INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: ERIC TOLMACH

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

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Tape 1 of 1

G: This is an interview with Mr. Eric Tolmach, who is the chief of Evaluation for the Training and Technical Assistance Division in the Community Action Program of OEO.

Mr. Tolmach, I know a little bit about your background, I know that you were in Labor and you were a newspaperman at one time, but I don't know enough. I think for the purposes of this tape it would be better if you were to begin this interview by telling a little bit about yourself, your education, your professional training, how you happened to get into OEO, or the task force.

T: I more or less stumbled into OEO, which may be the appropriate verb for a number of its participants, especially in the early days. I graduated from Columbia College, went to Columbia Law School for a year, worked for a while in the book publishing business and then got a job as a reporter for a Long Island newspaper. After several years working as a reporter and editor, I came to Washington as a national correspondent for a large chain of newspapers, the Newhouse newspapers. I left that organization in September, 1963. At that time I had been covering the labor field and because of that was then

invited to work at the Labor Department, writing speeches and generally working out of the information office.

G: Who invited you in Labor?

T: It was the Office of the Secretary and the Public Affairs director, John Leslie. They knew that labor was my specialty, that I was a writer, and they thought it might serve their interests and mine, so why not extend to me an offer to work for the department in that way. It happened that over the next few months, that is to say the fall of 1963, I was asked to do some writing and drafting of materials, speeches, articles, things of that kind, on the subject of poverty and unemployment. And unbeknownst to me, at that time things had already been taking place. I was just buried away somewhere, really, and wasn't aware of some of the trends that were beginning to develop. However, I found myself writing about this subject. More and more the Labor Department was becoming interested in focusing on poverty and unemployment and the relation of the two. And it was about that time that the Manpower Report had come out on Selective Service, and the failure of so many youngsters to get into the Armed Services for a variety of reasons having to do with or relating to their background economically.

G: Is this something that was conducted by the Selective Service, General Hershey's organization?

T: No. This was written by the Labor Department, a special report. I forget exactly which division and whether it was called a manpower report, something like that. Pat Moynihan had a large hand in developing that report, which showed certain correlations between the

population that was not being inducted and their economic backgrounds and failures. This became a significant input into what later were youth programs like the Job Corps and so forth, which the Labor Department had been engaged in prior to that.

As for actually getting with OEO, while still at Labor I simply went to have lunch with Pat Moynihan one day and learned that he was working with Shriver. I got in touch with Pat and expressed my interest in that, and a day or so later I was invited to go over and join the task force.

G: When was that?

T: That was actually, when I arrived at Shriver's office, Friday evening, February 6, 1964. At that time there were no more than half a dozen people engaged in the task force.

G: When you were at Labor and were asked to write, or to do studies, what was it, to write speeches?

T: There were speeches for Bill Wirtz; there were drafts of magazine articles for the New York Times for Bill Wirtz; there were pamphlets for the Labor Department--a whole host of things.

G: What was understood by the word "poverty", if you can recall, at that time? Was it discussed simply in terms of an economic line, or was it discussed in terms of the culture of poverty, or was it a preliminary kind of definition?

T: I can't speak for many in the Labor Department and how they were using this. My own relation to the word at that time, as I understood the word and the use that we had in the information division at that

time, was not really linked to its cultural definition. I think it was more of an unemployment kind of word, which I don't think is altogether surprising considering that it was, after all, the Labor Department that we were in. There was an interest in the Labor Department in such things as CPI, which stands for Community Progress, Inc. [This] was a Ford-funded project in New Haven, Connecticut, which was more or less of a prototype of a Community Action Agency, but which existed prior to OEO. There was interest in things like that and what they were doing about the jobless and their fix on these kinds of problems. All this was beginning to come to the fore.

G: I've read several accounts; one that comes to mind is Christopher Weeks' book, The Job Corps--Dollars and Dropouts I think is the name of it. I think there, when he goes back to 1963, he recounts the story of Kennedy's interest in poverty and the kinds of activities that he began with people like Kermit Gordon, Walter Heller, and so on. It was my impression that the single most important factor which I think was one of the causes for all of these studies was, you mentioned unemployment, that youth was such a critical factor in this, the very fact that the Selective Service study had been made. It was my impression that Kennedy was bothered by the very high number of rejectees.

T: Rejectees not for physical reasons. A high percentage of youth were rejected on the mental portion, which reflected their lack of educational background, among other things.

G: Did the concern, then, begin with youth, and then broaden out because

they saw the relationship?

T: I think at the Labor Department that might be said. The Labor Department, after all, had in operation a number of programs some of which focused on youth. There were bills pending in Congress like S-1. The Labor Department's concern with unemployment generally was developing into a specific concern for the unemployment among the young particularly, and the disproportionate unemployment of the minority young within that segment of the population even more specifically. So there was a large youth focus.

G: You say that in the winter of 1963 you had been asked by Labor to do this kind of a study. What month would that have been? Would that have been November, December? Would it have been close to the time that you went over to the task force?

T: Yes, it was. I remember writing a draft of an article having to do with poverty for the Secretary in December of 1963. It was fairly close to the creation of the task force. Although, as I said, at the time that I was writing some of these things, and others were too, I was not aware of concurrent events which were building up. I dare say a lot of people were not aware that they were all going to be dovetailed into a larger effort.

G: What did you know about the task force before you went over there?

T: The task force itself was created with the appointment of Shriver on February 1, 1964. Prior to that there was no task force; there were just discussions, as you know, at places like the Budget Bureau and the Council of Economic Advisers and the White

House, all of which I was unaware of. The task force itself began on February 1, and I knew nothing more of it than what I read in the paper, that it was headed by Shriver, and that he was gathering people around him.

G: Had you ever met Shriver before?

T: No, I had not.

G: When was your first meeting with him?

T: On the evening of February 6 I simply walked over to the Peace Corps where all of this was taking place, and was expected, and the secretary introduced me. I asked Shriver when we were starting, and he said, "Now." So I began work Friday night, when most people go home.

G: What had Moynihan told you about what was going on?

T: Actually he had told me nothing. I simply knew that he was at the Peace Corps, that he had been detailed by the Labor Department to represent it in the activities of the task force. Since Pat had been a friend and associate I asked him if I could get with the action, but I hadn't had any time to be briefed by him. I just knew that it sounded like the kind of thing that interested me. I had been working on related things, and it was what appeared to be an exciting group that was shaping up.

