

INTERVIEW XV

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE E. REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Professor Reedy's residence, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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R: I've got to go back and do a little bit of history, history that goes all the way back to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in the 80th Congress. Because otherwise the maneuvering here will make no sense whatsoever.

What happened is that the Taft-Hartley Act, which was a reaction to the Wagner Act, was written by a group of senators and House members who really knew very little about labor organization. They were not familiar with the intricacies of union procedures, and they had the rather widespread impression, which most members of the public have, that all labor is alike, that a union is a union is a union is a union.

One of their biggest targets was the so-called closed shop. Now to most of the members of both the House committee and the Senate committee at the time of the Taft-Hartley Act, the closed shop was merely a monopoly of labor, and they were against it. What they did was to pass a bill which outlawed the closed shop. Now, they were unaware of the fact that there are three versions of the closed shop. First of all, the classic version, the closed shop in which the employer can only hire union members; that's version number one.

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Version number two, in which the employer can hire anybody that he wants to hire, but whoever is hired must become a member of the union within some stated period, which can vary from place to place. Number three, the situation known as maintenance of membership, in which any time that the contract is signed every employee who is a union member must remain a union member for the duration of the contract. Now, keep these distinctions in mind, because without them what happened in 1959 will not be comprehensible.

The Republicans associated the whole thing with Walter Reuther. He was the black beast as far as the thinking of the House and Senate Labor Committees went in 1947-48. When they passed the closed shop prohibition in the Taft-Hartley Act, they thought they were striking a blow at Reuther. Well, actually Reuther and the automobile workers did not care about the closed shop. That meant nothing to them whatsoever. What they wanted was the union shop, in which the employer can hire anybody but he had to become a member of the union within a certain time period. The committees were both so unsophisticated in these various highways and byways that what they did was to go ahead and permit the union shop with some restrictions. There had to be a vote on it, there had to be--they also put a section in the Taft-Hartley Act which permitted states to outlaw the union shop if they wanted to. That's the only section of law I know of in which the states have explicit permission to pass tougher laws than the federal laws.

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Now, what they did not know at the time is that the closed shop is fundamentally a device used by the building trades unions, and the building trades unions are fundamentally Republican. What the Republicans were really doing was cutting their own throat, and the antagonism between them and labor generally was so deep, they did not understand the fact that they were kicking their only friends in labor in the teeth and were letting their real enemies in labor, meaning the industrial unions, go away scot-free for all practical purposes.

Now, if that's all there were to it, it would have been merely amusing. But it's more complex than that. In the United States, the construction industry has actually developed operating patterns of such a character that without the closed shop there can be no union contracts whatsoever. When they passed the amendment outlawing the closed shop, in effect they were outlawing the construction trade unions. The reason for that is that construction does not proceed along the same lines as any other type of work. If a contractor is going to build a building, he does not put his employees to work on the building. The contractor building that building, he can be a very big contractor and only have fifty, sixty employees: bookkeepers, people that take care of his machinery--although he may not even have machinery; he may rent his machinery, which is better--somebody to handle his payrolls, a couple of lawyers, and that's about it. Because the way buildings are built, the contractor estimates how many workers he's going to need each day and what category of worker, and those categories are going to change from day to day. On Monday, for

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instance, he may need fifty common laborers, three carpenters and one electrician. On Tuesday, he may only need ten common laborers but fifty carpenters and three electricians. On Wednesday, he may need five or six sheet metal workers in addition to a bunch of electricians.

So the practice in the building trades industry is for the contractor to make up a work schedule, what he is going to need when, and send it to the union hiring halls. The unions keep their members on a list and they send him the people from the top of the list according to his needs. The workers in that industry are paid almost entirely on an hourly or a daily basis, because they don't work every day. This is one of the reasons, by the way, that the wage rates in the building trades industry are so terribly high. They look terribly high to people who are not familiar with the fact that these men only work during the construction season and that there's a long period in between in which they're lucky if they can find anything.

So what they had really done in the Taft-Hartley Act was to make dealing with the unions impossible in the construction trades. Now, there they ran into another thing. The contractors did not want to destroy the unions in the building trades, because another peculiar characteristic of the building trades is that the unions and the Associated General Contractors have really been playing footsie with each other ever since unions started in the craft fields. And where they concentrate is on city councils. In the past the building trades had virtually no interest in federal legislation on labor whatsoever. What they were interested in were the building codes within the

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various cities, and there is a very strong suspicion among many students of labor organization that those building codes are deliberately devised in such a way that you cannot build the same type of house in two cities. In other words, the building codes are set up so that nobody can come in with a factory-manufactured house, as Lustron [?] and a number of other people discovered, because they're going to violate the building codes somewhere.

Now, nobody wanted to admit that they had made a complete boner with the Taft-Hartley Act. That was going a little bit far. So what actually happened was that they just went ahead and bootlegged closed shop contracts. The closed shop was outlawed by the Taft-Hartley Act but the closed shop continued with just about the same force that it had continued before the Taft-Hartley Act. And for a long period of time the unions went ahead and operated just the same way as they had operated before the Taft-Hartley Act. Now, that's one thing that has to be taken into account.

