INTERVIEW II

DATE: March 19, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: ERIC TOLMACH

INTERVIEWER: STEVE GOODELL

PLACE: Mr. Tolmach's office, OEO, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: Last time when the tape ran out we were talking about Community Action in the task force period, and I think that the last question that I'd asked you was whether or not the people on the task force had reached a consensus of agreement about what Community Action would be. I'd like to start this tape by asking you if you knew of any task force people who were opposed, had objections to Community Action; and if there were, for what reason were there objections?

T: First of all, you have to think of the task force at a particular period in time. The task force actually extended from February 1964 until we got our appropriations. Exactly October 8, 1964, is when the task force was terminated and OEO became OEO. There were different people involved in the October and September period of the task force, and many of those who were there in the early months of 1964 had left. So I would first say that in the spring of 1964 at about the time when the bill was sent up to the Hill, the group which had developed the Community Action language and the program to the extent that it was thought of in programmatic terms at that point in time was fairly well in

agreement. It was a smaller group of people who had evolved this and had convinced Sargent Shriver, who accepted it and helped sell it to the Hill. So those who were its supporters in the task force at that point were not challenged. There were not any factions that I recall, which is not to say that there might not have been individual disagreements.

Then as time went on and the task force grew in size, I suppose there were different persuasions. The principal group, however, responsible for Community Action, which had been formed under Jack Conway and Dick Boone, was pretty much of the same thinking. And to the extent, again, that there was dissension from that, it might have come from some of those who were responsible for such things as relations with the Hill, who were not actually in the Community Action group or section of the task force. There were pragmatists. There were people who I guess would have wanted to present Community Action in a way that might not be frightening to people on the Hill who had never heard of it and to whom the whole concept was they weren't going to have it. But I really don't know.

Now this isn't to say that it didn't exist, but I don't know of actual factions. There wasn't the "X" clique that favored a certain emphasis and the "Y" clique that would have taken a different route. Essentially, the people in those offices who were assigned to Community Action and developed that and gearing up for that program were pretty much in agreement. Later on, after the task force became OEO, perhaps six months from that point, from October, when we

were already into the spring of 1965, then very definite divisions in thinking and in organization appeared. But at that point I don't think so.

G: Fine. Would you know what, for example, the attitude toward Community Action might have been on the part of those people who had other more specific interests in mind on the task force? And I'm thinking now of Daniel Moynihan, whose job you said it was to represent Wirtz and whose primary interest was getting a job program in the War on Poverty.

T: When you bring in Pat Moynihan's name you send us back to the early spring, because Moynihan actually was not part of the task force after the very first few weeks. He may have had a continuing dialogue, you know, inter-agency, but he actually was not serving. The kinds of things that Pat was urging, in terms of emphasis on employment programs, jobs programs, those directions that he proposed, came at a time before the bill was drawn up into Community Action, Job Corps, and so forth. In other words, I think he was asking that that be the stress of the anti-poverty program. I don't think that he at that time represented a different view of Community Action. I think he had a purpose that he would have liked to see for the anti-poverty program as a whole.

G: In order to clarify this thing, you might say that there are stages within the period from February to April when the bill was being drafted where Community Action may have been at one point the major thrust, that there may have been attention drawn to it more than other programs. By the time that the bill actually went to the

Congress, it was simply Title 2.

T: That's right. It was one of six parts of the bill. From just reading the bill, it didn't suggest any more emphasis there than on any other part of it. Although if you read it closely, clearly the implications were quite broader than some of the other programs.

G: I'd like to turn if I can to, again, Moynihan's book. He talks in this book in retrospect, and it is a pretense at history. He states in the book that the people in the Bureau of the Budget conceived of Community Action the following way: that it was a means to impose order and efficiency on the chaos of government programs that had descended upon the American city.

T: That's correct. I think that's an accurate statement which I think is probably still accurate. As a matter of fact, it's not that that view is an incorrect one, it was that view that helped give rise to the Community Action program. It was clearly the necessity for bringing some coordination of diversified federal resources, so many programs in fields that related to poverty that were being implemented in an unconnected way at the local level. There was a need for that, and it was a very important factor behind the creation of the whole Community Action program.