G: What were you asked to do?

T: Well, specifically I was asked to keep the press off Shriver's back. I had been a newspaperman, and Pat knew this, and I'm told that that's the way Moynihan introduced the idea of my coming over to Shriver. There was someone else also on the task force at the time, Frank

Mankiewicz, who was a personal friend, who seconded apparently the idea of my usefulness. So I came over to more or less be the spokesman to the press, because the deliberations of the task force were in such an early stage no one knew what was going to be recommended. So many ideas were being batted around that there was considerable speculation about what was going on in the discussion rooms, and the press was clamoring for information. In those rather frenetic days over at the Peace Corps where the task force was first located, in a fifth floor suite of Mr. Shriver, there were literally half a dozen reporters roaming around in the halls at any time collaring people, and there was clearly a need to get them off people's backs. So that's what I was assigned to for the first couple of months.

G: Does this mean then that if a reporter wanted to know something about what was going on he had to come to see you rather than seeking out other people?

T: Right. We tried to set it up that way.

G: Did it work?

T: No. Reporters, good reporters, that is, have their contacts and do not rely on press spokesmen. To the extent that it was possible, I managed to be the go-between, and a good deal of information, I felt, I was able to pass on. But as I say, good reporters were able to corner their previous contacts and friends, and so naturally I was not in control of all the information.

G: Did you attend meetings? If you were the spokesman for the task force to the press, it seems to me that you would have to be very

much involved and at least knowing what was going on.

T: Right.

G: So, did you attend meetings?

T: I attended all the meetings that I knew of. Incidentally, there were additional press spokesmen brought on board, I guess after about a month of operation. But I did attend every single meeting that I knew of. I'm not sure I knew of every single meeting, and I know of some, as a matter of fact, that I didn't get to. Those would involve Shriver and Wirtz more or less privately, if such a meeting took place. There were some more precious groups, rooms that I just didn't get into. But most, I would say 99 per cent, of the meetings which took place at the Peace Corps, with the exception of certain more or less administratively confidential huddles or personal huddles in Adam Yarmolinsky's office, I did attend. So I had a pretty fair knowledge of how things were shaping up.

G: Were any records kept at these meetings?

T: Not formally, no. Most of the meetings were designed as working meetings to produce papers leading up to recommendations either for the President's message on poverty or for the bill itself. So the papers that were generated became actually the records of these meetings in a way, but there were no recorders, or there were no secretaries to my knowledge at the meetings. No minutes were kept.

G: I was wondering, because it seems very difficult sometimes to find recorded [evidence]. There are memos that exist?

T: There are memos, right, and they're based on people's interpretations

of what took place at the meeting. There are no word for word accounts.

G: How did Shriver operate or run this task force? I know that you were charged with drafting the message as well as drafting the bill, but how did he go about doing this?

T: The job of managing the work of the task force really was delegated to Adam Yarmolinsky. Which is to say he called many of the meetings and gave them their assignments and supervised the work, the output, and made many of the decisions based on it for presentation to Shriver, who did not attend every single meeting. There were many working level meetings, bill drafters, numerous night sessions composed of just the crew of lawyers, such as Norb Schlei from the Justice Department and Hal Horowitz of H.E.W. and others like that. Yarmolinsky would meet with them. It would not be necessary for Shriver to meet with these people every single minute; however, Yarmolinsky had his hand in everything that was going on, and those meetings that Shriver came to were the results, then, of the meetings that had been held before. He came to the more important ones. I think Shriver ran the task force in the sense of bringing key people into it and doing some beginning negotiating with other agencies and preparation for our requests to the Hill. He began having conversations. It was necessary to find sponsors for the legislation, and Shriver's ability in dealing with the Hill, I think, was put to use at that time. His role was that of top man.

G: You mentioned Yarmolinsky as being a key person. Could you name other

people whom you felt were very key people?

T: In the very, very beginning the key people operating under Adam Yarmolinsky were Frank Mankiewicz, who at that time was a top staff man at the Peace Corps; Norb Schlei, assistant attorney general; Hal Horowitz, who was an associate general counsel at HEW; Dave Hackett, who was head of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency.

G: He was in consultation at this time?

T: He was very much in consultation, either he, or, as the weeks progressed, he and his staff. I'm not sure I remember every single person, and the cast of characters did change somewhat. For instance, Frank Mankiewicz then became the head representative of the Peace Corps in Peru, so he took off. That accounts for his departure. Then as the task force grew, the regulars grew in number. Bill Cannon from the Budget Bureau was there from the very beginning, and a fellow named Bill Capron, who then was at the Council of Economic Advisers and went on to the Budget Bureau. Andy Brimmer, who was at that time assistant secretary of commerce, and now is on the Federal Reserve, was around a great deal in the very beginning.

I'm not sure at which point in time you're asking me. You know, at the outset these were the people. There were some non-governmental people, too, who were very much around and contributed very heavily in the very, very beginning. There was Mike Harrington, whose book of course had generated so much interest in the subject; there was a fellow named Paul Jacobs, a labor organizer from California who

is at the Center for Study of Democratic Institutions; there was a fellow named John Rubel, who had been a former assistant secretary of defense and was with Litton Industries; Pat Healy from the Department of Labor, who was involved in youth programs at Labor; and of course Moynihan. Again, in the very beginning there were people who came in and out and contributed. Dick Goodwin had a hand in writing up the message.

G: Was Sanford Kravitz--

T: Sandy Kravitz, who was on Dave Hackett's staff, was involved, but not over at the Peace Corps offices. [He] got in to the picture early, but not in the very, very beginning.

G: What was Moynihan's role or participation in this? Did he contribute, or do you know?

T: He contributed very largely before he went back to the Labor Department. He wrote, I believe, what was the first draft of the President's message and often helped organize and pull together many of the task force papers. He was more or less of a senior man on the task force in the beginning.

G: I think it's Moynihan's book where he--

T: Incidentally, there were two others on the task force who were very, very active. Chris Weeks, whom you've already mentioned, was one; and a girl named Anne Oppenheimer, who was later at the Budget Bureau.

G: As I was saying, in Moynihan's book he I think cites a memo--here it is from Yarmolinsky--that sort of describes what you had said, that there were assignments made, that there were papers or studies

that had to be done.