The next thing that has to be realized about the building trades is that unlike the industrial unions, if they are engaged in an argument with an employer, the situation is really very difficult because there's no point in picketing the employer. You're just picketing an office with a few people in it, almost all of them supervisory employees, and they're not going to be shut out by any picket line and no work is going to be stopped by the fact that you're picketing them. Therefore, in the building trades what the unions wanted was the right

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to picket on the site that was being constructed. You see what I mean? They're building a building, you picket the building.

G: Situs picketing, yes.

R: That's the famous situs picketing. Now, that also was outlawed by the Taft-Hartley Act, and there they didn't bootleg the contracts. There were a few other provisions of that general nature which really made life difficult. For instance, how do you get a collective bargaining election in the building trades industry, seeing that the carpenters, the electricians and all of those people are really not employees of the employer? See, that's the guts of it.

So again, because of the under-the-counter dealings between the unions and the Associated General Contractors over the years, things have gone on pretty well. But about this period of time, a general counsel of the National Labor Relations Act [Board] came into office, and he said he was sick and tired of all this bootleg nonsense. It was okay with him if Congress wanted to repeal those provisions, but he himself was going to start enforcing them. It created quite a bit of chaos, quite a bit of chaos. And the unions started to come up with alternate ways of getting at the same thing. They didn't dare just go ahead and repeal the closed shop. There was no question of that whatsoever. So instead they got into a very elaborate arrangement. I've forgotten the intricacies of it now; even then I had to have the thing in front of me in order to follow it. But it was a phony sort of a deal in which the man could hire from the union hiring hall for all practical purposes but wouldn't be admitting it for some

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five, ten, fifteen days. We can forget that. It was just a concealed way of getting rid of the closed shop ban in the Taft-Hartley Act.

There were a couple of other unions that were in the same position, for instance, the maritime unions. In the maritime unions, the ideal as far as the unions are concerned is to have union hiring halls where the stevedores and sailors, et cetera can be placed in a roster and they're sent out according to a list of who was last hired. The alternative of that is the famous, or rather infamous, shape-up in which the stevedores come down in the morning and cluster around a hiring boss, "I'll take you, you, you and you." Of course, what he always does is get kickbacks from everybody that he takes. It's a very messy business.

The only other difficulty there is that many of these--Dave Dubinsky and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union were also affected by these provisions even though the closed shop was not quite that important to them. But the big problem in the clothing industry has always been in the sweatshop where work is contracted out. Therefore the secondary boycott ban of the Taft-Hartley Act was a sort of a body blow to Dave Dubinsky and to a lesser--not so much to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Men's clothing has never been subjected to this rationing out. But under the Taft-Hartley Act, if an employer was struck by the union, all he had to do was to take his stuff over to another employer who would do the work for him, and the union could not boycott the second employer that was doing the struck work because that would have been regarded as a secondary boycott. Well, Dave

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Dubinsky had enough political clout that they couldn't quite get away with all that.

But, you see, what was involved here is a lot of extraordinarily tricky legal problems, which were not understood at all by the public. The general public understanding of the union is reasonably accurate for industrial unions, the steelworkers, the automobile workers, the textile workers, people like that. But the building trades have always been a sort of an elitist organization to begin with. You can't get into the union until you have gone through an apprenticeship in a very elaborate series of things. Their customs, their methods of doing business are so intricate that it takes a genuine expert to follow them.

Now, [George] Meany, who was out of the building trades--he was a plumber originally--and Dave Dubinsky were both very good friends of Johnson's. They were constantly pushing him for things like situs picketing, for amendments to the secondary boycott provision, and for doing something about the closed shop. And they pushed and they pushed and they pushed and, lo and behold, what cropped up but the Landrum-Griffin bill, which was designed to control labor racketeering. I don't think labor racketeering was any worse then than it had been before. If anything it may have been a little bit better. But there had been some Teamsters' activity about that time, I've forgotten what it was. The Teamsters had done something that got everybody outraged.

G: Well, [John] McClellan had held a lot of highly publicized hearings.

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R: Of course, but the point is that the Teamsters had done something that held the hearings. So what happened, instead of getting what they wanted, what labor got was a racketeering control bill with one provision in it, title something or other--it's in those memos you've just showed me--which apparently would ease the closed shop restriction a little bit.

Now, it's the most complicated piece of legislation with which I have ever had to deal, and as I remarked to you yesterday, this was one field of legislation where Johnson had no understanding whatsoever. I think the man had some sort of a psychological block to it, because most legislation he understood thoroughly. This he did not. I remember at one point where he walked up to me and said, "Is it true that under this bill two men could set wage rates?" And I said, "Yes, that's right." And he said, "Well, goddamn it, I'm against that," and he stalked off. It took me about ten memos to explain to him that without the bill one man could set the wage rates, and while two men could set the wage rates, they still had to be approved by the membership of the union before they became legal.

G: Do you think the fact that Johnson had associates like Herman Brown who were very antilabor served as a source for bad advice or antilabor advice on some of this legislation?