G: He also says that his own recollections indicated that Community Action would insure that persons excluded from the political processes in the South and elsewhere would nonetheless participate in the benefits of Community Action programs of the new legislation.

He says that it was taken as a matter beneath notice that such programs would be dominated by the local political structure. Is this also true? I guess this gets it at the maximum feasible participation clause within the title.

T: Was it true, you're asking me, whether we assumed--

G: Were you thinking in terms of maximum feasible participation of the poor in terms of involving the poor in the planning and the operations of the program, development of the programs, and so on, other than outside the South? He seems to imply that as far as maximum feasible participation, that the people in the task force sort of threw that in as a gesture to involve poor people in southern areas where they might encounter difficulties in setting programs up.

T: No, that's not the reason that phrase came about, to help insure the involvement of poor people in the South.

G: I guess he would mean black people in the South.

T: Black people in the South. That is not why that clause was written into the bill.

G: Would you like to say why it was?

T: There are many people who will tell you many things. Certainly the purpose he has mentioned is one that could be included among them, but that was not the primary, the real reason. The principle, the reasoning, was not geographic. There was no better chance, or not that much appreciably better chance, given the way things were, for the poor to participate in programs in areas ouside of the South. So clearly that wasn't just a southern

addition. It was aimed at poor people in every part of the country. Essentially, I think I mentioned before and probably many others have too, there was an assumption about service, social service, and its failure to be relevant and to be utilized that really led to the conclusion that the people who suffered the problems could and should have a role in deciding how and where and when the programs were to operate. It's essentially that general purpose. If it serves the one he mentioned, why, of course. But that wasn't--

G: I guess it's the second part of that statement which I'm quoting from him, that it was taken as a matter beneath notice that such programs would be dominated by the local political structure. Was this even a consideration back in those--

T: What do you mean, "taken beneath notice"? That's a fancy phrase.

G: That it wasn't even an important issue, that the people didn't even consider that there might be confrontation between poor people in the community and the local political power structure.

T: Who didn't see this?

G: He's saying that the task force members didn't, that it was beneath their notice.

T: I see. I don't think that the problems were not known to the people on the task force. I don't think that every effect, every result that this would ultimately produce, every kind of confrontation, was necessarily anticipated because it has come in many sizes and shapes. I know for a fact that the Urban Areas Task Force that you

mentioned before, that group in the more advanced days of the task force in the fall, just before the program was funded, were certainly thinking of confrontations, not in terms of riots, but in terms of conflicting demands in the problem of who is to control what. These were not things beneath notice. In the spring, at the time the bill was being prepared, they were perhaps given less attention, because at that point in time there was agreement that it was so important that we build in this capability and perhaps deal with all its implications as we went along. But the key thing was to get that in and to insure that that was there; that was what was different. That's what held out a chance that this would have some success whereas others didn't.

G: I guess, again, to go back to that quotation, the key word might be "dominated," that Community Action agencies would be dominated by local political structures. Can you recall if this was even an issue? He makes the point that Ylvisaker envisioned, and again I'm quoting him, "an assemblage of the power structure as a prerequisite to Community Action."

T: Sure it was an issue, but we did not make the assumption that it was the local political power structure that would run this program. We did make requisite that they be involved, and the language of the bill suggests that. In our testimony to the Hill we spoke of things like the three legged stool and the involvement of the three major segments, but the bill also allowed for Community Action agencies to be operated by nonprofit organizations. There were different kinds

of power structures, of course. But it was not felt that the local political structure, that the mayor's office would in every case run these programs, and that in fact it would be desirable in many places if that were not the case. In that way it differed from the juvenile delinquency program, which was funded through local government. This program allowed for a variety of funding bases.

G: It's my understanding that you personally--your involvement with the task force throughout the summer--were involved in public affairs. Is that right?

T: Right. Many of us were peripatetic, and I was working in the early days in the public affairs department.

G: While the bill was before the Congress this was where you were?

T: I personally started out in what might be called public affairs, although it was certainly not a department; then worked with Jack Conway and Dick Boone in the Community Action phase of it until the fall; then joined Edgar May in getting some of the public relations aspects of it going; and then went back to the Community Action program in December, 1964.

