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INTERVIEW III

DATE: April 16, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: ERIC TOLMACH

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

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

Tape 1 of 1

G: I think last time we were talking about the R&D programs, at least at one point in the tape we were. I thought I'd ask you to go back to that to begin today, and to focus on some of the ones that stand out in your mind as being so important.

T: The R&D program was a vehicle for testing a lot of the concepts and assumptions in the legislation and probably went further in areas such as resident participation and the employment of non-professionals from the low-income population, than the Community Action agencies themselves. There had been a need to fund rather quickly communities around the country with comprehensive anti-poverty programs, and to do that in a way that was more or less acceptable to everybody in town and everybody back here in Washington. Consequently, some of the key concepts of the legislation weren't really implemented as fully in the large scale, community-wide programs as they were in the R&D program, especially in the first year. The idea was that innovative approaches, tried and evaluated in the R&D program, would--if successful--be adopted by the Community Action agencies which were operating the big programs.

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I suppose the demonstration program largely reflected the kinds of people who were in it. It was administratively under the directorship of Richard Boone, who, as head of the program policy and planning division, had responsibility for the experimental programs. I mention that because Boone was one of the key people in the development of the concept of "maximum feasible participation" of the poor and, accordingly, he staffed his R&D unit with people who in the task force days had, like Boone, been promoters of the idea.

So the demonstration program undertook experimental approaches, essentially, to just about every feature of the bill. There were housing demonstration programs, there were demonstration programs in the area of education, in health. These were all funded under Section 207 of the act. Quite a bit actually was learned from these demonstration projects, and many of them evolved as major thrusts which were adopted by the Community Action agencies. However, it was probably in the area of resident participation that the demonstration program left its deepest mark. Those demonstration programs in the areas of education, for instance, didn't ruffle as many feathers. But it was where we actually tried out new methods of bringing poor people into the operation of programs that we accomplished our most interesting work, and probably caused the biggest stir.

There was a pattern to some of these; there was a design. We weren't haphazard by any means, and we proceeded systematically to explore the whole matter of how you involved poor people, or stimulated their involvement. Resident participation was, of course, an essential

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aspect of all of the endeavors, whether in housing, health, or any other area. But there were certain projects funded just to test that participation out in its pure sense, if it's possible to make that claim. There was one I had described in Syracuse where one approach was tried, and then a slightly different approach tried in Richmond, California, each of these making different assumptions about poverty communities. One making the assumption that there were no effective organizations and that it was necessary to go in and organize people around issues; another one attempting to utilize already in place associations of poor people and bolster those.

There were still others, and they ranged quite far and certainly caused us some of our more notable headaches. One in particular comes to mind because today, in the spring of 1969, three years after the project was defunct, we are still getting flak. I'm referring to a grant to the California Center for Community Development in Del Rey, California. [It] had proposed to us a program to train low income rural people, drawn largely from the farm population, for community-based service positions, which is rather formal language for training poor people to take a leadership role in starting and furthering services in a rural part of California. We were asking ourselves whether these people, given a certain kind of training and given the climate of the area in which they lived, actually could be effective in organizing the poor, either to obtain services for themselves or to be part of ongoing Community Action Agency programs. The trainees

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were drawn from the ranks of the civil rights workers and farm workers and the unemployed, mainly in the San Joaquin Valley.

No sooner had the project been funded, I think it was exactly ten days, when we put a stop to it. The papers had already been signed and the grant had been approved by Governor Brown, but we sent out a telegram to the grantee saying, in effect, "Hold everything while we investigate." What we were investigating were some reports, brought to our attention by the delegation of a California Congressman who represented the Valley area, that many of the people involved in this project were associated in one way or another with the organizing of the migrant or seasonal agricultural laborers who were working in the grape fields. There was a strike that had been going on there for some time. We checked into this, and my understanding was that OEO was put on notice by Congressman Sisk, and this is not a direct quote, that if we were to go ahead with the funding of this project the way it was we could just forget the whole thing. And I don't mean the Community Action program, I mean the whole Poverty Program.

Sisk was swing man on the House Rules Committee and the previous year had been a reluctant dragon, and consequently held a key vote in the upcoming hearings that year. So objections from Bernie Sisk were objections that OEO paid great heed to. So before the demonstration program had really even gotten started, we were already in trouble. One consequence of this was we drew up a whole list of special conditions to the project, among other things saying that the trainee couldn't

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get involved in any partisan political activities or any kind of strike activities. We also agreed to move the site of the training out of that district, and we moved it to another congressman's district, up in the northern part of California. When we had done all this, it was three months later before the project got started.