R: That could have been, although Johnson once told me, and I never checked this out, that Brown and Root had a subsidiary corporation under another name which was fully unionized, that if you wanted a union job, Brown and Root could give it to you fully unionized. I

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never looked it up. But I think that may have had a lot to do with it, because Brown and Root were deep in the construction industry, and most of the Brown and Root operations--all the Brown and Root operations that I knew were nonunionized. I think it was more than that. I think it was just that he thought of labor almost entirely in terms of the CIO, the industrial organizations. I know he never fully understood Dave Dubinsky's problem even though he did sympathize with that one. And of course you know it is rather hard to sympathize with the building trades. The unions have been arrogant. The building trades unions had been arrogant. They were elitist; they had no interest whatsoever in the public, a genuine public-be-damned mood. And it was quite possible to work up a considerable amount of indignation against them. Nevertheless, I think he understood the fact that as Senate Democratic leader, he could not just go along with being openly antilabor.

Now, what this whole thing did was to set up a very peculiar set of operations. What we had going at the same time was, on the one hand, a bill to control labor racketeering and a bill that had so much force behind it that it could not be ignored. I do not know whether the public was that indignant when people started with the bill, but they sure were after the McClellan hearings and the Landrum-Griffin bill had gotten going. On the other hand, here were some very potent friends of Johnson's, such as Meany and Dave Dubinsky, who were extremely interested in getting certain reforms of the Taft-Hartley Act and who actually, in my judgment, were entitled to have those

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reforms. I agree with that counsel on the labor board--I wish I could think of his name now, he was rather well known at the time--who said, "If you want to repeal these things, go ahead, but for the love of God don't have a law on the books which is being openly flouted all over the United States." I think the man was right. I'm not sure of the exact means by which it could have been straightened out but there was no question whatsoever that there was some justice on the labor side in trying to get these amendments to the Taft-Hartley Act. But what happened there is that so much emotion was involved that every step was fraught with danger, almost anything one did might pull some terrible kind of reaction.

Now, as a practical matter, what happened here was a rather difficult operation in which Arthur Goldberg, who was then the chief counsel of the AFL-CIO, and I were in touch almost every day and really negotiating on what could be done. And it was interesting, Arthur started out with some of the most impractical proposals that I have ever heard in my life, things that you could not possibly get through the Congress. It was day after day after day of knock-down, drag-out battles between me and Arthur, and me trying to point out to him that even proposing these things was dangerous because it was likely to bring about a reaction that would really stick a knife in the belly of labor. The thing finally got straightened around but, oh, Lord, it was a long, drawn-out very tricky battle, very tricky.

G: Now, the Kennedy bill when it was first introduced was really sort of a mild labor-management reporting and anticorruption type bill. It

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looks like the first thing that happened to it was this McClellan bill of rights addition that was a very tight vote, one vote [margin].

R: Right.

G: I want to ask you to elaborate on that. I think Kennedy felt that the thing was mishandled and I think [Hubert] Humphrey was away, was absent on a speaking engagement when the vote took place.

R: I don't remember this specifically, but it doesn't surprise me in the slightest.

G: What was Johnson's position on the McClellan labor bill of rights?

R: He was perfectly willing to accept it, as I recall, but with a number of modifications. What he was basically trying to do was to put together the labor bill of rights with some of the things that labor wanted and needed. That was the objective of the exercise.

Now, the Kennedy bill--I don't remember this specifically. I do recall the Kennedy bill which was--at best it was a diversion. It would have satisfied nobody. It didn't set up any genuine controls over the Teamsters, who were the major objective of most of this anti-racketeering drive, and certainly wouldn't satisfy any of the needs of labor.

G: But do you think that Johnson orchestrated that vote in such a way as to embarrass Kennedy on that?

R: No, no. That he would not do, that he would not do. Unless Kennedy had done something to knife him, and I know Kennedy had done nothing like that. In fact, during most of that period I was in touch with Kennedy, too, and--

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G: Well, Johnson was on record as publicly supporting the Kennedy bill without the McClellan bill of rights, I think, and--

R: Oh, sure. That was before the McClellan bill of rights came along.

G: No, I'm talking about the vote on the McClellan [amendment].

R: Oh, the vote.

G: Yes. It's difficult for me to understand how he would lose that by one vote, particularly if Hubert Humphrey were absent. Humphrey thought he'd arranged a pair with [Homer] Capehart, and Capehart evidently didn't honor the pair because the vote was so close.

R: I can't answer that. I am confident that Johnson would not have set the thing up to embarrass Kennedy. If he were to set it up for any reason, it would have been to convince the labor people that they were playing with fire, that's possible. But he wouldn't have embarrassed Kennedy. He would have no reason to do it. And when it came to Senate maneuvering, Johnson would never embarrass another senator unless there was a very potent reason for doing so. Don't forget, the entire Johnson operation was based upon the very firm realization that somewhere he might need somebody's vote. Never in all the years that I knew him did he conduct himself in such a way as to completely preclude getting somebody's vote down the road. And I think that if he had really set that up to embarrass Kennedy, it would have done that. I just don't think so. But, again, I have forgotten the precise incident.

G: Okay, now, of course the House version was a much stronger labor bill than [the Senate version]. It attempted to close this no man's land

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that existed between what the National Labor Relations Board would decide in cases and what the states were precluded from deciding.