G: Could you describe, from what you know of the process of the bill on the Hill in that first summer in 1964,was it difficult to get through? Did you encounter strong opposition, and if so, what were the lines that were drawn on the basis of that opposition?

T: This was an area that I wasn't personally involved in, because in the latter days, the latter part of the spring when the activity on the Hill was mounting rapidly and people like Wilson McCarthy were up

there every day, I was at that point working with Jack Conway in the Community Action sphere. We were developing the groundwork of what was the Urban Areas Task Force and those papers. So I didn't get too much involved in the day-to-day operations of lobbying for our program, although I had had a hand in development of the initial congressional presentation. I'm not sure that I know every problem that came up. There was a great deal of wooing, and I think if the entire operation needed one word, it was a wooing. That we did, and that actually characterized much of our activities from the very, very beginning. It was a great amount of selling.

G: Do you have any personal knowledge of the Yarmolinsky episode, or the incident?

T: It was the feeling of some people, and I can't say I have as much firsthand knowledge of it, certainly, as others do, but I was around then and it did seem to some of us that it need not have happened. Now, I can't provide too many details of what actually did happen. I know it roughly. But there is one theory, which I tended to support at that time, which held that we had a bad count of our support on the Hill. We had a bad count because we didn't have as much help in congressional liaison as we might have gotten from the White House. Some people didn't come into the picture to help us until later on, after we had been working on our own for some time. And those who had responsibility, those who were on the task force involved in Hill relations and lobbying, if that's the right word, were not necessarily the best or

the most experienced and didn't have always an accurate count. What I think I'm leading up to is the statement that had we had a better or more accurate estimate of our strength, that there would have been no need for a tradeoff involving Adam Yarmolinsky, if that is what happened.

G: Is this just a question of bad management? The conventional view of this period is that it was the President's first major piece of legislation since the assassination, and one would therefore expect that it had the best management of the White House.

T: And yet it didn't seem to, strangely enough. I could be mistaken in this, I don't claim to have completely accurate information of all of it. But Larry O'Brien was not as involved in the beginning, in some early, perhaps critical periods up on the Hill. He came into the picture later on. Primarily our relations up there, our contacts, were made by Shriver himself, of course, and Wilson and others. But then one couldn't help getting the feeling it wasn't terribly well organized. Shriver, of course, does a good job personally, but as a whole the assault on the Hill wasn't terribly scientific, even if it was flashy.

G: What was the impact of the news of Yarmolinsky's jettisoning, if that's the proper word to use?

T: Again, if that is the proper word and of course I could be mistaken, but the assumption is that [he was], you know, people have used the term "sacrificed," "jettisoned," "dumped," "sold out," all these types of expressions, "traded," in order to secure the votes of a

particular delegation from the South on the premise that those votes were critical. Because it was so very close that if we didn't have them the whole thing might go down the drain. Later on it proved when the bill finally passed that we had a majority which was more than sufficient to have absorbed the loss of that entire state delegation, I believe. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but it was something like that. Consequently, both for that reason and because the task force people had come to, for the most part, have tremendous respect for Adam, the news was received with a lot of not only shock, but great disappointment. There were people who even cried, if that's worth entering in history.

G: Was there the feeling on the part of that nucleus which had stayed on in the task force during this period and would go on into the organization as it was later set up that they had been sold out or that Yarmolinsky had been sold out? Was the White House held accountable for this?

T: I don't know that the White House was held accountable, but I think in the opinion of many of the people who worked on the task force, the White House was blameable. I don't think the White House is accountable in these matters. There's a difference.

G: I guess we're up to August of 1964.

T: Right.

G: And from August until you actually came to Community Action, you again switched, circulated around?

T: It's hard to follow. Actually during the summer I was with the

Community Action part of it. In the fall, at the time of appropriation, I then went for a few months back to the public affairs portion to help crank up public announcements of what we were going to do in our first wave of program funding.

G: How early was this Urban Affairs Task Force set up?

T: The Urban Affairs Task Force actually started in April of 1964.

G: And what were you supposed to do?

T: That was conducted under the chairmanship of Dick Boone and people he brought in like Sandy Kravitz. They developed papers which attempted to lay out what had been done and where needs were and what kind of strategies might be taken by the Community Action program once we did receive the green light. Also, it was called the Urban Areas Task Force, but it also worked on Indian programs.

