been exposed. As a personal matter, he seems to me to be a man of remarkable internal force and remarkable drive. He is, I think, a highly complex man; he's a scholarly man in many ways. He's a difficult man, as I think everyone knows, but nonetheless, he is a man who generated deep loyalty, deep respect. Among those of us who worked with him, I would say that he's one of the really remarkable people of the century in all respects: professionally, politically, and certainly personally.

B: In the times you've been associated with government, generally, have you found Mr. Johnson to be knowledgeable on agricultural affairs?

M: Yes, he is.

B: Even down into the technicalities?

M: Yes. Rather more so than one would expect, particularly again in terms of his interest in the cattle industry. Yes. He is a knowledgeable man. I suspect he's not quite so knowledgeable as he believes himself to be, but that's probably true of all of us. But he does regard himself as a man who is highly knowledgeable in the cattle industry.

B: Does that pertain to things like the technicality of agricultural economics--your field--or commodity marketing?

M: He, of course, had a good deal of interest in the marketing matter.

In fact, I made two special missions, at his behest, to Europe, and was the government head of them with Jay Taylor, who is one of his old associates personally and otherwise heading the civilian side of this. And there were many, many occasions in which Mr. Johnson had direct discussions with us, in the Department, with respect to cattle. He seems to know marketing well. He did, during the so-called beef crisis of 1963 , require that a special price sales report be made available to him every afternoon at four o'clock, without fail; and to my knowledge, there was failure once. And as I recall it, again without flippancy, it really wasn't necessary to have used the telephone, since the White House is only about a mile from the Department of Agriculture. He was quite upset. So we were fully cognizant of his rather deep interest in this matter.

B: Did reports like that have to be couched in sort of layman's terms, or could they . . . ?

M: No, this was the standard compressed summary of all of the meat and livestock reports of the entire marketing system, domestic and abroad. You see, this was a period, you may remember, in which cattle prices literally halved in a very short time; it was close to rebellion; as a matter of fact, about as close to violence as I had seen in any matter involving prices. I do recall that when Governor Hughes of Iowa and Governor Morrison and I jointly spoke at Waterloo, Iowa, in the middle of that crisis, we did so under armed guard.

B: That was the period where men were stopping trucks on the highway?

M: That's correct. It was not the National Farmers Organization. It

was a generalized, virtual rebellion which had some rather severe political repercussions also. Mr. Johnson's view, immediately, was that a very heavy surplus of beef in this country, with drastic price breaks, was simultaneously associated with rising prices and short supply in Europe. So that he, on a matter of about thirty-six hours notice, required us to get a half-dozen major people from the meat and livestock industry; get them into Washington, arriving on a Sunday; have them cleared; get their visas; get their passports; pass their health; provide them with a little funds; load them into his plane on Monday morning, and cover eight European countries in ten days. And this, of course, was impossible. So we did it. And that's the only mission I've ever been on in which not a briefcase was lost and nothing was missed. It went perfectly.

B: That whole idea of that was Mr. Johnson's?

M: Directly. Quite directly and personally. And rather forcefully expressed.

B: People keep saying that about Mr. Johnson. What does it mean when he "forcefully expresses" something?

M: It's not really a military method of address. It's just that it's a very quick, terse, concise set of instructions, giving you what is needed to follow his instructions, and no more and no less. And as implicit in the method of saying what he wants done, there's sort of an expectation that it will be done precisely like that. Regardless of the strictures, and regardless of the pressure that may be involved in meeting instructions, one is expected to meet them. There's nothing

particularly offensive about it. It is not equivocal. One understands fully what is meant; one understands quite fully what is expected, and one goes and does it as best you can.

B: Was the mission effective?

M: It had several effects. Its primary effect, I think, was to make very clear to the people of the Middle West and the Southwest that we were not indifferent to this difficulty. It was an association with another activity which was done at his direction and which I personally handled; involving the purchase of about 350 million pounds of beef for school lunch, needy family distribution, and that sort of thing. We did not export a great deal of beef; nor could we ever, nor shall we ever for a long, long time on any normal or routine basis, because of competition elsewhere, and because of the incapacity of the European market, thus far at any rate, to absorb American kinds of beef.

But it did have the desired political impact; it was a legitimate political impact. And with the two programs put together, the promotion of sales here--in this one, we lined up every possible retail, every possible outlet; our plentiful foods program was turned on. And as I recall, it was somewhere around 350 million Pounds of beef that I bought, buying every Wednesday,with the advice of my colleagues, reporting to Mr. Johnson directly what had been done and how much of a turnaround we were getting. And the only regret I have, looking back, is it would have been better to have bought about 600 or 700 million pounds of it. Of course, prices rose thereafter. We could have used it for

the military, whose needs went up. And by good design and, I think, very careful and carefully supervised execution, it was a beautifully articulated program; and again, I say it would have been better, I think, looking backward, if we'd bought a little more.

B: During that crisis, were you or Mr. Johnson involved in talking directly to the producers who were so irate about this?

M: It was my rather dubious privilege to spearhead all of that. I did all of that.

B: A difficult chore?

M: It was difficult in that it's the only time I've seen the cattle people and the feeding people, either one, irrational, violent, and angry. But it's also true that if you dropped a hundred or two hundred dollars a head and through matters totally outside your own individual control, you're faced with what amounted to bankruptcy. It was easy to understand the genesis of this. Now, in nearly every case in which there was abrasion in making the direct confrontations, which were also done at Mr. Johnson's direction, there has been no harshness. There has been no diminution of personal friendship; and one by one, nearly every one of the groups has taken the trouble to come into Washington and say they were quite sorry for what happened, which, of course, I think also is unnecessary, but it is gratifying.

B: During the crisis, did their anger tend to be directed at Mr. Johnson personally?

M: No. It was not. It was generally at Orville Freeman and me, because I was in direct charge of that set of battery of programs. But they

were primarily at Mr. Freeman. I think this is probably one of the great services that a good Secretary of Agriculture performs for a President, particularly if he's a colorful person and is widely known as Mr. Freeman was, and as quick to defend the Administration as he was, and as competent in that expression. This took a great deal of pressure, that might otherwise have centered on the White House, over to our building.

B: Is that one of the functions of a good Assistant Secretary, too? To take as much of the heat as you can?

M: Yes, it is, surely.

B: For the Secretary?

M: Surely. Although I think there is, again, a tacit understanding among those who have this rather unusual capacity to take heat and not flap and to take heat without generating more heat. So that some of our people did this, and some of them did not. I would say that together, again without arrogance and with simple accuracy, that Mr. Freeman and I probably did 90 percent of the public appearances of the Department.

B: I've gotten a little ahead of the story. There are some other background kind of things that ought to be on this record. Had you ever had any direct political activity before you joined the Department?

M: None.

B: In the sense of campaigning?

M: No. The only time I've ever campaigned was in 1964 and 1966. In '64, I was asked to be sort of a follow-up to a man whose name you probably have forgotten; the Republican candidate for the vice presidency, I followed about a bit.

B: William Miller.

M: Good work. Very few people could do that.

B: You followed him around . . . ?

M: Yes. And I did speak in behalf of a dozen or so Congressmen, particularly in the upper Middle West, and some down in the Southwest. Then, in '64 and '66, I did make some appearances in my own state, not with too much luck in '66, I might add.

B: In that '64 campaign, when you were following Mr. Miller around, to whom were you reporting for political purposes?

M: We had one of our people, Kenneth Birkhead, who was the center of the Deaprtment, at that time, for congressional liaison, was seconded over to the Democratic committee; I worked through Mr. Birkhead.

B: He was, technically, then I think, with Rural Americans for Johnson-Humphrey?

M: Yes.

B: What were the circumstances of your being asked to join the Department of Agriculture in '63?

M: I was asked, as I recall, twice before I came in.

B: Earlier?

M: Yes. And again, do you expect this to be an explicit and totally candid set of interviews?

B: We'd like for it to be.

M: I was most reluctant to come in for a reason which I've never said to anyone else before. I thought that Mr. Freeman and I were afflicted rather similarly with the same virtues and limitations of human flesh.

Mr. Freeman is a man of great intellectual vigor. He's a man of very quick reactions, perhaps sometimes too quick. I'm a person of rather quick reactions, sometimes too quick. Both of us have minds which function rather rapidly. Both of us are inclined to be a bit impatient with people whose methods of operation and styles of work and expression are different from ours. So this really was the reason that I didn't.

But finally, I came in because Mr. Freeman and Mr. Kennedy really wanted a major analysis of all of the structural attributes of the food distribution system in the United States. And since that was more or less in my area of professional competence, since I did know virtually the whole trade quite intimately, it was something that was professionally intriguing and it was also an area of work in which I felt I had some competence. The original request from Mr. Kennedy had been to take over the international side, which later gravitated into my office, but I didn't feel too competent in that area at the beginning.

But by the time I had accepted the third inquiry that was made, I had gotten to know Mr. Freeman well enough to be certain that despite our rather similar characters, that we would get along well. And we did, beautifully, as a matter of fact. There has never been any abrasion of one sort or another, and we ended up as rather warm personal friends.