R: That was a way overblown issue, way overblown. Again, though, it arose because of this particular counsel, Denham--that's it, Roger [Robert] Denham--who came up with interpretations of the Taft-Hartley Act which spread the jurisdiction far more widely than anybody had ever dreamed of before. Roger Denham, that's who it was.

G: Well, I gather the no man's land was primarily concerned with the hotel thing and maybe restaurants, something like that.

R: Yes, that was exactly right. You see, you've got two theories of interstate commerce. One is that interstate commerce is anything that travels across a state line. The other theory is that anything that affects interstate commerce automatically comes under federal jurisdiction. In other words, if your concept of interstate commerce is that of anything that crosses a [state] line, obviously hotel employees are out. But if your concept is anything that puts a burden on what crosses a state line, then obviously your hotel employees are in, because traveling salesmen have to stop at hotels. Well, Denham had picked up that concept of the burden on interstate commerce and, by God, by the time he finished about the only way you could possibly be out of the Taft-Hartley Act was to operate an orange juice stand in California where all of the orange juice is manufactured from trees that you grew yourself in California and where you had hand squeezers which you had made yourself out of California materials. His

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interpretation really was pretty ridiculous. But the no man's land was a way overblown issue.

G: Okay. Another issue was outlawing of hot cargo contracts with industries.

R: That was basically a Teamsters' question, as I remember. I am trying to remember the intricacies of it right now. I'd have to have my mind jogged on that one.

G: I think basically it was a question of other unions and industries not handling goods that another union was striking on somewhere else in the production process.

R: Oh, oh, oh, that's right. I remember now. That was a variation of the problems that arose out of the flat prohibition on a secondary boycott. You see, what the Taft-Hartley Act did was to permit unions to boycott only the products of a manufacturer where they represented the employees and where the manufacturer himself was trying to continue in the face of the strike. Now, obviously if you take a look at that you can see all of the loopholes that are open there, that is loopholes for the employer but not for the employee. The secondary boycott provision is probably the most troublesome one of the whole Taft-Hartley Act. With proper use of that secondary boycott provision, you could break almost any union in the United States.

G: Another element of all of these various labor bills seems to have been designed to address different types of picketing, organizational picketing; recognition picketing was called blackmail picketing.

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G: Yes, well, that's a very difficult problem. You can get one extreme where there is no question whatsoever about the picketing. Obviously if a plant is struck, the striking employees have a right to picket that plant. You know, if you just start from there, then you start getting variations. Suppose the plant is struck by the union, but a majority of the employees decide to hell with the union and stay inside. Not too difficult, the union still has a right to strike if it's been certified by the NLRB. But morally the situation is somewhat different.

Take it a little bit further, the example I've already given you of the employer who subcontracts his work out to another employer. Do those employees have the right to go over and picket the shop at which the work has been subcontracted when that shop has a perfectly valid union contract? And do they have the right to ask those workers not to do struck work? One version. Another version is what do you do when a union is organizing? Obviously, everybody has free speech rights, has the right to stand out there and tell the employees to go ahead and join the union. But a picket line in the United States is a little bit more than that. A picket line theoretically is something that nobody is allowed to cross. So you have to ask yourself, does the union--well, let's take a separate case. Let's suppose that the union has managed to get a collective bargaining election and has won the election, but then the employer stalls in the negotiation with the union leader. Does the union have a right to picket that employer just because he's stalling?

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You see, what you get into here is a whole broad range of questions of which there really is no answer. That's one of the reasons why, if you understand many of these disputes, it's very, very difficult for you to come up with the equities. In a sense there are no equities. In a sense what most of these disputes are is whether labor is getting what it wants or whether management is getting what it wants. Whose ox is gored? The equities are terribly difficult to find here.

G: In resolving the differences between the House bill, the Landrum-Griffin Act, and the Senate bill, the conference committee adopted virtually the House bill. I am wondering, as a case study of how a conference committee works, what happened here. Kennedy was appointed. I assume that Johnson was largely responsible for naming the Democratic conferees and that Dirksen would name the Republican conferees.

R: Not entirely, no. They're responsible for naming them, but the traditions of the naming are pretty well set. Now, you're supposed to name the members of the committee that actually worked on the bill, for one thing. For another thing, you're supposed to achieve a balance on that committee, because after all, what you have is a committee representing the Senate, and you should get the kind of committee that can come up with a compromise that will be acceptable to the Senate. So you do have to have balance. And you could not have left Kennedy off that committee very well.

G: Could you have left [Barry] Goldwater off the committee?

R: Yes.

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G: Well, Goldwater was on the committee.

R: Yes, but he could have been left off. He didn't play that prominent a role.

G: But was Johnson responsible for putting Goldwater on the committee and thereby weakening the Senate's ability to get a better bill?

R: Oh, I would doubt that. I think that the point of view that Goldwater had at that particular point would have had a fair amount of influence on the Senate. I just don't remember for sure, but I think Goldwater was put on because there was a large body of sentiment in the Senate along his lines. Not a majority, no, but a lot more than you realize. You see, at that particular point labor had become very unpopular really, terribly unpopular.

G: Well, if Johnson really had been opposed to the Landrum-Griffin Act, it seems that he could have appointed Senate conferees who would have held the Senate's ground more than [they did].