G: I was just about to ask if there was a rural counterpart.

T: There were people who were working on rural planning, and papers were done also under Dick Boone. However, the name Urban Areas Task Force has stuck with us.

G: After the bill was passed and after you sort of came back to Community Action, public affairs, did you return to this task force, or had it been dissolved? Was Community Action then an operational entity?

T: Community Action was really the Urban Affairs Task Force. It consisted of the people who worked for Conway, and it was a small group of people. I'm not sure what you're driving at.

G: You're saying that the Urban Areas Task Force was Community Action

after the passage of the bill, after the appropriations and during this period when the first grants were made. Are you saying that it became Community Action, or was Community Action as it was set up in the organizational scheme of things a separate division within OEO? Are the two synonymous? You're saying they are.

T: These people who were with the Urban Areas Task Force were all working in that part of the program which became the Community Action program, and the only reason that this Urban Areas Task Force name has cropped up is because of that group of papers that Conway had had developed under Boone. Actually a lot more took place, as I mentioned, than just urban consideration. It was out of that group, essentially, that the Community Action program grew.

G: Again, to go to Moynihan's book, and I think this is one of the key points and perhaps you are as well qualified as anybody to answer this. He said that the people who had put together the incipient Community Action agencies, the Ford Foundation, Mobilization for Youth, "grey areas" projects, [and] the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency were social scientists. He traces the origins of this kind of experimentation to the social sciences, and he says that social scientists were interested in an objective analysis of social systems.

But he says that the people who came to OEO, while their inclinations or their profession may have been in the social sciences, were nonetheless motivated by "a passionate desire for social change." He goes on to imply that social scientists should only be concerned

with the testing of social hypotheses, and that they should dismiss their interests, which might be passionate concerns for social change. And he identifies these reformists with a group within the Urban Affairs Task Force. He does name names, and he mentions you, Boone, Kravitz, Fred O'R. Hayes, and Horowitz under Conway. And he goes further. He identifies this group as the "Conway group." He begins to delineate that when the program got set up it then went about doing something other than what it was intended to do. So my question out of all of this is whether or not you feel that Moynihan is accurate in this.

T: I suppose there are so many inaccuracies that it's hard to know where to begin. For one thing, let's just start with picayune stuff. Let's get Hal Horowitz out of there, because he wasn't even in Washington after the spring. I find it hard to pass by the opportunity to comment on his view of what the social scientist ought to be. But suffice it to say that his is one man's opinion of what a social scientist ought to be, and I don't necessarily share that. It is true that the group of people generally, with the exception of Hal who left quite early, first of all were for the most part social scientists, whatever that means. Dick Boone had come out of the corrections field; I was a newspaperman; Fred Hayes was out of the Budget Bureau and a long-term career government employee, an administration theorist; Dave Grossman was an architect. As a matter of fact, I guess we should mention Boone was a police captain. Jack Conway was a labor leader. Actually, Sandy Kravitz was probably

the only one who qualifies as a social scientist. I'm just trying to pick up on the many, many things in that potent question of yours.

It is true, however, that that group of "social scientists" did share an intense desire to see that some institutional change, without for the moment defining it, took place as a result of the Community Action program, that they weren't just the same old kinds of service programs administered in the same old kind of way. So that what would come out of them was not only improved service, but also an internal change in the operation of those entities which distribute, which are responsible for social services to make them basically more relevant and acceptable, so that we wouldn't have the problem of under-utilization because service is distant or what have you. So it's quite accurate that this group of people put the stress on institutional change.

Now, if I can remember the question part of the statement.

G: Why don't I say it again, because I should add he does qualify this, and I think I should add his qualification. That is, that because of the congressional elimination of the requirement for comprehensive planning, and he does make the point that Boone wanted, apparently, a one-year planning stage before Community Action agencies would be set up--Is it because of the elimination of that requirement and the creation of broadly representative organizations--

T: What do you mean "elimination"? I know you're quoting from Moynihan. There was no elimination of that. First of all, one year is

inaccurate. Again, I can't seem to resist the opportunity to comment on this piece of history here. At least we could be accurate about it, but that's not the purpose of this interview. But the planning phase was Section 204 of the act, which most certainly was in existence in the first bill. And program development grants were made during the first year of OEO's operation to those communities not yet in a position to mount programs. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

G: I'll continue from that. Anyway, he says because of this that it enabled the anti-poverty warriors, as he calls you now, to go into action immediately and to turn local Community Action programs over to whomever they wished, which is the point that he was making.