B: Did you have any doubts about coming to work for Lyndon Johnson?

M: Well, we came to work for Mr. Lyndon Johnson under circumstances which were somewhat tragic to the Kennedy Administration.

B: I'm sorry. Of course, you came in with the Kennedy Administration in '63.

M: I had no great reservations with respect to Mr. Kennedy. I knew Mr. Kennedy as well as anyone in this kind of a position would, and I was deeply impressed with Mr. Kennedy. I think Mr. Johnson's performance in a substantive sense was substantially greater than Mr. Kennedy's, but that's not a meaningful comparison in any measure.

At the transition, at the time of the death of Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Freeman was one of the Cabinet members out over the Pacific. Mr. Murphy was then Under Secretary and was away. I was in Chicago. We got back immediately to Washington; Mr. Freeman, I think, about two days later arrived. But we moved the Department just as we would have had not Mr. Kennedy died.

B: In that period, and immediately after the assassination, was there, within the Department, any uncertainty in the sense that anticipating there might be a change in Secretaries?

M: No, not the slightest. Truly, I don't think it occurred to anybody.

B: It was assumed, by those close to Mr. Freeman, that he would stay on?

M: To be quite truthful, I don't think the issue ever arose. It never arose in my mind because it was a period of stress, and none of us would expect that a reasonable President, a man of the intellectual competence of Mr. Johnson, would shake up machinery which was drastically shaken by the one incident, the assassination. And in fact, it had never occurred to me, until you asked, that any such thing would be contemplated. We looked upon it, then, as our job to do what he was doing, try to get the pieces together and hold the mechanism intact.

B: Some departments of the government, not immediately after the

assassination, but within a period of time, apparently began to develop Kennedy and Johnson factions from the sub-Cabinet and lower level. Did anything like that occur in Agriculture?

M: Nothing of that sort occurred in Agriculture until the candidacy of Robert Kennedy was announced. At which time John Schnittker, who was Under Secretary, and again, a personal friend and colleague of many, many years, endorsed Mr. Kennedy.

B: I've heard it said that that circumstance, in which Mr. Schnittker endorsed Robert Kennedy and Mr. Freeman endorsed Hubert Humphrey, created some difficulties within the Department, some loss of effectiveness on the part of Mr. Schnittker.

M: I'm quite sure it did, yes. But I think, really, that there was a misunderstanding. Mr. Johnson had said that he withdrew himself from political activity, and he did. I don't think it was fully understood that this meant Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officers also. Mr. Freeman certainly did not know this when he endorsed Humphrey. Strangely, I had been asked again, by Birkhead who had moved over to the Humphrey group, twice to make endorsements, and two times, I deferred for excellent reasons. And then we were advised rather directly that this sort of thing should not happen; so therefore, I abstained.

B: Did your reasons involve the ethics of making such an announcement?

M: No, my reasons involved, one, that I was considering this post as President of this group that I now have here, and I rather personally questioned the propriety at the beginning of an organization of this sort, which is basically educational and non-profit--tax exempt, to

express it. I did, however, check with the directors; there was no reservation on their parts whatever. If I wanted to endorse Mr. Humphrey, I could and should.

B: That group, for the record, is the Agribusiness Council?

M: Oh yes, which is some sixty big corporations.

B: Your work as Assistant Secretary, did that involve any work on preparing legislation and shepherding it through Congress?

M: Oh, yes.

B: Did you have a part in the preparing of the bills in '64 and '65?

M: I had very little part in the price stabilization-price support bills. It was Mr. Freeman's basic procedure there that the Under Secretary handle price stabilization and the commodity programs, and virtually nothing else. It was pretty much segmented otherwise. And I would consult with our people who were drafting it, but I did not carry the representation obligation, but I did on many other types of bills -- difficult ones, too, I might add.

B: What I was going to ask you[about was]the general problem, and I suppose problem is the correct word, of dealing with Congress and agricultural legislation. Where do you even begin on, let's say, a major piece of legislation like the bill of '65, Farm Price Act of '65? Where do you start? Do you start in a drafting procedure, taking into account the wishes of committee chairmen and individual congressmen?

M: You really start from the present base, whatever legislative base you have, with whatever terminal dates that are to appear in the future. And then, the next thing you really do is lay out your options as to

what you might do; then, very carefully, you appraise the relative political possibilities of the different options, doing your head-counts as you go along. Then, of course, there is continued discussion with all sorts of outside groups and with carefully selected people on the Hill.

B: Outside groups would mean whoever's involved?

M: Oh, whoever is involved, the grain people, the consumer people. If it were the so-called processing tax, we'd be involved with the milling trades--whoever had a direct interest and even remotely approximately situated interests. There was discussion.

B: Who were those carefully selected people on the Hill?

M: On that sort of legislation, it was primarily the heads of the two Agriculture Committees. Again, I didn't do this. Mr. Freeman took care of most of the contact and discussions directly, and Charlie Murphy [and] John Schnittker, the two Under Secretaries, took the primary responsibility for the internal analyses and the drafting with the collaboration of the general counsel's office. For other types of legislation, quite different people were used.

B: How much of a part did Lyndon Johnson take in this kind of thing?

M: On many, many forms of legislation, and on many substantive administrative actions taken under existing legislation, there was direct clearance with Mr. Johnson. For instance, if we were to raise the dairy prices, which happened to be in my department despite the normal allocation of that to the Under Secretary, that was my baby because the entire marketing order pricing system was under my responsibility, and

any major change in a pricing mechanism, say, for fluid milk or milk products, any change in price support levels, any change in import quota, rulings or legislation to support or to amend such quotas, would go through the White House. Mr. Johnson had the same rule that I think every reasonably competent administrator has: that he was not to be surprised. So it was not entirely a matter of saying, "Do you approve." Although in many of those, it was tantamount to his approval. And it would have been, I think, grossly irresponsible not to have his approval. But also, he was to be kept advised. Mr. Johnson reacted as any other competent administrator would to a surprise. He didn't like it.

B: Who was your liaison man in the White House?

M: Mike Feldman, to start with [and] DeVier Pierson, to end with, were the immediate contacts. But on many of these, we went directly to Mr. Johnson.

B: Did you ever find the staff, people like Feldman and Pierson, getting in your way?

M: Not in my way. I happened to know Mike Feldman quite well, personally and socially; in fact, I've been quite closely associated, personally, with his present law firm. No. There were cracks made on occasion and references made to him as the over secretary of agriculture, but I don't think that was true. And certainly in the DeVier Pierson days, this wasn't true at all. There were some things that went through Mike Manatos over there. On occasion, some things involving interdepartmental reconciliation of viewpoints would go through Mr. Bundy. I participated in a good deal of those with respect to the troubles on

migrant labor, minimum wage laws, the bracero programs, the importation of foreign people, that would be Mr. Wirtz on the Labor side and I was assigned the responsibility there. So,much of that went to the White House, also.

B: Bundy was brought in, presumably, because those things also involved relations with foreign countries?

M: And they were also of sufficient internal delicacy that I think Mr. Johnson obviously wanted them handled by his top assistant. And furthermore, I think that one was the first time in history that a Department of Agriculture and a Department of Labor were basically in a position of congruence. There were still minor details of difference which were ironed out generally in Bundy's office.

B: That interdepartmental relationship seems to be a pretty touchy problem. Were you involved in anything like the OEO program in which there was an attempt to have an interdepartmental council which seems to have just withered away?

M: I had cognizance over the food programs also: the school lunch, the needy family distribution, the food stamp program, the surplus food programs, the disaster feeding. Those were most difficult programs.

B: Where was the difficulty? Was it at the Secretarial level, or at the bureaucracy's--?

M: There was substantial difficulty with respect to appropriations. There was no major difficulty with respect to appropriations from the viewpoint of the White House or the Budget Bureau. In that one, we generally had lesser difficulty with BOB that we did on many other things.

But we had immense difficulty in both sides of Congress. And it seemed very difficult perhaps out of own ineptitude although frankly, I doubt it, basically, to persuade the people on the Hill that there was a need for programs of this sort. It was not so much so with the straight routine school lunch activity. But when we came down to getting special funds for poor areas, special funds for equipment, special funds for aides to help, a breakfast program, that kind of thing, we obviously ran counter to some of the basic value concepts of some of the people strategically situated in both sides. Mr. Ellender and Mr. Holland were both very, very good supporters of the routine school lunch program, but they did show great reluctance in extending the program into its present dimensions and characteristics. Similarly, so long as the needy family program was basically a means of finding a sensible utilization of surpluses, we had their support. But when slowly, during the administrations of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson, they shifted over to something rather drastically different, the primary purposes of which would be to feed people who needed food without too much reference to why they couldn't get their food. Then again, we had substantial difficulty on the Hill.