Altogether they trained something like thirty people in two waves, and in the end the kinds of things that these people did following their training ranged from organizing welfare recipients to helping poor people get more involved in Community Action agencies. Some of the trainees went to work for Community Action agencies. It was only a few who, in organizing welfare recipients and some other projects, gave this particular program all its problems. In the end what I'm saying is, it's just really the community organizing activities of just a handful of people [that] cause untold difficulties for OEO for several years. Organizing welfare recipients, as it turned out over the course of the next year, was a controversial thing. There was an election in California, and one of the main issues was welfare. At any rate, the project was not refunded. It was closed down after one year of operation, and we're still taking lumps for it, having to explain to this congressman or that what we did, and, "Did in fact someone participate in any way in the grape strike?"

You know, the problem here was really very simple: this was a rather abrasive project in many ways, the kinds of training were sort of Alinsky oriented, and the trainees went out and organized people around issues, sometimes in a manner which was designed to ruffle

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administrators in local communities. The real problem was in the word "organizing" and in the difficulty that people in that part of California had with understanding the word. Now "organizing" to a lot of people meant organizing labor unions, and it's very hard to distinguish between organizing for Community Action and organizing anything else. We use organization and community organization in a certain sense, and not everybody understands the sense in which we use it. This has been the problem which is obviously greater than just this project.

Furthermore, in this instance, who was it we were organizing but in many cases the very people who are also organizing a labor union. After all, the poverty population in this part of California is largely the farm workers, and if one is organized, the lines are overlapping. It doesn't necessarily mean that our project people were on picket lines; it does mean that of course they were frequently dealing with people who were on picket lines. The needs of the farm people and the farm communities there, and even the small towns there, also exist in housing and in employment and in all the other areas. It was this kind of difficulty, and communication I suppose in part, but also a basic unwillingness to really see what we were trying to do. So all kinds of red flags were raised, and every other kind of flag, and this became one of the more controversial projects.

G: Could I ask you, was there anything in the bill at this time which prevented partisan political activity? Let me ask this before you

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answer that. What does partisan political activity refer to, if it refers not simply to organizing along partisan or party lines?

T: I don't think it refers to anything other than party lines. I think that partisan political activity, as we banned it, meant the formal political parties, capital "P" for party. And here again you raise an interesting point. It's clear what you mean by party, but it's not always clear about what you mean by political. This is another area in which organizing people for political purposes gets to be a problem for OEO. Political rights include so many things--rights to vote. Organizing people for voter registration is not necessarily organizing them to join the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or any other party, and it gets awfully close.

In this connection I recall something quite interesting. We drafted in early 1965 a kind of notebook which was probably the first. It was a predecessor to our thing that became known as the coloring guide, or the basic guide to Community Action programs, and it was just a description of various sorts of programs. I don't remember its exact title. It was a state of our thinking at that time in employment programs, in education programs, and there was a piece on resident participation which spoke of enhancing the political rights I guess--I don't remember the exact phrase, I don't have it in front of me--of the poor, the political capabilities, the ability to affect things that affect them. That means welfare systems and education systems, and it's a use of political in the lower "p" sense, in its broader sense.

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That was stricken from our draft after a meeting of the Conference of Mayors in St. Louis at which Vice President Humphrey was asked what the hell we meant by enhancing the political capabilities of the low income community. He said we didn't mean it, so we took it out. After all, it was the mayors who were questioning Humphrey about this. And here you have Humphrey's misunderstanding, the mayors' fear of it, and certainly the potential here for political power. I mean it's obvious, and yet you can't really talk about increasing the capabilities of the poor to deal with the institutions, the systems; you can't ask them to be part of the decision-making process without getting them involved in the political process in a larger sense. This doesn't mean signing up to vote with one party or another. In this kind of thing there's a similarity to this California situation again, a misunderstanding of organizing, of political rights, all these terms.

G: This is part of the whole, what I would say [is] not the inherent contradiction, but one of the inherent problems of Community Action and R&D. And that is possibly what's implied, not so much written in verbally into the act, but certainly into the concept of what Community Action or R&D is supposed to do. From my own point of view I agree with this line of thinking. But by tightening up, by eliminating this, by conceding to pressures and so forth, doesn't this hit at the integrity of what the original purposes were?