T: We, being the warriors, then rushed in and turned over Community Action funds to whomever we wished?

G: I'll add to that, just to provoke you further.

T: I'm just repeating your question. I'll have to read this book.

G: Conway according to Moynihan, and I would assume then that by identifying you people as the "Conway group," that all you people had the same idea, wanted to, and I'm quoting him again, "arouse the poor and to shake things up." You see, he weaves this elaborate structure, this elaborate history together, to show that what was the intent of Community Action in its operation never really panned out. I think he's looking for fall guys.

T: It's very hard to follow, because between the inaccuracies and the skipping around in time it gets very hard to deal without seeming to be overconcerned with detail in answering these questions. The

problems in arousing the poor, and I think that's a kind of sensational way of describing quite a sincere sentiment, purpose on our part, but if we must use that word . . . . That of course, over time, ran into problems because of the involvement of local governments. It became very difficult to meet ultimately all the objectives of Community Action. Now, that's looking ahead from that point of time to what did happen. Now I come back, and I'm still confused about your question because I don't really understand his [point]. Let's take this part: it never panned out, the intent never panned out. I guess in some ways that's probably true. I don't know how to relate this to what he's saying about the way the group thought. That part of it I really am somewhat confused about.

G: Let me just clarify it just to sort of put it--

T: What I had in mind, before you clarify it maybe I do understand, is that in places like Chicago it of course became very difficult for the poor to be meaningfully involved in the planning process of the Community Action program. Now that is fact of life in Chicago, and the kinds of problems that crept up there, and in many other places, certainly were anticipated by this group. When we speak of the intent not panning out because of any failure of the concept of this group, what really do you mean by that?

G: He says specifically that the Conway group gave to the Community Action program a structure that neither those who drafted it, those who sponsored it, nor those who enacted it ever in a way intended. I think that what you have to do is go beyond what he really doesn't

do in any substantive way, but to go beyond and look at what happened to Community Action, particularly in that first year. I think he would use as examples the CDGM incident, the Syracuse situation, the HARYOU incident.

T: All right, it's getting a little bit clearer. First of all, to say that this group gave it a structure that was never intended is to suggest that there was a difference between this group and some other group that existed. Actually, while I said that some of the people dropped off, some of the early birds had to leave and go back to their jobs, the people who were in the Urban Areas Task Force were people who had been with this from the beginning. It was the same group. So the group that was, in his words, developing a structure that was never intended, were the same people who drafted the concept in the beginning. There were outsiders, as I said, like Horowitz, who came in and helped out and left. But [with] Boone and Kravitz and the people like this who were around from the early days and bring us up to the point of when we're funding things, presumably now in his words with a structure that was not intended, this was not the case. This is the same group of people, to deal with that.

Now, certainly we didn't intend to create administrative mismanagement. And if the examples of things that we didn't intend to do include cases such as the HARYOU, where the matter of keeping the books and keeping order in the house became a massive problem for that agency, naturally we didn't intend that. Nobody in his right mind would have intended that, and nobody could really have foreseen

every kind of difficulty that was to come about. I'm sure by now we've had almost all of the different kinds of difficulties administratively in running the Community Action program. But I really think he's saying something else.

I think he's driving at something else, and I think that what he's saying is that what's come about has been the riots and glaring confrontations and things of that kind. Somehow he seems to be suggesting, if I hear you right, that somehow there was this little group that took over after the people who developed the concept. First come the people who drafted the language, then comes this little group that took over, of people who were reformers or of people who were social scientists but who have lost their sense of the science and are just bent on redoing the whole scene. And they're the ones who are then blameable, responsible, accountable for such events in two or three years hence as some of these major social flashes that have happened. I think that's hogwash.