They are also difficult to administer. It's very difficult to find who is hungry, and it's a shocking thing to concede that, while we had surveyed nutrition in some fifty-one foreign countries one way or another, we've never really done this here. There were no records of a routine nature which could help us. It was difficult to find and to get to the people who really were in need. We still don't know

who they are, how many there are, where they are, or the determinants of their difficulties.

Then, of course, we had to associate these with local people. We did have the authority on rare occasion to use the authority to put the direct distribution program into a county. This is not a reasonable thing to do in many cases, because it is provocative of severe reaction. As example, we worked through every county of Mississippi, one by one; Mississippi, I think, has probably the best poor people feeding program in the entire country; but we used very little coercion, we used very little direct intervention. Our problems were of two types there: one, that rich counties like those in my state were uninterested and [two],poor counties couldn't afford them. But looking back, we did a superb job, and we had Mr. Johnson's complete support every inch of the way.

B: Is the race problem the primary emotional quotient in that?

M: No. There is some element of what I think now is called racism; but no, I think there are people who feel that present poverty levels really are ridiculously high, that they represent levels of income higher than those of many of the people in the Congress and elsewhere. There is, I think, a rather deeply seated view among some of our colleagues in the House and Senate that you should not give everything to everybody. And there are others who have a rather more sophisticated set of viewpoints that it is not possible, in fact, to give everybody everything. And that happens to be true as an operational matter.

B: Was the Agriculture Department generally happy or satisfied with the

more or less arbitrary standard of poverty judgment that was set?

M: No. But it was not any major stricture. I think that our people--especially with well-established, long-established research components, which Mr. Freeman tied into program work rather more than any preceding Secretary had ever done--but we looked upon this in a far more sophisticated sense than any $3,000 minimum. What we really did was to try to get quantitative definitions - susceptible of program operation - of poverty; try to identify their determinants; analyze their inner relationships, and systematically build programs, tying in a variety of activities: development, investment, localization of our own facilities and activities, persuasion of people to move their businesses. I think there was a rather earlier and deeper insight to what could be called issues of poverty and issues of alienation in the Department than there was anywhere else that I know. Perhaps even more so than in the White House. Our people were totally cognizant of what they were doing all the way through.

B: Did this derive from Mr. Freeman himself, or was this more a consensus kind of thing?

M: This is basically consensus.

B: Antedating Mr. Freeman?

M: No.

B: I associate Mr. Freeman with it because he is associated with the rural urban balance.

M: That is Mr. Freeman's major baby, and Johnny Baker, who was another Assistant Secretary, worked with him directly on that. But these

were coordinated the programs of education, the programs of extension, of consumer aids, of food activities, of developmental activities these were packaged and systematically inter-related, and consequently, there was a consensus. I think the consensus would go that Baker carried the major responsibility on resource development. I carried the major responsibility in the education, extension, research, food program, sanitation--that battery of things that's associated with levels of living in urban and other areas. And then Freeman's rural urban balance program was a means of presentation, but also a means of coordination of this battery of programs.

B: Coordination with other departments as well as within the Department?

M: There was vastly more coordination within the Department than there was between us and others.

B: Which is really where we started all this, the apparent difficulty of getting with HEW and Labor and . . .

M: HEW is a new entity, if it may be called an entity, and I'm not certain it is yet by any means at all and that's not a disparaging or denigrating statement. OEO similarly is a new agency, and a new agency generally is created by a transfer of human beings; it takes a great deal of time to shake it down and to acquire the level of personnel and the competence of personnel that you get in the old ones. You can see that within the Department, as well as in things like AID, OEO, some of the HEW programs.

B: In this area of hunger and food for the poor, it seems, to sort of an outsider just reading the papers and all, that the Agriculture Department

was just almost always in hot water about the food stamp program, including such climaxes in the thing as the CBS program on hunger and Secretary Freeman's reaction to it.

M: Secretary Freeman's reaction may have been excessively vehement, but Secretary Freeman's reaction, I think, was meticulously accurate. It is irresponsible in his judgment, and it's totally irresponsible in mine. suddenly to discover human hunger, not to have appeared in the hard days when legislation was being hammered out, not to have been seen when authorizations were being fought through, and not being present when appropriations of one sort or another were gotten, not being there when the difficult initial stages of operation activity began, but suddenly to find that human hunger, of all things, is politically sexy and suddenly to build either the sale of political campaigning or the sale of scandal on human hunger was to Freeman an immoral activity. To me, that's perhaps a bit too strong. It's certainly an unaesthetic activity; it's ugly.

And this can be said of most of the people who have since capitalized on this rather difficult matter. McGovern was never present. Mr. McCarthy was never there. Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Clark had no participation in the genesis of any of these programs, until they became sensational. This is equally true of the people like Mr. Nader. It is not true, say of Leonore Sullivan, who was with us every inch of the way. Catherine May, on the other side of the spectrum, supported us. But those who have capitalized or who have really made this a major public issue were never present when the going was rough.

B: It was generally the feeling in the Department of Agriculture

that this was more or less political exploitation?

M: No, I think, soberly, most people would not say it; soberly, we said that these are parvenu, these are people whose support is late in coming. But generally, our reaction was we welcomed them aboard. But the difficulty was that it's not useful, in any sense, to criticize that which others had tried to do and which others had done very, very well, considering a span of eight years from a base, really, of nothing. The criticism was destructive and not helpful to us. And of course, there is a normal human reaction, particularly among the permanent working troops who put in twelve hours, seven days a week on this, struggling as hard as they could, then to be labeled as people who were cold and indifferent, detached, and cruel. This generates a rather standard human reaction.

B: To get down into the mechanics of that, did you ever seriously examine the food stamp program to see if it was the best possible method of food distribution?

M: By possible, you mean that which could be made operational under the constraints of the Constitution, the political necessities of living with the states and the localities, staying within the law and your budget, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera?

B: Yes. I don't mean an ideal situation. Although, if you had ever talked about an ideal situation, that would be interesting, too, but given the political realities . . .

M: Yes. We ran continuing and analytically elegant analyses of the impact of the program as best we could. That was done before we started

the pilot operation. It was done after the pilot operation. It was done systematically and regularly throughout the entire life of the programs. It was our hope that we could make this the primary mechanism for the distribution of food to poor people. That, however, was subject to budget constraints and authorizations, too. We were limited on authorizations as well as budget. It was also constrained by the necessity to obtain the cooperation of the localities, the states and local governments. We were not permitted under statute just to go in and do this. It was also constrained by some of the habits of the persons involved, the clientele, which are puzzling.

B: You mean their choices of foods and so on ?

M: The choices of food among those who stayed in the program were generally that which we wanted. They'd shift over toward what anybody else would. They'd begin to buy milk, animal proteins, green, leafy vegetables, that sort of thing, and their consumption of other types of products went down. Just as they would in any normal situation where income change occurred.

But there were people who seemed somehow to get off the food stamp substantially before their incomes rose high enough to make it economically sensible. There appears to be some preference mechanisms among the rural Negroes particularly, and possible among the Indian and Mexican derivative people of the nation, to shift away from food stamp as soon as they can find enough liquid funds in their ongoing incomes for appliances, television, things of this sort. This is, again, not a critical statement. Perhaps that's the way their

preference patterns go. But there were many puzzling things about them. We had to operate,in many cases, without the kind of analytical knowledge we'd like to have had.

B: It's also the kind of thing you couldn't do much about, even if you had full knowledge on it.

M: No, you can't force people to stay in. But it was our hope that we'd take that route for many, many reasons. It was the cheapest way to do it, and it gives people the broadest possible scope of choice.

B: Did you get personally involved in , as you mentioned, going to Mississippi and seeing the county authorities?

M: Yes.

B: Did you find them receptive?

M: In Mississippi, it was easier in Mississippi than the other states. We also had a very good relationship with Mr. Whitten. He's a man of great intelligence.

B: Mr. Whitten?

M: Whitten,Jamie Whitten of Mississippi. He happened to be the Chairman of our Appropriations Subcommittee. And we therefore had, I think, better access in many ways to Mississippi. The two welfare commissioners there happened to be sisters in sequence; we worked with them continuously, and there was no major problem there. There were problems with other people whose values could not countenance what they called charity of this sort.

B: I didn't really mean to single out Mississsippi itself.

M: Mississippi gets singled out. I remember once, just before the Watts

thing came, a black leader came to my office, and he wanted us to provide food to go with about $35,000 he'd picked up on a Thanksgiving fast, as I remember. And I told him, no, I would not do this in Mississippi, because then we had only one or two counties to go, and I frankly chose not to jeopardize what had been accomplished and was to be accomplished. I did tell him that if he would consider South Carolina or, it so happened, Los Angeles in my own state, that I would help him. And his answer was, "I'll get no publicity out of Los Angeles." This was a few weeks before the Watts bonfire. And incidentally, I went out on that,on the President's mission out there on that one.

B: That's an interesting point.