R: Would have held their ground in the conference committee, but then what would have happened when the report came back to the Senate?

G: Well, presumably they would have voted for the same type bill that they had voted out to begin with.

R: No, not necessarily, not necessarily.

G: What they did was yield to the House version.

R: I know, I know. But you have to realize that happens fairly often. Sometimes you can get senators to vote for a bill with the explanation that, after all, it's all going to get lost in the conference committee. If, if every member of the Senate had been convinced that their

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vote on that bill was the kind of vote that was going to enact law, they wouldn't have voted that way. This is one of the little, tiny aspects of Senate operation that is not very well known. It is very common for senators for certain record purposes to vote a certain way because they know that after the conference committee finishes with it, it won't be there.

G: So in other words what you're saying is that a majority of the Senate actually favored the Landrum-Griffin bill more than they did the version that they themselves passed, the Kennedy bill.

R: Right, there's no question about it, no question about it. And I think the reason that they passed the bill that they passed was because Johnson at least wanted the Senate to have a good record on it.

G: Now, in that conference report Kennedy evidently did get some concessions in the final bill, some exemptions for garment workers and construction unions for certain new Taft-Hartley provisions. So maybe that was part of the compromise.

R: It was, it was. Those are very important. I told you it really came out all right.

G: Now, LBJ had written a letter in August to his constituents, evidently a letter designed to shore up support among the constituents who had expressed a desire for a strong antilabor bill. This letter does document Johnson's taking a strong position in controlling labor and advocating labor reform and--

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R: Yes and no. Some of this is pure charade. True, he voted for the Vinson bill--I've forgotten what he did, but I remember it was anti-labor--Smith-Connally Act, the Taft-Hartley Act. But his thinking changed quite a bit when he got over to the Senate. During his House days he would have gone down the line with all of the conservatives on labor legislation. That was one of the issues upon which he was very conservative. But as I said, his thinking did change in the Senate. I believe almost any man gets a somewhat broader outlook in the Senate; he can't help it, and especially when he's Democratic leader and suddenly realizes that he has to deal with a group of senators who are just as strongly pro-labor as people like Barry Goldwater are anti-labor.

There were all kinds of things going on behind the scenes here. I'll never forget the shock when McClellan read his opening statement at the hearings. What they didn't realize was I had written it. It was a real olive branch. Johnson sold it to them. McClellan didn't know I had written it, he just knew that Johnson had talked him into giving it. But what had to happen here was the defusing of a highly emotional situation, and the situation was defused and the bill that finally came up was not a bad bill.

G: Well, labor was not at all happy with it.

R: Oh, they did some hollering, but they got a hell of a lot more out of it than they could reasonably have expected to get, and they knew it. Goldberg knew it.

G: You don't feel then that this Landrum-Griffin Act was one of the

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reasons that labor was so hostile to Johnson in 1960 when he was running for--?

R: No.

G: Really?

R: They weren't hostile to Johnson in 1960. What happened in 1960 is that they were for Kennedy or to some extent for [Stuart] Symington. But they weren't really hostile to Johnson in 1960.

G: Well, Reuther certainly didn't want him on the ticket.

R: No, of course Reuther didn't. Reuther was quite a liberal, but he wasn't hostile. There are different shades. Reuther wanted an all-liberal ticket and he did not regard Johnson as a liberal. And of course by his definition Johnson was not a liberal. But he was not hostile in the sense that he would have gutted Johnson. If you rephrase it and say, "Is this why labor was against Johnson?" you're a little closer to the mark. There was no hostility to Johnson at that point except from, oh, let's see, the oil workers' union was still pretty wild, which was strange because [O. A.] Knight was a good friend of mine. Dubinsky was certainly--Dubinsky and [Jacob S.] Potofsky, both of them, they did not want Johnson as president, no. They certainly weren't hostile to him.

On that particular bill labor had to holler, because of the Landrum-Griffin provisions trying to control racketeers. But Meany and the building trades were so damned happy to get those provisions governing the closed shop and giving them some modifications of the secondary boycott act that really they were damned happy with it.

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G: Now, this letter that we discussed evidently got into the hands of some of Johnson's adversaries. Wayne Morse was making use of it, and you reported in a memo that the letter had created a controversy with labor and that you had received calls from labor leaders, and Bob Oliver was particularly upset about it. That the steelworkers were planning to print two million copies of this letter and circulate it.

R: Yes, that was Nurdhey Hoffman [?].

G: Yes, let me ask you to recount this controversy.

R: The letter itself is just a form letter. The "Dear Friend" is a dead giveaway. Let me see that other thing that you have there.

G: Oh, this is just a note.

R: I know, but it will help me. This is purely a form letter that was sent out to everybody that wrote in saying, "For the love of God, why did you give in to those communist labor leaders?" et cetera. I have a whole memo here, let me have that memo.

G: I don't have the--

R: Yes, you handed this to me just a few minutes ago.

G: Oh, okay, just a [minute].

R: This is one of those things that bobbed up one day and was forgotten two days later. One of the things that you have to become accustomed to is that labor in Washington is represented by quite a few people that really are not horny-handed sons of toil. Like Bob Oliver, for instance. And they become highly politicized, much more so than their unions.