G: I think that what has to be added to this is that he does challenge the concept. Throughout his book he attacks, and he uses other people's attacks, on the Cloward-Ohlin thesis of community action as a way of mobilizing a community, instilling it with a sense of power, eliminating a sense of anomie or rootlessness or powerlessness and so on in the community. And then he, in challenging the concept, would suggest that there is within Community Action the potentiality for this kind of confrontation, no matter who administers it. The very fact that community actions were set up outside the power structure,

which according to him was ameliorated with the Green amendment, [insures that] you're bound to have these problems, you're bound to have this kind of confrontation.

T: Yes. There was those of us who think that the Green amendment didn't ameliorate, but crippled. Nevertheless, I think it should also be said that the power structure was involved even where we funded organizations other than the mayor's office, and that the mayor's offices were represented, and willingly, on the boards and governing bodies of Community Action agencies which were nonprofit institutions. They very much participated, and in many cases the difference was insignificant. There were ultimately good programs and bad programs in both categories. I wonder if we're not talking here about some of the demonstration programs that often are associated with Community Action programs, and mistakenly.

G: There's no differentiation in the book.

T: There's no differentiation in the book? Because it has been the rare Community Action agency that has created situations of crisis in the community, because they had broad representation from every part of the community. In most cases businessmen, clergymen, local governmental offices, welfare agencies, just about everybody, along with the poor, sat in these Community Action agencies. And it's because of that, one could argue, that they caused considerably less of a stir in the cities and rural areas than they might have. It happens that most of the instances of clash, of sit-ins in welfare commissioners' offices, organization of tenant groups who protest at housing

authorities, things of that kind, were generated out of demonstration projects which were very small in scope and which were very scientifically devised by the social scientists with a complete set of hypotheses and so forth. It was the Community Action agencies, because they were consensus operations, that in many cases failed to make any kind of real impact. In other cases, in extreme cases, in some of the very largest cities, the poor had such a meaningless role in it that one can hardly think of them in this context that's being suggested here.

G: The curious thing is that early in the program, in 1965, I think it was Saul Alinsky who disavowed Community Action.

T: Absolutely, certainly. So where is this element of subversion coming in? I don't see it as having taken place. Again, I come back to the question [of a] group of people who somehow shaped it into something that wasn't intended, or had a hand in moving it in a direction that was never intended. I find that very inaccurate.

G: There are examples, are there not, of Community Action agencies which are outside the local political power structure?

T: There are Community Action agencies, yes, even since the Green amendment, where they have opted to continue in that fashion. But prior to the Green amendment there was more of a mixed bag than there is today. There were those that were funded outside, if outside the Establishment means outside the mayor's office, yes.

G: In a general sense are these more effective in providing for institutional change?

T: I do not think that any evaluation of that particular question has ever taken place. If it has, it just has been conducted without my knowledge. I don't know that anyone has looked at those CAA's, Community Action agencies, which were housed in the local government and compared them in terms of quality and impact to those that were housed in nonprofit institutions. And, again, I must repeat that where the CAA was nonprofit, or was so "outside" the local government structure, it had on it at OEO's insistence very considerable representation and support from the local government. So the difference is not that great. As I also mentioned, some extremely successful, an awful lot of good things have taken place in Community Action agencies of both kinds.

G: Would the Newark Community Action organization fit into this latter category of being outside the power structure? Are you familiar with it?

T: I know so little about Newark that I don't really feel qualified to discuss Newark as such.

G: Let me then just pose a hypothetical example, and you can answer this in a conceptual way. If, again, this power structure is outside city hall and there is no control by local government over the Community Action agency, if that Community Action agency interprets the condition of poverty in such a way that they seek a political solution is this as valid as, say for example, a Community Action organization

simply taking advantage of the services that would be provided and not indulging in political activity?

T: I must ask you what you mean by "political solution".

G: For example, in a housing urban renewal project, picketing against this simply because the inhabitants of that community find it not in their interests that this activity occur; [or] building hospitals in a particular area.

T: To answer your question, it may very well be. It depends on the community. It may be that the kind of strategy I think you're suggesting, of confronting the housing authorities and those institutions with demands as opposed to simply setting up services of a more traditional nature, may very well be what's needed at that particular point in time in that community. As long as it does not get into certain areas, partisan political activities and the like, we have allowed basically for such kinds of expression within legal bounds, [and] why not? If your question is, "Is it more likely to happen when it's coming from an organization that's other than the mayor's office?" I would guess so. I haven't done any research into this.