T: Right. I'm looking over your shoulder. I can see names which I had forgotten when you asked me for my list. Of course, Jim Sundquist of Agriculture was very much around.

G: And Ylvisaker?

T: Right, Paul Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation. He actually didn't serve on the task force, but because he was one of the people who had been doing the kinds of things that were being looked at as a possible part of this program, he was naturally called in.

G: To your knowledge, was the task force set up simply to bring together programs that already had been proposed to the Congress and to add to those programs the more innovative kind of program such as Community Action? In other words, had the basic groundwork been done, and it was simply that Shriver and these people came in and put it together in a coherent sort of way?

T: I think the idea was to start fresh; at least, I got that feeling. I didn't sense that at the outset there were any "had to be's." However, it soon became apparent that there were several "ought to be's." And it was the work of the task force to take a look at, first, whom were we talking about. "Who are the poor people and what kinds of needs do they have?" What among those needs are being met, if at all, in what way by current programs?" And leading then to, "What is not being done?" Once we went through that progression, [we] then [would make] a determination of how to develop a package

which would consist of those things that were going on which ought to continue, because they really were part of this, and those which had to be developed anew.

G: Can you cite one of those former examples of those programs that were going on?

T: The kind of thing that the Labor Department was doing in the youth field, S-1.

G: That's the Youth Corps?

T: I'm trying to remember the exact name of it.

G: It wasn't the National Youth Employment Act, was it?

T: No, it was the--it's now five years.

G: Is it what sort of became Job Corps?

T: It's what became the Neighborhood Youth Corps. I forget the exact name of S-1. At any rate, there were those types of programs, it was the kind of thing that MDTA was doing. There were a number of welfare programs which eventually found their way into Title V of the act; the Work Training Program. Those were work experience programs I think we called them. But there were a number of programs of that kind. There was of course the idea of a domestic Peace Corps. And when I speak of existing programs that we looked at which ought to be a part of this, there were those existing programs which were in fact functioning and those which were in the proposal stage. The domestic Peace Corps, I think then called and referred to as the National Service Corps, had really never gotten off the ground. It was one of those that was on the boards. But the work training, the

work experience programs in the welfare area and the kind of thing that finally became the Small Business Program in Title IV of the act--some of these had been going on. And some of the ideas grew out of the kinds of programs of the thirties, like the CCC and others. For instance, the program that President Johnson himself had been involved in when he was young.

G: In this kind of an analysis where you looked at existing programs and you began to find other areas of need, was there any criticism made of the kinds of programs that did exist? I mean, did you find fault with manpower development training programs and this sort of thing?

T: In some regards, yes. Because the question had to be asked, "Why weren't these programs doing more good than they were?" Or, "How much good are they doing?" And I don't think the conclusion was that they were meeting the need adequately, or there wouldn't be a need for a Poverty Program. Obviously there were certain deficiencies. These weren't always administrative, some of them were conceptual. It became a feeling and then a conclusion of the task force that the people to be affected by the programs were not involved in the development and administration of some of these programs, and this might be one of the missing elements of a number of existing programs.

There was also a feeling of a kind of professionalism run rampant, with professionals having grown very distant, professionals in the field of education, counseling, welfare, housing, what have you. So that the services were run in a way that somehow was not as relevant, perhaps. The question kept coming up: why weren't these services being utilized? It was the conclusion of the task force--and others, too, you know; it had been talked about for some time, and it was only natural to become, I think, the conclusion of the task force--that the reason wasn't only that poor people didn't want to make use of these services because they were lazy, but perhaps because the services were either themselves not conducted in a relevant manner, or they were remotely located physically, or for any one of a number of reasons. This isn't to attack all existing programs, but to take a look at what about them was not functioning as well as it could, what was the reason it wasn't doing as well as it could. I think that was the way we looked at existing programs.

I think the task force has often been charged, or it was more in the past anyway, with condemning everything that had gone on until OEO came along, and that's not true. I think that this kind of analysis of existing social service programs was very healthy and had been going on in those fields themselves. These were brought out during the discussions in the task force, which invited people to come in and tell us how they saw things going. In the field of corrections much thought had been given to the use of the prisoners themselves, for instance, in counseling other prisoners, people who

know the problems best. This kind of new approach was being tried in a number of areas, and I think that's the way we approached that.

G: Could you cite any proposals or programs that may have been developed that were rejected by the task force as a way or a technique or a method to eliminate poverty in the United States?

T: Yes, there were some. I'm not sure I remember them all.

G: I can ask you of a couple of specific ones.

T: Okay.

G: Was there ever proposed a massive, or some sort of job creation program, something along the lines of a public works or WPA?

T: Yes, I believe there was. I'm not sure I recall in the form of a specific proposal, but I think these were not so much programs or proposals that were rejected rather than approaches. I think that it was fairly well known from the start that this was not going to be a heavily funded program, and that there were going to be certain limitations on dollars. Therefore, when we talked of massive public works and jobs programs, we didn't see it as the function of whatever agency or thing was going to come out of this to be necessarily operating something of that kind; to be concerned with it, yes, and, as it later developed, in a coordinating way. But I think it was known fairly early on that we wouldn't have the money to operate massive jobs program or public works program.

G: There was some comment, I'm not sure whether Moynihan mentions this in his book but I have seen it in articles, about a cigarette tax which was to help fund some of these programs.

T: Right. I remember it, but I don't remember the details of that. There were a number of gimmicks. Maybe that's not fair. Most of the things that were considered and rejected had to do with focus and approach. There were, however, as you say, like the cigarette tax business, a couple of ideas that came along that didn't last very long. They were ways of raising money, I guess.

G: Another one that comes to mind, and it goes back to this job programs . . . I'll make a statement, and then I'd like you to comment on it. Apparently, as I understand it anyway, the theory behind job training, or the necessity for job training and the opposite, no need for a job creation program, was simply an economic one along with the tax cut, where the tax cut was supposed to provide an incentive for business production expansion, and so on, which was therefore to have an effect of creating more jobs. So that the theory was that because of the tax cut you created more jobs. All you really needed to do was to train people to work, the jobs would be there at the end of the--

T: They'd take the jobs, and we'd all live happily ever afterwards.

G: Is this the case?