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Now, this letter--I think what really happened here--I notice this last paragraph of mine says, "It does seem to be a matter of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO," which is rather strange. It's scarcely touched by the Landrum-Griffin bill. On the other hand, they didn't get anything out of the Landrum-Griffin bill either. You see, the unions that got something out of the Landrum-Griffin bill were the maritime unions and the needle trades and the construction unions. I know most of this stuff would not have bothered me too much. Cy Anderson, who was one of Johnson's strong supporters in labor, he was the lobbyist for the railroad brotherhoods. John Hurling [?] I wouldn't worry about. Nurdhey Hoffman was an extraordinarily strong Kennedy man, and I think that he saw Johnson as the major obstacle to Kennedy getting the nomination. He would have been very happy at that particular point to circulate anything he could that could cut Johnson.

G: How did the Landrum-Griffin Act affect Kennedy's relationship with labor?

R: It didn't.

G: How about Humphrey's?

R: Neither one. You see, again you've got to realize the politics of it. As I note here, it's rather strange that the IUD, the Industrial Union Department, would be raising all this hell, because they weren't touched by Landrum-Griffin. Landrum-Griffin basically only caused trouble for the Teamsters, for the United Mine Workers--which were not even in the AFL-CIO at that point--for, oh, some of the building

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trades. You know, many of the building trades have been plagued with racketeering over the years simply because they do not have natural economic weapons. [There] has been very little racketeering in the industrial unions just simply because the workers all work together, and what racketeering you did have were the old fur and leather workers, for example. The racketeers were simply kicked out. You can't kick them out of something like the flat janitors or even the carpenters--or the carpenters have not been too racketeering. But wherever you have workers that are working isolated from each other, that's where there's a tendency to be racketeers, and those are the unions that the Landrum-Griffin Act hit the hardest.

But this [letter] is very much of a tempest in a teapot. It went away in a couple of days. My recollection of it is fairly dim, but I know that it was gone almost before it was started.

G: Anything else on the labor bill that we haven't discussed?

R: I don't think so. What is important about the labor bill is to understand the overall problem.

G: Okay, I want to ask you about the barbecue that LBJ had for [Adolfo] López Mateos in mid-October of 1959.

R: Well, that was quite an affair. As you may recall, Johnson had visited López Mateos in Mexico, and really they had gotten along astonishingly well. So when López Mateos came to the United States, one of the things that he wanted to do was to visit Johnson, and Johnson set up this barbecue on the Ranch. Now, it all went extremely well. Nothing unusual happened except that López Mateos enjoyed

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himself thoroughly. It was one of the more enjoyable events that I have had down on the Ranch. There was no great policy made or anything like that. I'm trying to think if there were any outstanding-- the funniest thing that I remember is trying to translate the menu of the dinner for the Texas press. Oh, boy, that was really something. Lopez Mateos' press secretary spoke beautiful English and of course beautiful Spanish. They'd had a dinner that night at which they'd had such things as water chestnuts wrapped in bacon and chicken livers. I forget how he translated that into Spanish, but he did.

G: Truman, Rayburn and [Robert] Anderson were there.

R: Yes. Nothing, no, they were just--

(Interruption)

G: I want to begin by asking you to, to the extent that you can at this late date, chart the course of Johnson's presidential leanings in 1959. He's obviously acting more like a candidate after Congress adjourns. He's traveling around some and being touted as a--of course, you authored a memo in which the strategy of being a serious favorite son was set forth.

G: In the first place, the course cannot be accurately charted any more than you could chart the track of a cat through a fish market. Because it was a period of fits and starts on his part and then sudden withdrawals and retreats. I remember at one point we made up a very ambitious schedule. Lord, it was ambitious! He approved it at first, tentatively. You know, he always played that game of not giving full approval to anything. We had actually set up some of the arrangements

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when all of a sudden he cancelled the whole damn thing, and we had to start over again. But what happened then is that he said that he wanted to cut it down, get it down to reasonable size. So we started going over it step by step, and at the end of it what we had was just about the full schedule that we had started out and that he had cancelled and then said he'd be willing to do it if it were reasonable.

This was the whole history of the presidential campaign of both 1959 and 1960 for that matter. He would authorize something--well, he never actually authorized anything, but he would indicate that he wouldn't object to something, the establishment of a committee or making some speeches, as long as we didn't bill them as campaign speeches or speeches searching for the nomination.

I think, however, that the most significant thing is that overall, as you have already pointed out, he began acting more and more like a candidate. I really think that 1959 and 1960 were years of tremendous struggle for him. He was torn between the normal Lyndon Johnson ambition, onward and upward, and the next step for him was the presidency, there was nowhere else to go in politics. But, on the other hand, I think personally he was tugged by a number of things. One, I believe, a genuine feeling that he was not up to the job, that he couldn't handle it. I think that was part of it. Partly I think that he had reached a stage where he thought that he had missed out on all the enjoyment of life, and he knew that if he ran for the presidency or for the vice presidency, there was absolutely no opportunity for him to do what he thought of as enjoying life. He thought of

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enjoying life as retiring and I guess sitting around having a lot of parties or things like that, which was nonsense. Because I don't believe he knew how to enjoy a life without something to do. The man lacked the psychological requirements for just pure enjoyment. Oh, God, I used to hate to have him go to a baseball game. I was just so terribly worried that a TV camera would pan on him sometime while a hot play was going on, and he would be talking politics to somebody behind him, showing no interest whatsoever. Baseball fans get very sticky about that, you know.