I think you'll find that most of these kinds of demonstrations or expressions of sort of this political route that you're referring to, with a lower case "p", were exercised more under demonstration programs. I do not know of too many Community Action efforts of this kind that have been sponsored by, endorsed by, and come from the CAA, from the Community Action agency, whatever kind it is. Maybe

it's the third time I'm coming back to this business of being the term "outside" the local political or local power structure; it's not at all. As a matter of fact, one of the problems that the agencies continually wrestled with is board representation, the matter of the poor serving on the boards. Over the years we've added to the language of the bill, putting in one-third representation, bolstering it in one way or another.

And why has all this happened? This has happened because a poor person sitting on the board as an individual simply is not equal to the superintendent of schools who sits on the same board: although he sits there as an individual, he obviously has quite a defined and large constituency behind him. It's because of that that we've had to go further into examining how we provide support for the concept of the poor on the boards, or how we bolster that. But it speaks also to this business of outside the power structure, because here you have the power structure fully represented on governing levels of CAA's that are not in mayors' offices. I don't find the two that different. Some of the most conservative are those that are not in the mayors' offices.

G: What in your view, looking back over the five year history of Community Action--actually less than five years, four years--has been the controversy then that has so upset people like Moynihan, and apparently even the President?

T: I don't know that that which upsets Moynihan is the same as that which upsets the President. You know, the whole program has been so

broad that there have been so many different kinds of upsets. When it's reported that there are instances of theft or gross financial mismanagement in a program, this upsets people. They don't pause to think which part of the program it is, who's responsible really, but it tends to taint the Poverty Program generally. And the Community Action always is the most vulnerable, although we've had some considerable bad publicity in Job Corps as well. I don't know that there's a common cause of disturbance or a similar kind of disturbance. I don't mean to avoid your questions, I just don't know.

G: He seems to focus on the political repercussions and the political controversy which has sort of been the number one--

T: If I understand Moynihan's thesis, he would place more responsibility for conducting social programming with local governmental institutions. I think that he looks to the strengthening of that and takes a dim view of anything which might create competing local political institutions. Now, that may be the area of his upset; I think he has much suggested so in some television interviews and other places. And of course it should be pointed out that the Community Action program certainly does have that potential, it certainly does.

One of the problems, just to elaborate a little further on that, is with the concept of organizing. It depends on where you are. I remember in California, to the growers in the San Joaquin Valley, organizing poor people means organizing labor unions, because they have foremost in their minds the activities that have gone on in organizing the grape pickers. So any attempt to organize poor people

around other issues in that area is going to raise that flag. It means that to them, so that's why they're upset out there. You can organize tenants in a housing project in that part of the Valley, and to them it's all part of organizing, so that's the cause of their upset.

G: Might it not also be that organizing poor people in an urban ghetto area might give a structure of people who might also be black and viewed with the idea of black power?

T: Sure, it could. And organizing people, I was going to say, in some of the larger urban areas can awaken people to the notion that they ought to be organizing also for political representation, partisan political representation. Sure, some of these things can be outgrowths of it. But let me hasten to add that this was not a hidden agenda or anything like that of any individuals, as far as I know, who were involved in developing the Community Action program concepts back in the task force days.

G: No "conspiracy of assassins"?

T: Not that I know of.

G: We've been talking about this Urban Areas Task Force group. Again, in that first year were there other delineations or factions of individuals who might have had different ideas about Community Action? Not so much within the Community Action part of OEO, but even in other divisions of OEO?

T: Are we talking about that period when we're in business?

G: Yes.

T: Yes, I think that certainly there were many divisions. In order to

administer the program we had to have an organization. The organization produced an operations division and a planning and development division, as I think it was called then, or planning and policy division. And the operations division was responsible for the funding of the Community Action agencies across the country. It was the major core investment we were to make, and they quickly developed administrative rules and regulations. It wasn't actually terribly long before we acquired many bureaucratic characteristics, and many of them necessary. But in order to run that part of it, let me say that it was in the R&D wing that most of those people, not all but most of those people who were identified with the Urban Task Force group continued working.

G: Such as yourself.