T: Well, this was the case made by some people. I think that it was the case rejected by OEO, or by the task force. I mean, it was an assumption which just simply hadn't worked in the past, and there was no convincing reason to suggest why it would work in the future, at least it seemed so to many of us. This brings out the earlier point about what was wrong with previous approaches. A simple business incentive wasn't somehow managing to get all these people employed.

For instance, the number of business starts might be on the increase, and the number of training programs on the increase, and yet somehow both the youth unemployment and the minority unemployment were also on the increase. Something's wrong somewhere. And I think, you know, in looking at youth and employment programs, or any of the kinds of things that concerned the needs of the poor, we were always trying to figure out what it was, what element about it was somehow not there. I think that in looking later on at what was at least tried in the Job Corps, some of the premises, what was behind the idea of Community Action, what was the object of the VISTA volunteers' mission [that] the nature of all these programs was that certain something which had not been taking place before.

In the case of the youth and the training, it's not enough simply to offer the traditional kinds of training in the traditional manner to people who had been, if not excluded from the system somehow rejected by it, or who hadn't taken to it for a number of reasons. You know, a fellow who reads poorly performs poorly on tests and then performs poorly in interviews and isn't accepted, even by employment service offices for existing Manpower training slots. It was no secret that many training programs were doing what we came to call "creaming," and looking for those that were most likely to succeed. Well, we were interested in helping those who were least likely to succeed. If we were to just rely on the traditional methods of stimulating the basic needs economically through business incentive tax, and then providing the traditional kinds of training with its traditional

kinds of criteria for acceptable trainees and placement, we were just going to keep on going as we had been. Therefore, we had to do something a little bit different.

G: Was there any thought or consideration as to a regional approach to poverty programs, such as, for example, as was later, I think in 1965, the Appalachian Regional Development Commission set up?

T: People from the Appalachian Commission incidentally were involved. Frank Roosevelt participated briefly in the very, very beginning, and one of his men, Jim Adler, was an active task force participant and later wound up in the Job Corps. I don't remember discussions on regional approaches as such, but I do recall that in defining the nature of the problems they were seen as cutting across both state and regional lines. While we had to know the geography of poverty, that in fact Indian reservations are located in certain areas, migrant streams follow certain paths through the country, the more sensible way to cut the program would be from what types of individuals needed what types of help, rather than by state or regional lines.

G: The Appalachian programs were called the bricks and mortar programs.

T: That was true too, right.

G: And OEO was a human development program.

T: Right.

G: Was there any consideration at this time about--

T: Again, it's the money factor. For one, we wanted to be concerned with the human services programs and leave the bricks and mortar kind of

thing to those agencies whose mission it was to develop bricks and mortar. This became, to my way of thinking anyway, the key element in the whole legislation, which was the coordinating clause. While those things that we were to directly operate or administer or supervise were in the human services or the softer areas, if you will, at the same time we had a handle on directing the resources of the brick and mortar and other agencies toward this. So there'd be some kind of focusing of the whole thing. But we ourselves would neither have the money nor the staff, nor the mission, to actually take over what were these brick and mortar functions.

G: You're talking about OEO's role? I'm sorry, you're talking about the council that was set up in the act to coordinate, to have people come together?

T: No, I'm talking about, I believe it was Section 611 or 612 of the act, which required other agencies to coordinate their poverty related programs with those of OEO generally and with Community Action specifically.

G: I was wondering how, for example, the Appalachian Regional Development Program coordinated with OEO?

T: It's a matter of giving priority to where you place your resources. If a brick and mortar agency or an agency with any kind of program that was concerned, that would benefit low income people, would give priority to developing its programs in the same places and even in ways that were consonant with the way that was being now taken, we'd have a focusing of efforts, be it on housing, education, all in the

same area. I think that clause was designed to help people think out the priorities of where their dollars would go and into what places.

G: Just to digress from the task force a minute, I'd like to ask you to give your opinion as to the success in achieving this kind of coordination. Do you think OEO has been successful in doing this?

T: I think that the successes in coordination are probably more evident at the local level. I suspect there are more achievements by local Community Action agencies in getting other local institutions in the city or town to work along with them, even in a homespun way: getting the Kiwanis Club to donate a bus to bring the children to an after hours tutorial session which is being sponsored by the local school setup which was convinced to do so by the local Community Action Agency director who actually has very little money to begin with, and whose job amounts mainly to coordination of what's going on in town and most of whose dollars are being spent on small staff. Those kinds of coordinations are probably more frequent than at the federal level. You know, this is not necessarily the most knowledgeable statement, but I think as hard as coordination is to do, it may be found more there, in the towns, than here in Washington. There are too many jurisdictions that are jealously guarded, and I think this is no secret. This is federal government, and it's very hard to get the agencies to coordinate.

G: Along those lines I'm thinking back to an article which appeared in one of the New York magazines that described the task force process

as one of blood on the wall, empire building, tsars coming into conflicts. Could you comment on that?

T: I think that relates to this point we were just discussing. It almost boiled down, it seemed at times, to a "Who owns the poor?" kind of question. I won't take away from some of the participants in these battles some logic that they may have had for wanting to be the key agency or key coordinator or even key operator, seeing the world from their vantage point. There was logic. There's not necessarily any one set of reasons for everything. But at the same time there was blood splattered around as agency unwillingness to yield control over its programs, even willingness to submit to coordination, became evident, and in many of the sessions that the task force had it was a matter of knocking heads together. Many of us recall this as actually what happened in some of these sessions. And if I might say so, I think Adam Yarmolinsky was brilliant at it. I'm not sure he'd agree with that assessment of his talents, but I think that this was necessary.

G: How would he manage this? You say he was brilliant at it. What would he do?

T: I think it was a matter of style, of conducting a meeting, of organizing the direction of a meeting, and in the less subtle arts of persuasion, exercise of clout. I think that this was a key factor we had going for us, that this had the White House behind it. One almost got the feeling at times that people who weren't going to go along were reminded that there was an interest at the very highest

level in bringing about some kind of coordination of all of this. I think that that reminder had to be issued occasionally.

G: Was there sort of a Byzantine atmosphere about this, or was it not quite as serious as all of that? Just to give a kind of hypothetical situation: If for example a head of a department, secretary of a department, claimed his prerogative over a particular kind of a program that the task force was considering or working at, [and] the task force through Shriver or Yarmolinsky were to tell this agency head that "this comes within our prerogative," that agency head might go to the White House if he had an in to the White House. Then there would be that kind of triangulation of interests involved.