M: Yes, there is. I think there is a standard reaction, perhaps unconscious among many of the critics of many of the programs of the Johnson Administration, which really comes down, first, to a kind of immanent hostility toward that which is, regardless of what that which is is; and secondly, there are some people, I think, that exploit the sale, the representation of severe trouble. And if it could be tainted with an implication of scandal, that they're so motivated. I don't think consumerists would agree that this is part of their motivation, but it is. I asked one of them frequently to help me in South Carolina, which was a tough state to crack. Georgia was a tough state to crack. But that's not what he wanted to do.

B: How'd you handle the personal relationships there when you were trying, to use your phrase, "crack" South Carolina or Georgia? How did you

handle your relationships with their Congressmen?

M: Basically, on a direct person-to-person, honest discussion.

B: Went to them in advance and explained what you were doing?

M: Surely.

B: Did you find them generally cooperative?

M: There are people in the delegations of some of the Southern states who quite honestly, quite sincerely disapprove, in value terms, of programs of this sort. I don't really think that the mythology that they wanted to keep the Negroes submerged, or that they wanted to give him food only in the off-harvest seasons so that he would be available and have to work during the harvest season, these were not the basic constraints, I don't think. Many of the people, after five years of this one stretch there, one gets to know well enough to speak honestly. And I know this: Mr. Holland, who has very strong viewpoints on racial integration, is not afflicted with the views that are attributed to him on occasion; neither is Mr. Whitten; neither is Senator Russell; neither is Senator Talmadge.

B: You mean with the racial views that are usually--

M: Yes, that are generally attributed to them.

B: Did you run across any of the kind of reaction where a Congressman would say, "I'm all for what you're doing, but I can't support you publicly"?

M: No. These are honest men. Their values are different from mine; probably, from yours. But I think one, in dealing with another human being of any persuasion, must proceed upon the assumption that this

man's values are beyond argumentation, that one accepts them or rejcts them; one does not convert very often. And therefore, what you try to do is to work out a tenable resolution that maximizes the achievement of your own values with minimal adverse impact upon the others. And you do this on an honest basis, a straightforward basis, and you listen. This is the major secret in dealing with the people on the Hill. This was the major complaint against many of our people. I think the one I worked most closely with, politically and otherwise, was Wilbur Mills, who was a man of massive intelligence and a sense of integrity, which is also quite remarkable. In dealing with Wilbur Mills, first, it is necessary that you know what you're saying; second, you speak with complete honesty and candor, because there is no other way to do with Mr. Mills, nor should there be any other way.

B: Did you find that he reciprocated with honesty and candor?

M: Completely. He's one of the very, very great men I've known. I also served as the linkage of occasional difficulties involving Mr. Johnson and Mr. Mills.

B: Going beyond strictly agricultural matters?

M: No.

B: As, for example, in the tax surcharge?

M: Indirectly, the tax surcharge was involved. Mr. Mills happens to represent a dairy district, and part of his own local political mechanism is closely associated with the dairy industry. And Mr. Mills, therefore, pressed for certain types of adjustment to the pricing and support activity of that industry, which, again, was my responsibility.

There was a warm personal relationship that had developed over the years, and there were occasions in which it was suggested to me that I could let Mr. Mills know that if he called the President directly, that that which he wanted in the milk industry might very well be gotten. The answer--and invariably I followed instructions--would be exactly what I would expect it to be. "Certainly, Mr. Johnson would do that." And then Mr. Johnson is going to say to me, 'All right now, what about my tax bill,'" and he said, "I'm not trading milk for taxes. I'm really not that silly. There are other ways of getting my milk legislation and adjustments through."

B: You've used the phrase, "it was suggested" to you. You mean, the President would suggest it?

M: Mr. Freeman suggested on behalf, I would assume, of the President.

B: Is it your opinion that Mr. Mills' interpretation of that was correct,that is, that that was what was involved, Mr. Johnson through Freeman was offering a deal?

M: A quid pro quo? I doubt it very much, because I don't think Mr. Johnson is that silly. I think it was an exploratory effort, perhaps generated by Freeman himself. I would think, however, he wouldn't do that unless the President knew it, to get a colloquy established which might extend to taxes in the process of the dialogue.

B: Mr. Johnson's techniques of dealing with Congress would seem . . .

M: There were times when there were rather strained relations, but there's no personal animus. I spoke at San Antonio, after I left office, on the same platform with Mr. Johnson; I think at least fifty members of

the Congress were there, and Mills was sitting next to the podium, and I was sitting next to Mills, and there's a warm affection there on a person-to-person basis. It's very obvious.

B: Did they chat with each other?

M: Oh, yes. And this happened to be the night that the President announced that any effort to take over Rumania would be disapproved, and that he handled superbly also, I might say. There was tension, it was clear, in that one evening, also, between Mr. Fulbright and the President. I think that Mr. Fulbright did permit their basic political differences, on occasion, to color his own personal attitudes.

B: You mentioned that you went to Watts. Did you go with the first group that left Washington while the riots were still in their last days, or did you go later with the task force group?

M: Ramsey Clark took a task force, which was Andy Brimmer and I think Jack Conroy, who was once in the labor unions himself. But I went with them. The fires were still burning. Within three days, I had a $15 million food stamp program going there. I also was chewed out rather mercilessly by an old friend of mine named Pat Brown, having finished it.

B: Governor of California.

M: Yes.

B: Chewed out for what, sir?

M: He said, "You're stupid." His words were: "Up until now, George, I thought you had fairly good sense, up till now . . . " I had expected a small pat on the back for getting this thing done as rapidly as I

did in a community which was predisposed against it. His statement then was, "What are you trying to do! Are you trying to generate a riot in Oakland? Is that what you're trying to do! If you let these people know that by burning down Watts they get a $15 million food program, how do you think they'll react in Oakland!" And I told him I doubted very much that giving $15 million to Los Angeles would be provocative of riots anywhere. Pat disagreed with me.

B: Did his point of view cause the Department to consider accelerated programs in Oakland, or any other place ?

M: No. We were always so far behind on places that we could have taken the program to, had we the money and the staff, that, really, California was rather well down the list. California is a wealthy state, among other things, and the priorities were established, as much as we could in advance, in a natural sequence. The opening of programs was scheduled. We had San Francisco on the list, but not Oakland.

B: How effective was your program in Watts?

M: It followed about the same sequence that the food stamp program follows anywhere; the need declined, and the numbers of those who had been participating in direct distribution, and [there was] a slow regaining of the loss. It's generally, in a big city, two or three years to get back up.

B: There seems to be some indication that the Watts Riot caused a number of government departments to become more or less suddenly aware of the problems of the urban ghettos.

M: Yes.

B: Did that occur in Agriculture, too?

M: We had always been aware of the problems of the ghettos, because 95 percent of the activity of the Department is done in cities of the United States, literally. Two-thirds of the budget is spent in cities, and 95 percent of the activity and personnel are in the cities. I would think there are 5,000 persons in the Department of Agriculture in this city, ranging from the Quarantine people out at Kennedy Airport and out here at the ports to the health people, to the meat inspectors, to the graders, to the market service people, to the school lunch people, to the university people. It is an urban department. It always has been an urban department. Although, I think, looking back, we stressed that a little bit more than we should have politically because that bounced back on us and bit us, as the phrase is put politically.

B: Well, this provided . . .

M: Oh, yes. This provided the opposition, including the Farm Bureau, and particularly the core of the higher income Middle Western states, to build a reasonably respectable campaign that we really didn't give much of a big damn about farmers, that what we were really doing was taking care of consumers. Looking back--I was the consumer guy--Mr. Freeman and I oversold that one, I think, because it did give us a backlash.

B: From your normal base of supporting . . . ?

M: From the rural communities.

B: You were on the President's Commission on Consumer Interests, were you not?

M: Yes, I was.

B: How did that commission work?

M: While I was on it, nothing happened.

B: Did those of you who were working on it get the impression that it was sort of intended to be a lightning rod?

M: No.

B: Take attention and heat rather than . . . ?

M: I think Mrs. Peterson's function may not have been so intended, but certainly Esther Peterson diverted a great deal of pressure that would have impinged upon us on herself.

B: Presumably, a good deal more than the President would have liked

M: I think so.

B: Her coming out in favor of supermarket boycotts and so on?

M: I don't think Esther ever came out in favor of supermarket boycotts. I think she came out in favor of the right that the female has to protest by orderly means, if she so chooses. But I was happy, frankly, to have Esther feel close to that. We had no position on that, any more than we would have were we still there on the strikes which will occur this summer in the supermarkets across the entire United States.

B: Are we going to have some more?

M: Yes, we are. They're all programmed and ready. There will be a great boycott to start with, with secondary picketing presently being organized, with support of AFL-CIO, to picket any retail outlet handling that product. Expect to extend it beyond this one California product and

others using migrant labor.

B: Does your knowledge of that come from your position now, or when you were with Agriculture? Is this one of the functions in Agriculture, to find out about these things such as this?