But the man didn't know how to enjoy retirement. The few things that he did that bore no relationship to his job were frenetic things. Sometimes he would play cards, and really he was a rather poor card player. He'd get into a poker game and he'd make huge bluffs, and it wasn't very difficult to determine that he was making bluffs, and he wasn't too good at it, to be frank. He played dominoes. You know, dominoes is the real gut-cutting game in the Hill Country, and I think almost any of the sharks around Johnson City or Fredericksburg could have taken him for his eyeteeth. He'd get tremendously enthusiastic about hunting, and for a while everybody would be out shooting deer, everybody would be out shooting doves. I think that it was not really recreation, it was not really enjoying himself. It was occupying his mind when he wasn't working. I believe that if the man had known how to enjoy himself that quite possibly he would have dropped out of the presidential race and made no bid for it whatsoever. But I think in

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the back of his mind was the realization that he couldn't do it, that he was not the type of person just to drop out and enjoy life.

G: Were there any particular individuals who were really trying to persuade him to become an active candidate?

R: Oh, sure. Oh, Lord, the woods were full of them. I think Jim Rowe worked at it. I think that--

G: Well, now, by this time Rowe was already working for Humphrey.

R: Early in 1959?

G: No, we're talking about later in 1959.

R: Well, that was after Johnson had convinced him that he wasn't going to go in. See, Rowe worked on Johnson to--you're going to find a letter somewhere in the files.

G: We went over that yesterday.

R: You'll find a letter somewhere in the files in which Jim Rowe says specifically that he wanted him--

G: But when Johnson wouldn't come out, Rowe--

R: Rowe dropped out. Rowe moved over to Humphrey and was very unhappy there, just as Dean Acheson--I don't know if Dean Acheson ever tried to urge Johnson to become a presidential candidate, but he was ready to support him and when he became persuaded that Johnson was going to drop out, then he switched over to Symington.

Oh, there were quite a few people and of course many Texans who wanted him to work at it, and quite a few senators. At one point-- I've forgotten where the point was, but it's a rather key one--he was persuaded to let Irv Hoff, who was one of Warren Magnuson's assistants,

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make a swing through the West to determine whether he could get any support there. One of my theories was that if he could come through with some support in the West, it would not give him very many votes or very many delegates for the convention, of course, but what it would do is to present him as a western candidate rather than a southern candidate.

At that particular point, coming from a Confederate state was not a very good platform as a spring toward the presidency, and, God, it kept bobbing up all over the place. I'll never forget at one of the meetings, on the way back he decided to land at Las Vegas to spend an evening. That was very popular with the press, they wanted to see Las Vegas. And, damn, we walked into the hotel and they had a review, "Save Your Confederate Money. The South Will Rise Again." And that stupid bastard of a publicity man for the hotel kept trying to point out to me what a great picture it would make of Johnson alongside of this Confederate general. You know, with ten newspapermen standing there! I could have broken his neck. I would have if the newspapermen hadn't been there. It was just something hard to shake.

Well, my idea of the western swing was that it might be one way of breaking the so-called southern mold. And Irv Hoff made a sweep. He went mostly through the Pacific Northwest; he was in Washington, he was in Oregon, he was in Wyoming, he was in Idaho, Montana, a number of places like that. And he came back and said there was a reasonable chance for Johnson to pick up all of those states. I think if Johnson had moved right at that moment, he might have picked them up. But he

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didn't. He got Irv's report and then he suddenly retreated into the silences again, and at a later point--I wish I could give you the dates on this--he actually did make a swing through those states. By that time it was too late. I think I've told you about Teno Roncalio in Wyoming. That story was everywhere.

G: What was John Connally's role during this period?

R: No role at all until the Johnson-for-President Committee was set up.

G: Was Connally one of those who was urging Johnson to run?

R: I don't know if he was spending much time at it, but he certainly wanted him to run.

G: Perhaps this comes later, but we hear the story of the Johnson-for-President headquarters opening in Washington, the sign going up, and then him ordering the sign to come down. Do you remember that?

R: I don't remember the specific incident, but it was a lot like that. They had hired a public relations man, George Bevel, and they were all open for business when he started to pour cold water on it. It is true that he had never at any point authorized it in that kind of language, you know, "I hereby authorize you to open a campaign committee." But it's also true that he had given every indication that if one was opened, he wouldn't object. And I think it opened and closed three or four times before it finally opened and stayed open; my memory is a little unclear on that. But the situation had become so farcical by then that the committee was not worth the effort.

G: Is this basically an ambivalence in his own mind that had this effect,

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or was it--were there other factors as well? Was timing a consideration or factor?

R: No, timing would be a consideration, but a consideration that could have been worked out. If timing were the only question, you'd sit down and work out the timing. He was ambivalent. It was within himself. I have theories on why he was so ambivalent, but they're only theories. I have no direct explanation. There were times when he would indicate very strongly that he wanted to make a real break for it. Then he would retreat into the silences and he would sulk.