T: I think that kind of thing happened. And I think that people were trying to make cases around town, not necessarily through the White House but through the press, for why one direction would be preferable to another. As I mentioned to you before, I wasn't always able to control the information, and all kinds of leaks occurred. And often leaks, as anybody in Washington knows, are self-serving; they're not just because some government official suddenly feels that the public has a need to know. In nine out of ten cases it's because it serves a purpose.

G: That's a good CIA phrase, "a need to know."

T: "A need to know," right. But this indeed happened in fact. Every day there were stories of one kind or another in the news magazines and in the Washington press and in the national press--radio,

television--suggesting which way things were going, the shape of the legislation, where the emphasis would be. In some cases they were factually right, you know, about elements that eventually did appear in the bill or in the message.

G: Which indicates a leak?

T: Which indicates a leak. But many of these were put into print in order to bring it about, and that's not a new trick either.

G: I don't know if you want to put this on the tape, but I remember a few months ago you talked to me about a particular kind of leak and Shriver's reaction to it.

T: Yes. Well, it was just somewhat amusing in retrospect, although it was no fun at the time. I don't remember the exact date, but I guess it was getting very close to the time when the task force was going to announce what it had finally come up with, send the message to the Hill. And on a Monday, I recall it was a Monday, there was a particularly revealing story in Newsweek, and I got called down for it: "How the hell did this happen?" "I don't know." Then another story appeared in the Wall Street Journal on Tuesday which had another third of the picture. When Wednesday morning's New York Times hit the street with the remaining portion of the bill, virtually, that was the straw that nearly broke my back. I just remember Shriver coming in the office I was using and throwing the New York Times down on the desk and asking me how this had appeared, "How did this get in?" I said I really didn't know. I told him that I did know how the other two got in. Which was true, I did.

I had learned of it confidentially, and I didn't feel that I should get people in trouble. I told him, "I know, but I really don't think I can tell you."

He was upset, and he said, "Well, you tell Bill Moyers then, because they're upset." Apparently, Adam Yarmolinsky was getting chewed out and Moyers was getting chewed out and Shriver was getting chewed out. "How had all this come to pass?" I called Bill Moyers, because I was under instructions to do so, and he asked me the same question Shriver had, "How the hell did this get in the paper?" I said, "I don't know how today's story got in. I know how the other two stories got in, and I'm not going to tell you." He was furious, and he called Shriver back and said, "Tolmach didn't tell me." Shriver came back in, and I said something about, "I'm not going to tell you even if you put bamboo shoots up my fingernails." He said he'd already had bamboo shoots in his fingernails because someone else was torturing him for the same information. The fact is that those stories were leaked by some people in very, very significantly high places.

G: Would you care to put that on the tape?

T: One of the stories that I was referring to came from Kermit Gordon, who was then director of the Bureau of the Budget. You know, that kind of thing had happened prior to that, and I know personally of stories that Pat Moynihan let out of the bag.

G: Could you identify those stories, the Gordon and the Moynihan leaks?

T: Again, five years has somewhat dampened my memory. I believe

the one that I was referring to from Kermit Gordon had to do with what was going to be in Title I, the job programs, the nature of what was and wasn't in them. I really don't remember exactly what Newsweek said about them, or what his statement was. There was a story I remember that I knew Pat had talked to a reporter about, but again I don't remember specifically what was in the story. It was, perhaps, more important at that moment than it is now, so it may not have stuck with me for that reason.

G: The way you describe this is that there was obviously some sort of pressure being put on Shriver, and Moyers for that matter.

T: To keep the lid on all of this.

G: Yes, and it seems to me that that pressure would be from Johnson himself.

T: Yes. I was told that the President wanted this to be, not secret, but to be kept administratively confidential or quiet until he had a chance to announce the whole thing at once. This is not terribly unusual, one; and, two, when you recall that this is the first piece of major legislation that the President was formulating and was behind, this was his first big effort, I can both recall and understand why he was particularly concerned with keeping this as much of a surprise package [as possible]. I don't think "secret" is the wrong word, but "surprise" is maybe more correct. He wanted to make a splash in this thing. It was his thing, as we say today, and that was understandable. It was something he personally was concerned with and associated with, and it was his first

legislative issuance of any major consequence. It was also the first thing after the death of President Kennedy, and it was something that President Kennedy had started. There were a number of reasons why he didn't want it all splashed around and leaked ahead of time.

G: And this was the understanding on the part of other task force members?

T: I think this was quite clear.

G: Even to people like Daniel Moynihan and Kermit Gordon?

T: I would say so.

G: Do you have any idea why, other than self-serving purposes or to get a program in? Were these simply the reasons for this kind of press leak?

T: Well, you know the business of leaking stories. I can tell you as an ex-newspaperman there are so many [reasons]. Sometimes, as I said, they're self-serving. Sometimes they're self-serving in a long-range way, that is, to maintain good relations with the press. They need support frequently of the press, and so you do them favors without any specific immediate objective in mind. I mean, there are a whole host of reasons why people deal with the press in that way.

G: You said that the task force had the White House behind it, and that this was Johnson's program.

T: Very much so. This was very much so. We have even used White House stationery.

G: What kind of relationship was there? I mean, was there a constant contact?

T: Yes, there was. That was more or less conducted by Shriver and Yarmolinsky. Yarmolinsky was at the White House a heck of a lot.

G: And Moyers, I take it, was the chief liaison.

T: And Moyers was the chief liaison, right.

G: Did he ever come over? Did he ever attend?

T: I never saw him over at the Peace Corps, but then these were his first days in his early time over at the White House, and they went to him.

G: Shriver was obviously the chief contact, but Yarmolinsky was his working contact?

T: Yarmolinsky was the working contact.

G: And there was considerable contact?

T: And there was considerable contact between Yarmolinsky and the White House to my recollection.

G: Do you have any knowledge of any suggestions, interdicts, or anything that came from the White House, other than the kinds of pressures that you talked about simply because of news leaks? Were there any instructions that were sent down?

T: It wouldn't surprise me if there were. I never got any.

G: Did it ever come out at a meeting that you might have been at? Did the White House have priority programs and so on?