M: They come to me mainly because out of time, out of old acquaintances, people come to me now. The supermarket director has been here within the last ten days asking that I arrange for a discussion of this matter with the new Secretary, which I did. He asked, also, that I arrange for a discussion of the matter with one of the four Cabinet members of Mr. Reagan, which I did. So it's a matter of time and not merely the service in the Department of Agriculture, but it's a matter, I guess, of thirty years of professional acquaintance where people come and ask you to do these things. So I do them. If they're reasonable, decent, I do.

B: You've already mentioned that you were involved in the Department's international aspects, too.

M: Yes.

B: I might add into the record here that prior to your service in the Department, you had been a consultant to Brazil, Venezuela, Italy . . .

M: The United Kingdom, Korea, a large number.

B: What sort of international responsibilities did you have in Agriculture?

M: I had some of them that were directly associated with the allocation of responsibilities, anything involving health, sanitation, packaging, labeling, restrictions associated not with economics, but with the maintenance of health and sanitation, this, that and the other thing.

Honesty in Trade, that was my unequivocal assignment. So I negotiated most of the matters involving pesticide residues, standardization of products, standardization of names and labels, that kind of thing. Similarly, since they can't always be detached from matters of direct economic impact, nor can you certainly detach certain domestic activities from cognate international activities, a great deal of that came. And since I handled the import quota activity, not merely the legislation but the activity, on several products, meat, for instance, that very difficult quota of legislation which Mr. Mills basically resolved by compromise; the dairy stuffs and the cheese stuff. In fact, I negotiated with the Germans, one of the last things I did on that matter. George McGhee is ambassador there.

B: The poultry war, did you get in on that?

M: Not so much, no.

B: When you're working in that kind of negotiations, are you in tandem with the man from State?

M: Yes. We had continuing relationships with the State Department. Sometimes a dozen a day.

B: I was just going to say that it would seem the interests of Agriculture and the interests of State might not always be identical in matters like that.

M: No. But basically, I had little, if any, conflict.

B: Are any differences that might exist between you and your counterpart in State generally resolved at your own level, or did the Secretaries and the President ever have to take care of them.

M: I had no difficulties. Freeman, pretty much personally, handled the 480 shipments, and there were difficulties there, and there were difficulties, I think, in general, associated with Freeman's conviction that we were required, as the phrase is put, to attach strings. But if we were going to make foods available, to India particularly, it was operationally necessary to require that they do something. And there was, I guess, some abrasion there. I was not directly involved with it.

B: Was that concept of "self-help," or "strings" concept of the PL-480 shipments Freeman's idea or Johnson's idea?

M: It's very hard to answer a question of that sort directly. I think Mr. Johnson had a substantial part in developing the basic structure which exists today. That is, we will make food available if and as emergency requires, and as our own availabilities permit; that we will require adjustment by the people who want it if they are to get it; that we would associate it with population programs. None of these was developed de vacuo or overnight. This developed over time. But I think that the final enunciation was as much Mr. Johnson as it was our own people, perhaps more so.

B: In this kind of activity overseas, I gather you also had to work closely with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization?

M: I didn't do that much. Mrs. Jacobson's primary duties were the international organizations. I had various professional relationships with them, but the actual negotiations and participation in counsel, that sort of thing, Mrs. Jacobson did.

B: Is that an effective organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization?

M: What are the criteria by which you'd measure effectiveness here?

B: It gets an awful lot of general publicity as an effective organization for improving health, dietary standards, and so on; and I was wondering if . . .

M: My answer would be no.

B: . . . from what you have seen in operation, if it's as good as its publicity.

M: No. It is a grossly ineffective instrumentality. And it is presently in the area in which I'm working. They have a large private investment center there, which, to my knowledge, has not engendered any investment anywhere, that I can . . . and this is equally true of UNDP.

B: Does it actively get in the way, or is it just lying there doing nothing?

M: Oh, it's going through motions, but I don't think there's any substantive program achievement that I know of. It has done, I think, a reasonably good job on some types of data gathering, although I think their data basically suspect. The major trouble of FAO, I think, is its own internal constituency. It's a nationality quota mechanism which precludes associating persons with the professional competence that's required to do this. It has never been an active agency; it has never been useful to us or, I think, to very many other people, but it has not been obstructionist in the sense that one can move around FAO without offending them when things weren't done.

B: You mentioned earlier that you undertook special missions for Mr.

Johnson in Europe. Was one of those the one you've already described in connection with the meat crisis?

M: Yes.

B: What other sorts of special activities [were you involved in]?

M: I worked on the sanitation requirements, the residue requirements; the non-economic barriers to trade with the EEC group, on quite a few occasions. I also did a little work in Panama after I left office. I went down as his Special Ambassador for the inauguration of the President down there. And I worked, on quite a few occasions, in Europe. I went to Argentina to make speeches in my capacity as a professor, despite being an officer of the government, which also was intended to gather some information on some rather difficult matters at issue there. And quite a few trips to Europe.

B: This was to gather information for the President?

M: This was not his direct request. This was the State Department, primarily, which wanted to find information primarily on certain sources of tension in some of those countries, and also to see what could be done to resolve difficulties in our foreclosing of animal product imports from South America here. The State Department was deeply interested in that, as we were. So, quite a few of these kinds of things.

B: Generally effective missions?

M: Yes, I think that one certainly was. Because I stood fast under something like eighteen rather sharply worded adverse editorials in the Argentine press. But about ten days after I got back, one of the major outbreaks of aftosa--foot-and-mouth disease--broke out at Tierra del Fuego, which they had claimed, violently, was free

of this bug. So, yes, it was. And I think there's a much greater understanding.

And I also worked with the Latin American cattle people, Latin American animal health people regularly on a routine basis. In Mexico, I did the screw worm job with the Mexican government. The aftosa work, I was on that commission. I worked with them on that kind of thing quite often. I also had substantial economic discussions with them; that would be Latin America and Europe, mainly.

B: Was your effectiveness in that kind of work helped by having private non-governmental contacts with the countries?

M: Yes.

B: You don't have to deal solely with the. . . .?

M: I made it a routine procedure, and always made it a routine procedure in government or otherwise, to use three basic sources of information. I was Director of the Giannini Foundation, which was originally endowed by the founder of the Bank of America. So I knew them well and still know them well. They happen to be members of this present corporation I'm in. I could get from them and from other banks a type of general intelligence which could not be gotten, really, from any other instrumentality. I used our own embassies, but with a careful selectivity, particularly using those I know well. As example, I know Stanley Cleveland, who is now minister in London and was in Paris for a long time, very well; I could work directly, and openly, and without constraint with him. I knew Bob Brand, who is now minister at Paris, very well. I have known Mr. McGhee, who is a very great Ambassador,

and I could work directly with him. Most of our attachés, I have known for twenty or thirty years. So there was an easy basis for discussion.

B: Attachés, you mean the Agriculture Department's attachés?

M: Yes, who are attached directly to the Department, as you know.

Thirdly, I would use selected companies. As example, I would get Mr. McFarlane, who is the president of Corn Products which operates in about thirty nations. He would always bring his people in to one place and give me a day's briefing so that I could get the viewpoint of an operating business, and the viewpoint of a major financial element and the viewpoint of our own government sources, which are quite different. Many companies helped. And this I did routinely, everywhere, and still do, I might add. I availed of friends in the universities and the ministries abroad.

B: I would imagine your present position is, at least marginally, diplomatic in nature.

M: Yes, but so was the one in Washington, using the word in its broadest connotation. Looking back, I think the function of anybody in a sub-Cabinet or Cabinet post or any post of administrative responsibility is basically to compromise difficulties. Because that which gets settled elsewhere doesn't come to the front office, and that which does come to the front office is inevitably and almost invariably that which has not been settled elsewhere. So that your primary function really is the resolution of differences.

B: And only the hard ones come to the top?

M: Yes. And those that I couldn't get resolved went on over across town.

B: Did you, through overseas work, involve Vietnam?

M: There's only one element of it. There were some elements of it that are publicly known, I guess. We did the extension work, the recruiting. The Extension Service was my responsibility also. I did not deal directly in the feeding part, in the supplemental shipment part. I did have some science-oriented activity which involved several other parts of the federal government--fire experimentation, defoliation, burning, things of that sort.

B: Military-type activities.

M: Yes.

B: Was the Agriculture Department extensively involved in that kind of work?

M: No.

B: Was your work advisory, consultant, technical?

M: It was primarily of a research nature.

B: I realize that some of this is classified; I'm not trying to pull it out of you.

M: I'm being very careful about what I say.

B: Most of it, I'm quite sure, is on the written record and will be eventually available.

M: Somewhere. Yes.

B: Extension. The Agriculture Department set up an extension service in Vietnam?

M: Yes, I think we have fifty-seven people, whom we recruited. This was done under AID.

B: Vietnamese?

M: No, Americans who trained Vietnamese, but also served as extension

people in Vietnam. They're still there, as a matter of fact.

B: Was this modeled on the extension system in the American states?