T: Yes, I think it does. And I think that the people whom I worked with in those days saw this, too. As a matter of fact, I think you trace

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this over time and the concessions came faster and faster. This was more and more limited, and at the same time you're getting in more and more traditional kinds of programs. You're getting more participation in terms of numbers of people as you increase the sheer number of fundings, but you're not increasing, really, this concept. It is a contradiction, and we have made concessions. You know, in terms of the demonstration program it wasn't long, really, before we had to start backing up. Such things as failing to refund the California project because some people screamed about welfare organizing and because some people screamed about this, that, and the other thing, is one side. Taken alone you can say it doesn't mean much, but it wasn't the only one.

Because we got into trouble over so very many community organizing projects and others that came out of the demonstration program. There were programs in Harlem, that HARYOU, and there was the program in Syracuse. Each in its own way led us into confrontations as an agency in the kinds of things we were funding with political, capital "P," powers in these communities. And it was from that that we gradually retreated in not funding these kinds of things. Along with this we're developing more and more administrative rules and regulations, and meeting demands from Congress and elsewhere that we have greater degree of control over administrative procedures and personnel practices and what have you as we developed as a bureaucracy.

So we limited gradually the kinds of things that we started out. It was the feeling all along that Shriver never really had his

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heart behind the demonstration program, but one sensed a kind of perverseness in him, though, that he in a way kind of liked it. It separated him from the average bureaucrat in town, and it gained him some credibility on the one hand with large groups of people who were for doing this kind of thing, and with the poor. So he could point at the same time--he'd always say he was doing some of these things, and yet he was pulling back on them because he was eminently sensitive to political pressure.

G: I'm going to just hold off on Shriver and get him on the tape as a topic later. As a sort of parenthetical comment, it seems to me that the recent experiences by VISTA workers in Appalachia, certain regions of Appalachia, I think in West Virginia, and in Texas, seem to be a repeat performance of early kinds of experiences that you were just talking about.

T: Yes.

G: The pattern that seems to have developed out of each of these incidents is that OEO does back off, that it does make concessions or bows to the political demands by the people on the Hill.

T: Sure it does, and has from the very beginning. I can recall our attempting to develop a project in the Lawndale area of Chicago. I don't think we even got up to the plate, let alone get to first base with that project. But the control of the Poverty Program, the major Community Action program in Chicago, by Mayor Daley's man Jack Brooks was such that the demonstration program, again, attempting to organize people more or less for the sake of organization to experiment

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with different kinds of organizations and their effect was simply out of the question. Oh, it did happen. We had some other instances in which it did, and they all exploded. There was one fairly recently, of course, with the youths. But earlier this project in Lawndale, which had considerable support, incidentally, from clergymen in Chicago. Namely, the leading rabbi and a major figure in both the Catholic and Protestant churches there were very much behind this. Of course the church has been behind this in many places; it didn't do any good at all. Of course Shriver had his own ties and linkages and associations with Chicago, and I'm sure that he never would have signed it even if we could have gotten the necessary work together to put it in front of him.

And incidentally, when we're speaking of putting things in front of him, it may be that someone else has mentioned this, but the immediate supervisor, the supervisor of the demonstration program, a fellow named Sandy Kravitz, was known around here as "Dr. Strangegrant." Because each time we presented a proposal to Shriver for his signature the answer was, "Well, what have you nuts got cooked up for me now? In which funny papers am I going to land now?" As I say, Shriver did sign a good many of these things, but somewhat reluctantly, and increasingly reluctantly. But we'll get to that later.

G: Were you involved in this Lawndale project?

T: Yes, I was involved in the Lawndale project.

G: You went to Chicago?

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T: I went to Chicago and was just about thrown out of Brooks' office. As I walked in and was introduced [he asked], "Are you the guy who has been working on this Lawndale project?" He wouldn't hear of it. And at that time it was not necessary, as it is today, that we have the clearance of the Community Action agency, which Brooks represented. I don't recall the exact date of this meeting that I had with Brooks, but we'd already begun trying to get the approbation of the higher-ups in town. Having been burned so badly in Syracuse and in so many other places, the process of getting sign off, while not formal, was already underway. So we were trying to, in a sense, get his nod or at least understanding of it. Well, very frankly, some of these demonstration programs depended on just the opposite.