T: I don't recall its being stated that way. It doesn't mean it wasn't, and it doesn't mean the White House didn't have these kinds of special interests. I'm not sure I'm the best person to answer that. I think maybe Adam would.

G: We can go to another question. Could you describe to me the process of arriving at the way OEO was finally set up? It's my understanding that there were several ways that OEO could have been created. That is, did it need to be a Cabinet level agency? Why not have all these programs in the Department of Labor, or why not merge Commerce and Labor and have a Poverty Program in those two, and so on? Why a separate agency?

T: I think for two reasons basically. One, once it was determined that the national anti-poverty effort ought to encompass a broad range of programs it then became kind of evident that the range exceeded that of any one department. And while, yes, there might be youth programs or job programs that would seem to fit into the Labor Department, there were things that were quite far afield from that, VISTA, to name one, or Small Business Loans. As you looked at it, there was no one appropriate agency, so I think that the range suggested the need for something different. That's one reason. Another reason was the decision that this would be a coordinating force, and therefore would best be lodged in the Executive Office of the President. I think it's interesting today to note that the Nixon Administration, at least for now, seems to

have adopted that same logic; that if there was to be any clout behind that coordinating clause, it would have to be the White House, would have to be the Executive Office.

G: Was this arrived at early? Was this pretty well understood early in the task force period?

T: Well, reasonably. I think so, yes. Because actually the whole work of the task force was, well not completed, but the draft message was prepared and the bills were drafted in, oh, I don't know, I guess about two months. It went up in April, and the task force started about February 1, which is a little over two months. So I would say these determinations were reached reasonably quickly.

G: Was it also understood that Shriver would become director?

T: I think everybody made that assumption. I never heard any talk of anyone else's becoming director.

G: Was it also understood or assumed that Yarmolinsky would have a role?

T: Yes, I think it was assumed by people on the task force that Yarmolinsky would have a role, and that it would most likely be that of the number two man. That of course proved to be wrong when he was dumped.

G: I want to get into that in a little bit. I just want to shift to another topic that's still within the period of the task force. Did the Vice President have any--I'm sorry, I'm way ahead of myself. I'm thinking of Humphrey. I should say did Humphrey, who became vice president, have a role?

T: I don't recall. Humphrey did have a role, of course, after OEO was in business. He had a titled role as chairman of that council and related, of course. Hy Bookbinder who was another task force member--I guess I didn't mention him in that first list either--and he was very much there, became the official liaison to Humphrey's office. But in the very beginning, I really don't recall Humphrey's name coming up terribly often.

G: I think, again, it's in Weeks' book, where he points out that Humphrey was a little bit annoyed that his youth program, along the lines of the CCC, had been pre-empted, or had been absorbed and slightly altered in the process into the OEO job Title I program. I was just wondering if there was any contact between the task force and Humphrey.

T: There may have been; I am not aware of it.

G: You were talking before about the empire building, and I don't think that was your phrase, I think I may have used it. Who, if, again, you want to point this out, were the people who had more prerogatives than others? I'm thinking again of accounts mostly in newspaper articles that Willard Wirtz was very big on the job program and fought Shriver.

T: That's right.

G: Is this the case?

T: That is the case. I think the references to most of the battles are to the wrangling with the Department of Labor. I think I once mentioned in another conversation that we had [that] Pat Moynihan's

first draft, suggested draft, of the legislation focused on jobs. After all Pat was Bill Wirtz's representative on the task force. I knew he was the spokesman for this jobs point of view, which he still enunciates today. It was evident from what he was saying and urging at that time, and he was doing it, I think, not only because of his own beliefs but also because he was Bill Wirtz's spokesman. That certainly is true. There were other constituencies that were vocal and protective of their operations, and to whom some of these references of battles also are made. But primarily I think it's the Labor Department that was seen as the biggest opposition.

G: You also mentioned that the task force people didn't think that they would have a great deal of money to spend in this War on Poverty. I've seen two figures cited: one, five hundred million dollars; and another, the final request, which I think was close to a billion dollars, I think .9 billion dollars.

T: Right.

G: What was the understanding? You say you didn't think you would get much money, but where did you think you'd get it from? What were the kind of budgetary arrangements which were being thought of by the task force?

T: What do you mean, where we would get it from?

G: For example, I think it was in 1963 after Johnson had become president, that he ordered the Department of Defense to make cut-backs in spending. I think that the interpretation is that the money which would be saved there would be shifted to the Poverty

Program. Is this--

T: Well, it was such a small amount of money, I don't think anybody was really concerned about what would suffer in order to support this. I remember a picture in the Washington Post. It was either the day we got our appropriations or the day--I forget exactly which day it was, one of those early 1964 days when the final money figure was involved. They ran a picture of the F-111 or some plane which cost, just for that one plane, the same amount of money as the entire Poverty Program, War on Poverty. How much is one plane out of the entire Defense budget? I don't think anybody was really terribly concerned about hurting another government effort elsewhere, because they knew it was small. This wasn't troublesome to many of the people on the task force, nor even to the people who were working in OEO once it was formed. Because we were not producing hardware and bricks and building buildings, but were trying to get new types of things started and fill gaps and be an adhesive force, and what have you.

As it turns out, it's relatively hard, very, very hard to spend money in this field wisely. In fact, it's hard to spend money, hard to get people around the country. At the same time there was a lot of interest in the program. You know, the interest came largely and often from people you expected the interest to come from. In order to get--

G: You mean mayors, people like that?

T: Yes, mayors, some mayors anyway; the social science profession;

the professional people in education, better ones in education, the ones who were all too glad to operate programs. It wasn't always that easy to place programs, you know, or to place good ones. Sure, communities would take the money, that represents money, but it became hard to spend the money well.

G: What I'm getting at is, just what was the magnitude of the program involved? Were they thinking in terms of projecting on, say, a ten-year basis, as in fact was done later?

T: Yes. I don't recall any out-year planning done on a serious basis, at least not in the very early stages. Maybe some individuals did it. I don't recall any PPBS approach to this at that time. That may be one of the faults, I don't know. It may have been that if we did that we might not have ever gotten off the ground. It's a question I haven't resolved in my mind. But obviously there were virtues in long-range planning, and those techniques are now more and more established. In fact, we do it ourselves now, by fiat we do it. I don't remember the task force plotting out, logically, where we would be going in five- and ten-year increments. I just don't recall seeing any of it done. And it was not presented to Congress in that fashion either, no.