You have to realize there's another aspect of this. His presidential potential had been a very potent weapon in controlling the Senate. It really helped, because it kept the southerners in line. You see, the southerners, especially under Dick Russell's tutelage, had the idea, "My God, Lyndon might be president," and all of them wanted to see a southern president if at all possible. Therefore they did not put him on the spot on many occasions when they could have put him on the spot, such as signing the Southern Manifesto, which I discussed down in Austin at that meeting. They laid off of him in many other directions where they could have made life unbearable for him. Also, I think the fact that he might become a presidential candidate had a considerable amount of appeal in the West. He was very strong with the western senators at that point, people like [Joseph] O'Mahoney and Ed Johnson--Ed Johnson I think had retired by then. But if you made a swing up and down the Rocky Mountain states,

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I think you would have found every Democratic senator very willing to back his presidential campaign. Now, of course the trouble was they did not control their delegations to the national convention.

G: Did he think that Kennedy was going to get the nomination as early as [this]?

R: At that point I don't know. He never indicated one way or the other. I thought that Kennedy was a possibility at that point. I assume you're talking about early 1959.

G: Well, any time in 1959.

R: It wasn't until early 1960 that the Kennedy power became apparent. In the first place, the first time that Kennedy really demonstrated his power was in the West Virginia primary. After that, it was obvious to me and to anyone that had political experience that Kennedy was going to get the nomination. Because if he could take West Virginia, he could take anything. West Virginia, you know, is a bitterly anti-Catholic state. To this day I will wager that if there are any real dregs of anti-Catholicism left, I'll bet they're in West Virginia. And you know Kennedy lost West Virginia in the fall election. The Kennedys got the state--it's worth talking to Jim Rowe about that one because he was down there with Hubert Humphrey. Jim came back and he said to me, "Look, it's all over." He said, "Kennedy's got it." And he explained why, the various tactics, the techniques. They'd reached the sheriffs, and sheriffs are very important in West Virginia politics; they control an awful lot of primary votes. There were so many members of the Kennedy family that they could give the appearance of

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Jack Kennedy being in every county in West Virginia in the same night. That was where the power really came through.

By that point Johnson had reached a stage where I don't think he could have backed out even if he had wanted to. You know, one of the peculiar aspects of politics is that a leader starts something and at a certain point what he has started has conjured up enough of a following that he cannot just walk away and leave them there. So Johnson had to continue right into the convention.

For all I know the man may have had in the back of his mind the vice presidency, that's entirely possible. I doubt it, but I can't be certain of it. I think there was an assumption that Kennedy would almost certainly select what was billed as a liberal for his vice presidential candidate, because Kennedy himself was far from a simon-pure liberal. Actually if you took a look at Kennedy's voting record and took a look at Johnson's record, you'd be rather startled on how close together they were. The only issues upon which they had very clear-cut divergence were on issues that were peculiarly Massachusetts or peculiarly Texas. On public power, for example, Kennedy would have been much more conservative than Johnson, but if you look at Massachusetts, you can see why. The electric power companies got established very early in Massachusetts; there was no real need for REA or any of those factors. Of course, Kennedy didn't have any oil in Massachusetts, but there were a number of votes upon which he cast the same kind of votes for kelp or something like that that Johnson would have cast for oil. The two men were about on a par.

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(Interruption)

Every question that a reporter asked him would be interpreted by him as being a nasty dig, when quite often they were just conversation. One of my pet recollections is that of meeting him and a bunch of reporters at National Airport in Washington, and Mary McGrory from the Washington Star was there. Mary had obviously been partying a bit the night before, and she had kind of a colossal hangover. She walked up to Johnson when he came in and said, "Senator, is this trip really necessary?" Well, all she was doing was making the kind of conversation that people tend to make when they have to get up real early in the morning and don't want to. God, I thought that I was going to have to get a firehose and pour cold water on him! You know, he gave her some short answer which--thank God, he didn't blow up in front of her.

G: But he was furious later?

R: Yes, he was furious. I finally got him calmed down, but it was pretty difficult.

The whole thing's kind of a blur now. The Teno Roncalio thing stands out in my mind because it was so typical of what happened in a number of places. We had one of those Bernie Boyle luncheons in his back yard in Omaha, Nebraska, at which Lady Bird made a very effective speech.

G: I notice that she was taking public speaking this year. Was this in anticipation of doing some campaign speaking?

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R: I don't know if it was in anticipation, but that's one thing she sure didn't need. That woman has a real knack for saying precisely what should be said at the right time. She was good at it. She did not need any coaching.

G: Now, the end of October he went to Indianapolis for a Democratic dinner. Any recollections of that?

R: Let's see, is that the one where. . . . I remember it. My problem is whether what I remember is that year or the following year. I think what I'm remembering is the following year. No, he went to that Democratic dinner in Indianapolis, but the following year, after he had been nominated for vice president, he went to Indianapolis also and had a very successful meeting. But the meeting in Indianapolis that you're referring to went off rather routinely. There was really nothing to comment on. I myself, when I realized how smoothly things were going, went out to see an uncle of mine who lived in Indianapolis. Perfectly safe, no problem.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XV

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