M: No. There's a fundamental difference which, I think, was learned over time. The American extension service person is primarily a communications expert who can tell people how to do things. It's quite obvious, now, that in Vietnam, and Asia generally, the underdeveloped countries generally what you need as an extension man is a man who can do it. You need demonstrators,not people who are skilled teachers. So that we have systematically, just as Rockefeller has, recruited a different type of person for that kind of extension work from that which is recruited in this country.

B: Is it fair to say that, you mean, you recruit more Peace Corps types?

M: No, we get people who really, really are topflight agronomists and not extensionist people.

B: Does it make a difference? Here in the States, the extension system is, so far as I know, invariably a function of a college.

M: It is by law. It's the county, a designated state university, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It's a tripartite arrangement by statute.

B: I assumed that, in Vietnam, you must have had to have a different administrative kind of structure.

M: Yes. This was an activity under the direct supervision of AID, but we did the recruiting, just as we recruit and train, for AID, some five or six thousand people a year.

B: Has that been in operation long enough to tell whether or not it's

going to be effective?

M: I can't speak directly, but those who have studied it, including Mr. Freeman, seem to be well pleased with it. It has done pretty well.

B: Somewhere in here, there must be some incompatibility, which if not serious now, could get serious, between military objectives and this kind of civilian activity. For example, if you worked on defoliants which I assume could have some sort of lingering effect on agricultural productivity, is that a kind of problem that you had to face and assign some sort of priorities in your activity?

M: That which was classified and associated with the military was, for practical purposes, detached from ongoing programs.

B: But if you sat down and looked at it in the long run, what the Agriculture Department is doing in Vietnam, did this ever cause any difficulties?

M: You mean, do I personally approve of what we did?

B: If you choose to answer it that way.

M: I don't know of any other way to answer it. Yes, I approve of what we did. What we did was make available part of our science capacity for inquiry into some experimental military techniques at a time in which, regardless of its designation, the nation was involved in war. And personally, I have no objection to it. I wouldn't want to make it a major matter, and I wouldn't want to infringe upon the activities of the director of Research and Weapon Development. That's his basic responsibility. But in those instances in which we had the competence, and he didn't and couldn't mount the competence within his own

department, under such rare circumstances as that, yes, I think we did a very sensible thing.

B: To get down into the operation of the Department of Agriculture, how it runs, first of all, did Secretary Freeman really run the Department of Agriculture?

M: More so, I think, than any other Secretary that I knew, and from what the old, old people say, much more so than any Secretary they had known.

B: Is it a cumbersome piece of machinery? Are there several bureaus?

M: Much less than you might think. Now, there are deeply seated empires. The Agriculture Stabilization System is pretty much a political entity and has its own being. The Forest Service has some of its own being. The Farmers Home Administration has some of its own being. There is an élan or an esprit in the regulatory groups which, in a measure, detaches them. But Mr. Freeman, I think, did more to make a Department out of it; and certainly did more in the program planning activity that was meaningful and operational than had ever been thought of before. And I would say now it is a Department.

B: These agencies, you said, had their own being. You mean, they have what amounts to an independent constituency that they could call on?

M: There is a clientele of the Forest Service; there is a very carefully organized clientele of the Soil Conservation Service; there is a clientele of the ASCS group, the Stabilization people; there is a clientele, even, for the Meat Inspection groups. Surely, they have their clienteles and sometimes there's hostility among the purposes

and activities, and they do have to be straightened out.

B: These clientele bring up another question. Agriculture in the United States, in the broadest sense, if anyone has anything to do with it except possibly the consumer, seems to be very well organized in a number of farm groups, specifically, a number of trade processor groups, and groups like the Agribusiness Council. How much do they run the Department of Agriculture?

M: Let me say this: it's very hard to answer the question, again, because they're not susceptible to quantification or quantitative analysis. You have to use judgment as best you can. My judgment is that the big general farm organizations, the Grange, the Farmers Union, American Farm Bureau Federation, as things now exist, can pretty much obstruct, if they choose. I'm very doubtful that any one of them alone has the bullets or the clout, as the phrase now goes, to generate and make effective programs of any major meaning.

The really important people are the commodity and functional groups. They have, for practical purposes, pretty much replaced the general organizations, both with respect to representation to the Department, collaboration with the Department, or the lobbying function. I have never had any personal distaste for the lobbying groups. They're generally competent people, reasonable people, decent people. And it's not a bad way, really, to operate a mechanism of this sort where you have specifically, explicity, purposely pluralistic mechanisms; where dissent is not merely tolerated, but frequently is generated; where sort of unwritten rules are required for the compromise of

dissent; and where there's an equally unwritten acceptance of the decision of majority groupings after due processes have been had.

That really is the heart of the whole system. I think it's a major differentiating attribute of this and other systems. And this kind of representation from interest groups is very useful. In fact, I don't think you can run it without it.

B: When you were with the Department of Agriculture, you, of course, worked closely with such groups, planning legislation and--

M: Yes, and very closely against them in many cases. This meat inspection fight involved direct hostility with people who are very close personal friends of mine with whom I've worked many, many years.

B: The processing representatives?

M: Sure. And this was open battle. But slowly, we won, in rather more bloodshed, I think, than was necessary, but--

B: In an affair like that, presumably you would be in touch with the processing representatives from the very beginning of the idea?

M: Yes.

B: Again, in a diplomatic sort of function.

M: Yes. But in many cases, it didn't work. I have personal friendships in the commodity exchange business. I was, in fact, offered, and it's no longer any secret, the presidency of the Chicago Board of Trade.

Six months later, I testified for the redraft, the amendments, to the Commodity Exchange Act, which would have introduced reforms that were

most clearly, clearly needed. We got parts of it, but we lost most of what we wanted, because they beat us.

So there are no personal animosities in these things.

B: Is your offer from the Chicago Board of Trade still pending?

M: No. The only reason I mention this is that they left all their records. Henry Hall Wilson, who was Mr. Johnson's Special Assistant, who took it and knows what the facts are there, because they did not remove their early correspondence. Henry's seen it and talked to me about it. It's no longer any great secret.

B: That was when Mr. Wilson was doing congressional liaison work?

M: Yes.

B: Actually, this group that you're with now is one of the major outside agencies that gets involved in agricultural policy, isn't it?

M: No. This doesn't get involved in agricultural policies. As a matter of simple fact, most of the processors have no executive home. I suppose, technically, the meat packing people, the canning people, the dairy processors, the works, should center at Commerce. But they have no facility at Commerce; they have no personnel at Commerce. Whatever representation they had came through the Department. But they do not have the sophistication and presentation, or lobbying, that the commodity groups do. In other words, the canners are strong; the meat packers are a lesser opponent than the cattle people are.

B: Simply because of the lack of an organization . . . ?

M: The cattle people organize. No. The cattle people can turn two persons in boots and cowboy hat on every congressman in Washington, and do it

in forty-eight hours, and keep them there. And they're competent; they're able; and they are formidable opponents. They play it straight, but they play it hard, too. The business community doesn't really have this insight or this skill, and this group has no lobbying activity whatever, although, we have been asked in the last month to consider participating in drafting the new legislation for the AID type of operation and also have been asked by the executive and the legislative side to participate in the reformulation of the administrative structure of the foreign assistance activity. And no decision has been made. I think some of my highly intelligent colleagues here really don't know what a commitment of that sort means.

B: This would involve overseas investments and so on?

M: No. This would involve the basic legislation guiding the total assistance program of the United States and the private participation therein, as well as a variety of suggestions for changes in the administrative structure of the assistance entities in the U.S. government. My reservation is not a matter of protecting virginity. My reservation is that I really don't think that my associates here understand what it means to say, "Yes, we will help in the drafting of the legislation; yes, we will help in reorganizing the administrative mechanism; and, yes,we will help with the presentation to the Congress." These are rather large commitments, and they're not easily fulfilled.

B: To get back to the Department of Agriculture itself, is there much factionalism within the Department? Is there anything amounting to, for want of a better phrase, a generational gap? There are an awful

lot of people in high positions in the Department who have been there since the farm programs of the New Deal days. Then, on the other hand, there are a lot of men who have come in more recently and I'm not sure of this, I gather, from an outsider looking in, it looks like agricultural economists are playing more and more of a part in the workings of the Department.

M: Yes, that's true.

B: Is this causing any kind of division or factionalism in there?

M: There are two types of divisions. I don't think it has much to do with age--age of agency or age of people. One is the inherent and inescapable divergence of interests: that which might be useful to the Forestry group might be hostile to the interests of the Soil Conservation group. Within Forestry, there are people whose interest in recreation or in wildlife reserves conflicts with other interests within that service with respect to commercial utilization of those resources. So that there is naturally and inevitably divergence of interests within and between agencies. There's a little abrasion that occasionally comes from an inescapable overlap of responsibility. There is also an abrasion which comes from the difficulty in getting separated agencies working together when their activities become complementary. Thus, to get the Nutrition Research people to support the Food Program people requires some rather difficult administrative maneuvering. That's one type of abrasion which is not, I think, serious, and with which one must live, and about which not too much can be done other than to resolve the difficulties if and as they arise.