G: What do you mean by that?

T: If, as in Syracuse, you're going to allow poor people to question whether the poverty agency is the appropriate organization to represent the poor, you can't very well first get the poverty agency to agree to the organization of an effort which is going to question them; especially in the case where the poverty agency is headed by the mayor, as it was in Syracuse and of course in Chicago. As it happened in Syracuse, one of the first targets of the organizations that were formed in Syracuse was the Community Action agency, in spite of the fact that it was one of the better Community Action agencies.

G: Subsequent to this period, also, the Congress wrote into the amendments of the legislation a provision which made it impossible to go

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out and register voters. Did this come out of any specific kind of experience that can be related to Community Action or R&D?

T: It may have, I don't remember exactly.

G: In this period that you're talking about, you mentioned the Mayors Conference where Vice President Humphrey was queried about this. Moynihan in his book, again discussing this general period and about this topic, says that Johnson was upset by Community Action, that it wasn't his favorite program, and that he wanted no disruptions. He goes further, and he says that Johnson pressured OEO to keep the Community Action agencies quiet and to try and keep the role of the poor to a minimum. He says also that the Bureau of the Budget supported this view, and he cites a number of mayors who were asserting this viewpoint also. Do you have any recollections or any knowledge of that kind of pressure being exerted here at OEO?

T: Yes, in terms of the boards and the board composition it came out in that way. As we were preparing language for the bill which would specify the composition of boards and how many poor people, or percentage of poor people, should serve on them, there were directives from the Budget Bureau which some of us construed as limiting. This is one reflection of that. I don't know that I personally was aware of how it got expressed and all. In this way I do recall its happening. And I remember, it was a little scandalous at the time, there was a memorandum that was circulated here describing the Budget Bureau position. The writer of the memorandum asked that all the copies be returned to him after it had been studied by those to whom it had been

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sent. Of course it found its way into page one of the Washington Post, and the whole subject of limiting Community Action then became kind of public debate, as well as an internal one.

But it was generally felt around here that the results of that kind of pressure were felt in the bowels of OEO. Through such specifics as board compositions and cutting down on demonstration programs that were abrasive. Certainly after a year or so out it was obvious that whatever the real difficulties were being encountered were in the Community Action program. Sure there were problems in Job Corps and in the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and someone runs off with the money here and pays his brother-in-law there and that kind of thing, but the serious problems obviously were going to grow out of a program that was as broad as this. I think many people in it felt that we were gradually being constrained and compartmentalized and limited. And I think people who've been here over a span of time certainly have been able to see this.

One sees it in a number of ways. Right this minute, for instance, we are in the process of developing the third year of a program which is involved with training nonprofessionals. It is now mainly a personnel management program in what started out as a program to enhance one of the key aspects of resident participation, that is the use of nonprofessionals. This was one way, and the whole subject of training them was one of the larger programmatic concerns of OEO. Now through the years, the result of many trends, not the least of which is the increase in the importance of administrative practices,

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it has been turned around so that nonprofessionals and their utilization are seen as part of the personnel system. And while, of course, use of nonprofessionals has some very, very important implications in personnel, in career building and in career ladders and accreditation and transfer ability, and particularly where CAA's are city agencies and there are a number of personnel agencies, it is nevertheless not a personnel program. This kind of thing, this limiting is felt in many ways.

G: Was it felt in the sense that some people left OEO?

T: Well, yes. He might not put it quite this way, but I think that Dick Boone probably felt that in order to be effective, to really do certain kinds of things, particularly in the area of organizing poor people to have a bigger say in these things, that one couldn't really do it from within a federal agency. I think that's a factor probably in his departure, and many others who were only here for a short time. Of course in the beginning there were some people who stayed only a week. Such people who might very well have made a considerable contribution had they stayed, but people who felt they'd make a greater one if they didn't stay. I have in mind a guy like Mike Harrington, who in the very, very start certainly knew more about poverty than most of us, and would never dream of getting enmeshed in what he probably knew was going to become a more and more routine kind of program, and others.

G: I've seen elsewhere, in other sources besides Moynihan's book, that after 1966 OEO more or less informally--it wasn't a formal written

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thing, maybe in a guideline somewhere at OEO--came to involve mayors in a conscious way to make sure that Community Action agencies came under local control of public officials in local areas. Is this accurate?

T: Yes.