G: At the same time the task force wasn't projecting a larger program? They were quite satisfied with the request for the authorization and appropriation? They weren't thinking of a three or four or five billion dollar program, they were thinking of a .9 billion dollar program in the first year?

T: More or less, yes. I think the issue is not whether they were thinking of a five billion dollar program as opposed to a one billion dollar program but whether they were thinking of a five hundred billion dollar program as opposed to a one billion. In other words, either you were going to go for broke on this thing [or not]. Because if you really were going to eliminate poverty in a crash way, which of course some of the phraseology did suggest, then clearly you have to spend untold billions. But since it wasn't going to be that, I think we settled for this in our minds.

G: What prompted my question was, for example, Michael Harrington's subsequent criticisms of the Poverty Program. One of the phrases he used, I think, is that it was a Band-Aid program; it simply didn't have enough money. I was wondering, what were his reactions, for example, if he was involved in the task force planning.

T: I don't want to speak for Mike, but I think the reactions of Mike and Paul Jacobs were all ones of disappointment. Not because Mike was necessarily advocating a massive jobs or public works program, but because here is a guy who had spent a lot of time taking a look at the extent of poverty in the country and how really badly off an awful lot of people were. Having been immersed in that and seeing the massive need, or the need for such massive aid, to participate in deliberations which will eventually lead to a one billion dollar program is going to be disappointing to a guy like that. How much Mike appreciated the difficulties of spending even a billion dollars well as a cohesive, generating demonstration I don't know. And that kind of theme ran through a lot of this. After all the Job Corps,

and the Community Action Program even more so, and the others, too, were all, I hate that now hackneyed word "innovative," but they were new enough, they were demonstrative enough so some of us thought that the billion dollars wasn't that much of a handicap. It was either going to be all the money or, "Let's spend this wisely in a demonstration way." But I can understand why certain people like Mike might be disappointed.

G: Could you sum up the task force personnel in any kind of descriptive phrase? In consensus was there a kind of ideological bind?

T: Yes, there was among the regulars. There was a task force and a task force. When you speak of the task force, you may be speaking of more than one group, or one larger group and a smaller group. There was a roster of regulars who showed up every morning for work at the Peace Corps. They were employed by a variety of agencies around town, like Jim Adler from Commerce, I was there from Labor, and there was Hal Horowitz from HEW. We came every day. Somebody even has a little kind of phone list printed; it's kicking around still which shows that small group of people. I [am] speaking of them, and not the people who came in to confer with that group. I mean that was the group that was present at every meeting. Now if the meeting was concerned with agriculture, then you'd have half a dozen people from Agriculture there and maybe a few others. Yes, those others participated in the task force, but there's the task force and there's the task force. The regulars I think shared a kind of common sense of purpose, an electric excitement, moving

ahead. It had that kind of spirit, yes.

G: I want to again shift to another topic, but still keep it in the task force period, and that is Community Action. It's such a large subject it's very difficult to approach in a structured way, but I guess I can use Moynihan's book as a point of departure.

T: I have not read it yet.

G: Good. I can surprise you.

T: As of this interview, I haven't.

G: I may be misinterpreting Moynihan, but I'm not sure my misinterpretations are that important, because I think that there are good questions that can be derived from the book. One of the things that I think he suggests is that the major thrust of the War on Poverty as it was conceived in 1964 would be Community Action, and that the other kinds of programs were peripheral, important, but Community Action was the central part of that effort. I think that he makes a case for associating Community Action with such precedent groups as Mobilization for Youth in New York, and particularly with the Attorney General's commission, or, what was it?

T: The President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency.

G: Committee on Juvenile Delinquency coming out of the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Control Act. Is this a fair assumption to make? Did it stem from the kind of work, the kind of research, the kind of theorizing that had been going on during the Kennedy years out of the Ford Foundation and the Attorney General's committee?

T: I think that that was a major input. I wouldn't base it entirely

on that, because among other things the Community Action agencies that came into being that were funded by OEO and were defined and thought about during those days were quite different from the sixteen, I think it was sixteen, cities of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. There were some similar assumptions. The answer is yes, in large part. The President's Committee program operated only through the mayors' offices. They were public entities through which the funding was routed, and Community Action agencies for the most part were public, or private non-profit. I think as it eventuated more of the latter in the end, although now it has switched back under new directions from the Hill. But I think that that kind of experience was certainly one of the major inputs into the Community Action Program.

G: You mentioned that Hackett was an active participant in the task force, and of course he had been the director?

T: Right.

G: I'm not sure what the title would be.

T: I'm not sure either, director, I guess.

G: Again, Moynihan's history of this is that Hackett, and the programs themselves, had impressed people in the Bureau of the Budget. Those very people, I guess Capron and Cannon would be two, and I guess another would be Boone, were enthusiastic and helped to push, or helped to persuade Shriver and others of the task force that this was indeed a valuable program and it should be included. Could you elaborate on that? Is this fair or accurate?

T: I think it's both fair and accurate. Community Action, and some of its principles and tenets, stem from a lot of things. You know, it was a convergence of many ideas. I mean, the Civil Rights Act, you know, movement, was reaching certain climaxes at that period. Elements of it kind of came from many areas. But programmatically there's no doubt about it. The work of the Ford Foundation--the Ford Foundation had been involved with the President's Committee as well, did they call it the "grey areas," or something like that, project?--and the PCJD began to look at the problems of the delinquent youth as larger than a personal type of problem which could be reached just through counseling or just through education. It became a community type of problem, and I think that that was the theme to mobilization for youth and to many of these other programs. We attacked the so-called larger courses, the constellation of problems. Only by dealing with it that way were you going to in any way have hope of [success].

After all, it's oversimplification, but improving just one area is not going to improve all. The kid who goes even to a school that has been substantially improved in one way or another but goes home to a house full of rats still has as many problems as he had all along. So I think that is accurate. And Boone, who was an advisor to Dave Hackett whom Dave Hackett brought in--Boone had been in Chicago and worked with youth projects there, was actually on the White House staff, and he served as a consultant to Dave Hackett--certainly did have a large effect on this.