The difficulty to which you refer, I think, in your reference to the agricultural economists, is associated primarily with the development of a program planning system whereby one is required not merely to proceed on an organizational budget with some increment to go to it, where one is not permitted any longer to give a vivid and lyrical justification of his program suggestions, but he's first required to find out what he's doing, and he's required to find it in terms of agreed-upon objectives or goals with elements and sub-elements subsumed thereunder. He is required to associate his activities now, his facilities, his personnel, his expenditures, with those program elements. So the first thing, he has to find out what he's doing, and that's difficult. Then he has to cost out what he's doing, and that's at least conceivably possible.

But there is a bit of mythology perpetrated, in large part, by some of the economists, I think, who did populate the front office pretty thoroughly during my tenure,of associating relative benefits. Now generally, this is almost impossible. It's impossible, for instance, to quantify the benefit, whatever that may be, from as simple a thing as meat inspection. Therefore, you use what is called the surrogate, the representative or carrier variable, such as tons of meat, or tons of meat per man, or a proportion of the meat supply that comes under inspection. And this is not meaningful, and the benefit calculations are gross and specious. When you get into indirect inputs like research,it is as a matter of quantitative procedure almost impossible to measure the benefit. So much work is done in an effort to do this, and

the results are not probative to a competent person, and even those that are not trained in economic systems--and most live physical scientists are not--they're irritable. And they have some basis for it. There has been some excessive zeal on the part of the economists in the program planning group.

I think, frankly, it was compounded by an unfortunate attribute of John Schnittker, in being unable to speak easily with people under times of stress. John never flapped himself, but he got very chilly. I think there were a half-dozen of us, who were also economists who have known John all his professional life, with whom this didn't occur; but a great deal of tension was generated by this. Mr. Freeman committed himself to it. I had done this with the science groups, federal and state, the universities, the 20,000 projects of the USDA and the universities. I had done [this] prior to getting this done in the Department at large. We also developed a current research information retrieval system with them. We also automated a library, which is the national focus.

B: You're talking about the research program and evaluation staff?

M: Yes. And that was not easy. And there is a touch of specious quantification in there that is questionable, highly questionable, but it's much, much better than it was.

B: Of course, one factor in all of this is that the programming system you're describing tended to concentrate more power in the hands of the Secretary, didn't it?

M: Yes. It did several things for the Secretary. The Secretary knew

what was being done. I didn't really know what 20,000 research projects were until I got them classified and got meaningful inventory that was associated with purposes. To my mind, these are resources, disciplines, personnel, places, et cetera. But at least this much I did know by the time I left: I knew what the research program was. And I knew that with acceptable accuracy, just as I knew what the program of the Consumer Marketing Service was, which I hadn't really known before. But it would be very difficult, and I don't delude myself as some of economic colleagues, I think, did that I really could put a meaningful derivative of benefit on a grading service and oppose it, say, to an animal health activity, either as a regulatory function or research function. I think that it was this latter issue that has been provocative of the troubles, and I think, again, some issues of personality were involved in this. There were young economists who became quite potent in presentations to the Program, Planning, and Budget Committee.

B: I presume that sort of emphasis will continue then?

M: Yes, it will and perhaps eventually it will become a smoothly functioning activity. I hope it does, because it's worth trying.

There were other things that created parts of the tension which you seem to have sensed in some of your other discussions, I guess. One of the most difficult was a matter of these cuts.

B: Matter of what, sir?

M: Matter of the budget cuts in the last couple of years. You see, to have come in and chop 600 million bucks out, and to do it in a short time, does generate substantial dislocation; and it does have to be

quite arbitrary. And then we were totally constrained by necessities of one kind or another, with the net effect that we had very few places in which we could center these harsh budget cuts of the last few years. You see, you can't cut price supports. You can't cut the capital of the Commodity Credit Corporation; these are protected by statute, really, and they're furthermore imbedded by tradition. You really can't cut down meat inspection; you can't cut down plant disease, pest control, border protection, and that kind of thing can't be cut. So it doesn't leave you the broad range of equitable allocation. And consequently, some agencies got it meaner than others did. And the same agencies that had to take the cuts that we were required to apply also caught it from the Budget people. You see, for instance, they were the unfortunate people. The Department has some forty-four anti-trust, fair trade laws--more than Justice and FDC put together, I might add--to administer. They got it; the general counsel's office got it; people of that sort, who didn't have a direct defensive clientele. And basically, nobody loves a cop; so that enforcement people always got it in the neck.

B: Did that situation of Agriculture's budget getting cut create a general failure of morale within the Department?

M: I must say that they took it with good will, and with calmness, and rationality that is surprising. And I think, again, this a tribute to Freeman. They knew what we had to do. They were told clearly, openly, fully, the constraints under which we had to operate; they were given their chance at the slugging match. I think the fact that

they were permitted, always permitted, to bloody it up and fight it out within the Department diminished some of the rancor that might have been associated with it. But you do get this. I think the enforcement groups feel very strongly that they are the pigeon, and in this, as a matter of fact, they were.

B: You know, there's some irony in this. I suppose that the average citizen of this Republic thinks of the Department of Agriculture as an agency which takes care of farmers; most people would say "fat cat" farmers at that. Whereas, as you've pointed out, it really deals mostly with urban areas on one side or another.

M: If you take my own responsibilities, I had all of the marketing services which are strictly for people and involving about a hundred and fifty billion dollars of activity a year I had regulatory work; the Commodity Exchange, which is a hundred billion dollars of regulation a year; Packers and Stockyards, about fity billion; Perishable Agricultural Commodities, which is an enforcement activity, market regulation activity, anti-trust, and that kind of thing,that's twenty-five billion. The clientele there are people who eat, wear clothes, smoke cigarettes, drink whiskey, live in houses made of wood, and that's pretty much everybody. So you've got your services; you've got your regulatory activities; you get your food programs, which are basically welfare; an immense amount of developmental work; fifty-three land grand universities; about twelve thousand scientists in every field under the sun; regulatory work involving, again, health, sanitation, honesty, absence of fraud. This, in general, is what I did plus, the total

educational activity. Those are all urban activities. Again, I repeat: If I were to do it over or ever to be secretary, I don't think I would emphasize this the way we once did.

B: It must be a dilemma though. You mean if you emphasized your urban activities, you get in trouble with your . . . ?

M: You can lose forty-eight congressmen in the Middle West, which we did one year, you remember. And that was one of the reasons, not all of it, probably.

B: But there are also occasions when, in Congress, you've been most grateful to the urban liberal congressman, to whom this kind of activity appeals.

M: Yes. But the fact is that to get things through committees, through Rules, or its set of equivalents, on to the floor, did not involve urban people.

B: That's the rural part of it.

M: That's the rural side of it. Those were generally Southern or Southwestern people with a rural emphasis in their attitude. So that we could not afford, really, as an operating matter . . . Regardless of who our ultimate clientele is, the power was in those who represent rural, agrarian, and sometimes rather Populist interests, and Populism has not completely disappeared from the face of this tattered planet you know. . . .

B: As a matter of fact, there are many who say that the immediate past President of the United States was one of the last and greatest Populists.

M: Orville Freeman's basic attitude is Populist, sort of a modern 1870 Populist attitude. Mr. Humphrey's fundamental attitude is Populist. I wrote a letter to Mr. Humphrey, in the summer, when I was in our home in Wiesbaden, and they sent me his agricultural policy statement; and I wrote him back a letter, and said, "Dear Mr. Vice President: I think you should understand that you are not running for the President of Minnesota and that there is something in the United States agriculture other than supports for feed grains and dairy products." And he took it in very good form. He agreed that this was not the kind of policy statement that he could take very many places. So that we did live in a Populist community. The National Farmers Union, for what it is or is not at the moment, is strictly a Populist activity.

B: Did you play any further part in the campaign last summer?

M: No. I left the 1st of June. But I would not have done what John did. I think I did the right thing. And I think the President's view was right, that for while an endorsement from Schnittker, me, or even Freeman didn't mean much, certainly not from me, I think it was wiser to conform to the President's implicit instructions.

B: Although Secretary Freeman, of course, was active after the convention, after Mr. Humphrey's nomination.

M: Yes, he was. Although Mr. Freeman said, at a long and happy dinner the other night, that he has now decided that the one group who knows nothing in politics is the professional politican, and he wasn't making jokes either. He said that that which happened during 1968, disgraceful as it was wasteful, wantonly wasteful as it was in all aspects

including, I think, he would encompass the withdrawal of the President, that this has persuaded him deeply that the man who has made his profession in politics, as Mr. Nixon once told him he did, was the one man who really doesn't know much about it. And I suspect there's a little truth in it.

B: Did Mr. Freeman suggest who does?