T: Such as myself, Sandy Kravitz, and others. Fred Hayes headed up the administrative end of things, the operations division, and in many ways was of a more conservative bent than some of those people who were in the R&D end of it, which was responsible for developing the demonstration or experimental and research projects.

G: Conservative in what sense?

T: Conservative in that, I think out of necessity, he had to deal with the states. He had to deal with all the elements in the community that made up the Community Action agency, which was, after all, by our own purposes a broadly representative operation. To bring them

all together was to have to make perhaps some concessions, was to have to admit many different persuasions and viewpoints in a community to work together. To bring that about is not an easy job, and the people who were operating the demonstration program could deal with discreet and very, very separate groups quite a bit outside the power structure.

There's where the outside really comes into play. Some demonstration programs were funded early on which clashed with Community Action agencies, and that's a whole different history. It's often that, as I've suggested, that gets confused with Community Action; not so much these days, because the demonstration program has dwindled considerably in the last two years. There is now, for instance, a requirement that a demonstration program have the approbation of the local Community Action agency. It was one of the virtues, I think, in the very beginning that demonstration programs did not have to have the sign off of the Community Action agency, or anybody else in the area, in order to receive funds. If they had, we never would have been able to make the kinds of experiments that we did make.

G: What were some of the early experiments? Was TWO one of those?

T: No. TWO had been in existence prior to this. One such demonstration program that became a major headache for the agency took place in Syracuse, New York, where incidentally there was quite a fine Community Action agency. The demonstration program up there hypothesized that the needs of the poor would not be met until they were

organized around issues. So community organizers fanned out into the community and got groups of poor people together around in some places housing issues, in other places welfare issues, with the ultimate aim of merging all of these groups into an organization of organizations. It was more of an Alinskyish approach, and it zeroed in on the Community Action agency as one of its enemies, causing no end of problems for us.

There were other demonstration programs. One all the way to the other side of the country in Richmond, California, which hypothesized that there already were in existence meaningful organizations of low income persons, and that to create new organizations would only tend to minimize the existing effectiveness, an effectiveness probably unknown to most middle-class citizens, but nevertheless organizations of some considerable importance to the poor. It hypothesized that by strengthening those organizations one could achieve better resident participation in programs. I think the theme of most of these demonstration programs, or a good many of them, was how to improve this business of resident participation, how to bring it about at all. There were still other types of demonstration programs, but many of them caused a considerable ruckus in the community.

But I guess I didn't really answer your question. There were within OEO, as time passed on, divisions, I guess, in thinking. The demonstration program came to be looked upon as a "kooky" operation by many of those who had responsibility for managing our core investment and didn't see always the relevance, and often saw

only the problems created by the so-called experimental projects. So over time there naturally were differences of opinion. I think there emerged different views of Community Action, not in its basics, but in some of the how-to's and I think that that dynamic was a healthy one.

G: How about between, say for example, the Office of Inspection and Community Action? I know on the whole sign off procedure you had to have General Counsel, Inspection, Community Action, Shriver himself, and others.

T: Right. Other parts of the agency sometimes had difficulty with the Community Action program, among them some of the people in congressional liaison. They're the ones who got hit over the head for things that were happening as a result of one thing or another that was funded under Community Action. The Inspection Division, ironically, has been in my experience remarkably friendly and supportive of the Community Action program, and I haven't found them a force one way or the other really.

G: I was just wondering whether under Haddad and under May, not that there's a difference--

T: Stylistically there was all the difference in the world.

G: But under Haddad, how would you describe him?

T: Haddad was frenetic and colorful in a fast-paced sense. He was a man after exposés, and I guess in some ways some of the work, some of the things that they uncovered in his day tended to cast some bad

light on some of the Community Action programs. It wasn't always unjustified. Ed May's approach was considerably more scientific and suave, and ultimately more helpful.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Eric Tolmach

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Eric Tolmach of Woodbine, Maryland, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on March 5, March 19, and April 16, 1969 in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings of the interviews shall also be available for research use under the same conditions governing the transcripts. If I make substantive changes in the transcripts, however, the reference copy of the tapes shall be edited to delete the portions I have modified before the recordings can be made available to researchers.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Eric Tolmach
Donor

Dec. 27, 1979
Date

Walter W. Stender
acting Archivist of the United States

January 14, 1980
Date