G: What was Shriver's understanding? I'm not asking you to speak for

Shriver, but perhaps you saw in these meetings concerned with Community Action his reaction to it. Was he enthusiastic about it? Did he have an understanding of what it was? The reason I ask this is because Moynihan, not only in his latest book but articles in the past, asserted that there were several theories of Community Action and that they were mutually exclusive and incompatible. He suggests that nobody really had an understanding of what Community Action was. What I'm trying to get at is the understanding among the people who actually put it into the act. I'd like to know what they thought it was and what it could be, whether they could project into the future and see some of the problems that Community Action would encounter.

T: There are two different questions. How much Shriver understood the idea and accepted it, therefore adding up to his notion of it, whether he thought the same things that other people in the task force did, is a separate question from precisely what the task force thought about it. I think that Shriver did accept it. It was something which he personally had not been involved in, and I think he didn't have to be persuaded but had to be told what it was. I think,however, that the Peace Corps experience was one that he drew on to help him gain understanding. After all the volunteers were helping in many, many areas to organize the people around needs as they saw them, not only to dig ditches, but to develop organizations of people. Maybe [these organizations were] not quite the same as they are seen in this country, but that experience, I think, assisted him greatly even though he didn't come from the social science sphere to which Pat

alludes. So, therefore, I never sensed any difficulty on his part in swallowing this notion. I recall him taking to it quite readily. Now that he, as well as the rest of us, had to define this somewhat was of course necessary. I'm not sure that when we make the statement that nobody knew what Community Action was, whether that's accurate.

G: Let me rephrase that. He said that there were several interpretations and that some people had an understanding of what it was, but they may have been limited in their understanding in not being able to understand what it might also be. In fact, he makes the point that he attempted, and succeeded in some cases, in talking to some people and warning them about the dangers of Community Action.

T: It depends on what you have in mind of what it "also could be." Let me try and respond to that. I don't think that anybody would have professed to know all the ingredients of what Community Action was. I think that the task force and the people who came to work in the Community Action Program, and I think Shriver himself realized this, operated on the assumption that it was an approach. No one was in the prediction business. It could include an awful lot of things. Yes, maybe it could include things that were beyond the perception of some people; it depends on what you have in mind. You could be talking programmatically. I mean there may be programs which went beyond the current thinking, or it could be in terms of the kinds of results, I think, that Pat has at least been said to allude to, meaning some of the disruptions, that kind of thing. Yes, I suppose no one would have professed to know where it all could lead.

I don't know what the value of that kind of analysis is, really, because I think as the task force saw it, and as the people who staffed the Community Action Program, certainly in the early days [saw it], the whole idea was that it was a new approach. And that in its very newness, especially newness in some of its principles of involving people and the way it was to be structured and what it was to be concerned with and so forth, it was a virtuous way to proceed. This had to do with what we talked about earlier. Now it hadn't worked before; we were trying some kind of new way of doing it. It doesn't necessarily make it the answer. It seemed to join together some of those elements which appeared to be lacking in previous approaches, and of course nobody knew exactly what all the consequences of it would be. They didn't know everything that was meant by maximum feasible participation. I don't know that one needed to know everything.

G: In your questioning the value of that kind of analysis that he makes, I think what he does is to try to show that because of the uncertainty of what it was all about, because it would affect people, large numbers of people, urban ghetto residents and rural poor and so on, and because it was put together by social scientists and reformers not out of that class of poor, that there is something inherently undemocratic about it. In fact, he even makes the statement that "you" people, although he doesn't name names, were playing God with other people's lives. Added to that, he says that because not enough was known about it it simply should have been deferred until enough

was known. I think he suggests that the social scientists, or the sociological theories behind it are in error, one; and that, [two], they were questionable at the time that it was put together.

T: That's a key point. Really, at the time it was put together I know of nothing which suggested that the theories were wrong. I don't know of anything today which necessarily suggests that the theories were wrong. There are things about them that too much may have been expected of. I don't know that. "Wrong" is kind of stark. But in any event, certainly at that time there was sufficient reason to suggest that this was a worthwhile approach to embark on.

G: Whose job was in it in the task force to explain Community Action to Shriver and the rest of the members of the task force?

T: I don't know that it was a job.

G: Was everybody familiar with what Community Action had been in the juvenile delinquency or the Ford experiences?

T: No. But the task force, especially in the early days, operated through a series of papers; like Paul Ylvisaker described in a paper what they had been doing. All these people like Hackett would contribute to the body of knowledge, and everybody read everybody else's paper. There were certainly some individuals there whose background was far afield from Community Action, but that was part of your last question, too, about the remoteness of the people or playing God allegation.

G: This is Moynihan's.

T: Yes. The people on the task force who were advocates of the Community Action approach probably knew as much about it as anybody in the country. Yes, it's true, there were no poor people sitting in the task force conference room. I don't think anybody ever said there were, and it may be a fault.

G: How about black people?

T: There were. In great preponderance I guess not, but they are not in great preponderance in key offices in Washington anywhere. Andy Brimmer was there. I'm not sure I remember every single one. Certainly the proportion, percentage was low, as it is generally still in Washington. But the people who made the case for this aspect of the legislation were drawing on experience, even if they themselves weren't poor. Dick Boone certainly wasn't poor, he was making a hundred dollars a day, but Dick Boone had been working with street gangs in Chicago. And a number of other people know whereof they spoke, or what of they spoke. I think it can be safely said that they represented as much firsthand experience in that area as professionals could have. I think they were the best of the professionals in this regard.

The crew from the President's committee were the people who did operate, administered these programs for better or worse. But they were involved with that experience, and they were in the field a great deal. Most of the people on the President's committee came out of social work and youth work, and were on the streets and I think had this experience. The task force brought in people, consulted with

people in various committees who were out there doing a lot of this kind of thing, community organizing to the extent that it was taking place, and using nonprofessionals to the extent it was taking place. So I think they represented as adequately as possible that experience even though they themselves were not poor. Not everybody in the anti-poverty business has to be poor.

G: Do you know if Cloward and--

T: Ohlin--Lloyd Ohlin.

G: Were they consulted?

T: I don't ever recall seeing Dick Cloward or Lloyd Ohlin brought into the task force, but both of them were very involved with the President's Committee on Juvenile Deliquency. So all those people had had contact with those two.

G: If I can rephrase what you've been saying, there was an acceptance of it. . . .

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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