M: No. I think he's rather disturbed as to who may or may not. But I think he believes that the old organization activities are not very useful anymore in things of this sort. I think he's making a quite honest comment on this. I think, actually, Mr. Nixon sensed this. I've had no immediate recent contact with him, but I did, I remember, spend a day with him once when he was running for Governor and I was then Professor and Director. And he let me know it was my duty as a Professor to discuss with him certain issues relative to the California campaign. And he also said that it was most difficult, eleven hundred miles long, to campaign. So I said, "Why are you doing it then, Mr. Nixon?" And his answer was a simple answer. He said, "Because I'm out of work. I'm not really a lawyer. I'm a politician, and I haven't got a job. That's why I'm doing it."

B: Had the virtue of honesty, if nothing else.

M: There is probably less bitterness, I think, in the people I've seen as a result of this drastic and wasteful destruction of the Administration than I would anticipate.

B: Less bitterness within the Administration, you mean?

M: Yes, within the Administration with which I was associated. I see no

rancor in Mr. Freeman. I've seen Mr. Humphrey a few times, and I think he's honestly free of rancor. He's disappointed, deeply disappointed. I think he's deeply distressed at, again, what I've agreed was a wanton throwing away of an election. But I don't find any real anger.

B: Does that mean also that there is no lingering rancor against Mr. Johnson himself?

M: I'd suspect that the rancor, yes, there's ample rancor against Mr. Johnson all over the United States, and perhaps most vehement, and most violent, and most vitriolic in Texas.

B: I meant within the Administration, within those people who have in one way or another worked with him.

M: I don't know how much of the reported discord involving Mr. Wirtz and Mr. Udall is real and how much of it is generated by the press. But there is not in the Department of Agriculture. And if there be personally oriented rancor, or if there ever were such rancor with respect to the President, I did not sense it truly. Now, the President was demanding, and these attributes of the President's operating methods. . .

Tape 2 of 2

M: I can honestly say, looking back, that there were never comments of any unpleasant nature, even with respect to the rather peremptory procedures by which the President made his wishes known. In fact, there was sort of a pride in it. There was probably an occasional comment to the effect that, "Well, dammit, it was difficult to do, and the

least he could have said was 'Well done.'" But there also seemed to be an implicit understanding that when the President advised people, directly or indirectly, of what he wanted done, he expected it to be done, and he was reasonably confident you could do it. But I never sensed any personal feeling. I do know this--since you said to speak in candor--that there were many times that his relations with Orville Freeman were difficult and tense and not merely as a matter of the carry-over of some of the early Kennedy-Freeman relationships, which I think are generally known, but as a matter of the personalities and the operational necessities of two people. There were obvious tensions there. There were tensions, I guess, with Mr. McNamara, I've heard here and there. But I sensed no denigration of the President; I sensed no hatred of the President. And I think most of us who worked in the Administration think the President made a mistake in deciding apparently that it was necessary for him to withdraw. For what a guess is worth, I would guess he would have won if he'd run against Nixon.

B: Even though, as you mentioned a moment ago, that within the nation at large, there is a good deal of rancor against Mr. Johnson?

M: Yes, that's quite so. But I also think there's a high respect for Mr. Johnson. I don't think he's liked personally. In fact, if you go down into the southern parts of Texas, you can hear some unpleasant things about that man Lyndon, very harsh things about him. But again, he did escape much of the rural troubles, because Orville absorbed them.

B: Because of Mr. Freeman personally as well as because of the farm programs?

M: Freeman was a very visible and attractive target, whereas a quiet and retiring person like Charlie Brannan, really wasn't so much. It's very difficult to get mad at Charlie. But Freeman is an aggressive and brilliant, sparkling sort of a human being, and his head's up to get shot at.

B: Again, an outsider watching it got the impression he handled himself very well.

M: Yes, he did indeed. As a matter of fact, he likes conflict.

B: I think he said in his valedictory press conference a couple of months ago that the only thing he really regretted was a little bit of over-reaction to the Billie Sol Estes affair.

M: Yes. He was pretty well shaken up on the wheat referendum. I think that was one of his major difficulties.

B: The failure of the wheat referendum in '63?

M: Yes. I think he looked upon that as his own failure, really, to understand the attitudes of the people in the farming community with whom he was working, and he was very much disappointed. But Freeman thrived under pressure. He loved it! As a matter of fact, lots of people do.

B: Yourself, too?

M: Yes, sure. (Laughter)

B: You mentioned a point, just a moment ago, in connection with Mr. Johnson's sometimes demanding ways. You said that oftentimes, to the people who

were subjected to those, there would be an element of pride.

M: Yes, in doing the impossible. Very frankly, I considered that what Jay Taylor and I did with that first mission in Europe was a rather sparkling performance. I guess, looking back, it couldn't have been done, but it was done.

B: Did you ever get a direct thank you from him?

M: No. I took the mission over to the White House when it was over, and he didn't really thank them. He said he was doing everything he could for them, and he wasn't going to do any more, and if they really wanted to politick it, they were making a mistake, because he'd met many steers, and no one of them could tell a Republican from a Democrat, that while cattlemen maybe could, if he found them politicking this matter up on the Hill, he'd show them who could politick.

B: Pretty straight talk to those people.

M: Yes.

B: Effective to the group?

M: No, I think he made five or six enemies who are still his enemies. They did expect him to say thank you, and they were quite disturbed.

B: Did you ever get rewards in the sense of being invited to White House parties and that kind of thing?

M: Oh, nothing too much. I think his major thank you was this ambassadorial post which he gave me after I left.

B: I wasn't aware of that, sir. You were offered an ambassadorial . . . ?

M: No, I was his special ambassador just for the inauguration. I went down there as his ambassador.

B: Oh, the Panama that you mentioned earlier.

M: Yes, to head the American delegation to that. I don't think that I, or most people, really make too much of a fuss; it's just that his mannerisms are different from mine. My own is the compromise. And I don't mean to sell, but to compromise. If I have to yield, I'll yield. My own is a personal persuasion, and his is not. I think I have that because in the university structure, particularly the Berkeley kind of structure, it's the only way you can administer anything. You have no authority to give any orders, but you still have to get things done. So his way of operating was substantially different from mine. Orville's was different from mine, but there was one likeness. Orville probably knew several thousand people in that huge Department by their first names, and Orville was demanding also. When he would say, "Dammit, who the hell put this goddamned can of worms together, Herbie?" When he addresses a division director as Herbie, this completely eliminates any sting of the language. And those people would go off the cliff for Freeman. I think there was a loyalty there that I'm not sure I've seen in many other places.

B: Is there anything else that you think should be added to a record of this sort?

M: No, except that I personally consider Mr. Johnson was a great President. I think he operated under most difficult constraints in a period in which lesser men would have failed, and he didn't fail. And I think, finally, that the transition to the Nixon Administration was probably the greatest benefit in eliminating some of the divisions in this

country that have occurred or could have occurred in many, many years. It was done with decency, with dignity, and in complete deference to the basic attributes of the American way of living in this land. And I think that's one of the things that ultimately will be appreciated.

B: Did you see anything from this position, directly, of the transition from Freeman to Hardin?

M: I kept in very close touch with the Department people. Some of the Commodity people would talk to me. There was very little substantive collaboration except on issues of defense and foreign relations. There was virtually no participation by the incoming Administration in certain of the activities of the Department which do commit Mr. Hardin and Mr. Nixon, but that was not because the door was closed to them; it was because they didn't do it. Similarly, I now know that there was no, literally no communication of the outgoing Administation and the incoming people with respect to foreign assistance. That was just put off in a corner. So that there was no program collaboration. But nonetheless, the transition was done with a complete and clearly visible reaffirmation that you operate by process in this country and that you take the rule of the majority if that rule be enunciated by means of process. And I think that has been made beautifully clear, and, without the propaganda and promotional attributes which might have occurred and might have destroyed its effectiveness had it occurred.

B: Of course, on another level, the Department of Agriculture is going to continue in its more or less accustomed ways, unless there's an awfully massive effort to change it.

M: This matter came up a week ago Wednesday. Mr. Hardin was to address the agricultural component of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. At the last moment, he withdrew and said he was not prepared to make such public appearances. They then said would I speak in his place. So I went down and said what the last administration had tried to do, rather than what the new administration would try to do. And the questions naturally involved the differences. And I stated that there would be relatively few differences, because there can be relatively few differences. And fortunately, Cliff Hardin went on the television ten days later, and essentially said the same thing. He can't pull the string on price supports, and if Mr. Humphrey's Secretary had gone in, he couldn't have pulled the string on price supports. You can't turn off most of these programs. And there's very little water in them, really. So the latitude for political decision is substantially less than many people might think.

B: Of course, there's the personal quotient. It's going to be some time, probably years, before a Secretary learns his way around the Agriculture Department.

M: The new Secretary is a very able man, a highly intelligent man, and he's not totally virginal with respect to this kind of thing.

B: I meant no reference to Mr. Hardin himself. I was really thinking more of Mr. Freeman's position in '61, or any incoming Secretary of Agriculture. There's a lot to learn here about people and projects.

M: Or the Department itself. It's not an easy thing to see in one quick glance.

B: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate your time.

M: All right, and I thank you.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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