G: Does it also tie in with this constricting process that's going on in terms of the flexibility of programs, the original purposes, and what it could do?

T: I would suspect so. I think it's a cousin. It's related to it, certainly. Although let me just add something here. There were people who from the outset believed that the mayors ought to be more involved than maybe some other people thought. In this sense perhaps there were, if not formal factions here of the kind you once asked me about, certainly gradations of thinking by different groups of people. They might choose to align themselves with each other. I think that Jack Conway, as the first head of the Community Action program, certainly didn't have quite the same, or as radical a view--lower case "r"--as did many of the people who worked immediately under him.

It was Jack Conway who was very much for and promoted the concept of what he used to call the "three legged stool," the public sector and private sector and poverty sector, and he was always urging the mayors. As a matter of fact, when I first got involved with the Community Action program after the bill was sent up and Jack Conway came aboard, the very first trip we took--first trip I believe Jack Conway took; it was the first I took, and we made it together--was to

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see the Governor of Georgia in Jekyll Island at a major statewide political meeting there where there were important state people. So this in a sense began from early on. I think Fred Hayes was always one who sought to bring into the fold the mayors.

G: Again, to continue this a bit, Moynihan takes the view in his book and cites it repeatedly that OEO, "far from creating a constituency and bringing about institutional change, in fact has brought about very little change and produced few supporters and has brought about enormous dissatisfaction." In a sense what you've been talking about, and [in] the pattern that you've been etching out, so to speak, you're saying that OEO, while it may have begun in an atmosphere of conflict and confrontations and so forth, has gradually gone further and further away from that. So it seems to me that this would be a reverse process from what Moynihan has been talking about, or the conclusions that he draws. It would seem to me, in other words, that by retreating, by making concessions--

T: We would effect less and less change.

G: Not so much that. You probably would bring about less change, but you certainly would bring about less dissatisfaction at the same time.

T: I'm not sure, because to the extent that the promises of the early days were high, you know, the dissatisfaction will be consequently higher. I don't know that you feel the dissatisfaction immediately; it takes some time. So there's some of that. However, I would disagree that there has been little change.

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G: Institutional change?

T: Little institutional change. Of course, again, here one has to define institutional change. But there is much more going on, in the cities particularly, but in many communities of the country--in the area of social programming than there was before this all started. How deep some of these things have gone is certainly open to question; it's deeper in some places than in others. One would hardly speak today yet of a vastly improved public school system across the country. And welfare departments are as bad as they ever were where they were bad. There has been little impact. Nevertheless, there has been a focusing of attention. This is important because it begins the process.

I suppose, really, of all our faults the greatest one was in advertising the possibility of potential for change in a way that suggested that it would happen more quickly than it did. The process, of course, is extremely slow even though one sometimes has to use what looked like quick starts; over time, the process is slow. But just bringing the country to a point where poverty problems are considered to the extent that they are now is, I think, immeasurable gain. So in that sense there probably has been some visible institutional change made up of specific ones here and there. It's interesting that even the communications media focus on this in a way, now that there are ghetto reporters. Papers cover the news of the ghetto, not just a robbery here and there or a major fire that occurs in a

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slum community, but the problems are covered and often in an unstructured way, as the Columbia Broadcasting System is doing now.

There are a number of changes. They're not all due to the Poverty Program. And to the extent that there has been change, or institutional change, development in this direction, the credit doesn't all go to OEO's programs. The black community has made many gains which go beyond what we've done. Not all the credit goes to us and not all the blame either, if blame is needed, for some of the disruptions that have occurred.

G: Although there was an attempt to do that.

T: Well, of course, because it's first of all something visible. It's there, and in that way it's blameable. It's organized. There have been numerous eruptions of emotion on the part of many groups of people. I read just the other day welfare recipients in New York City are speaking their piece, and that cuts across color lines. In a sense the needs of poor people have been aroused, and so a great deal has happened. No one is responsible for it in either a plus or minus way, no one entity.

G: You've talked a bit about Shriver and his attitude, the way he reacted to some of this. I wonder if you could indulge in some sort of a capsule sketch of Shriver as you saw him.

T: I suppose in a way he's a guy that you admired and couldn't stand at the same time. He was, as everyone attests, handsome and forceful, and had a great sense of humor and so forth, and in that way was a natural leader. Some of his administrative practices made a lot of

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hair stand on end of a lot of scalps. I think though in the sense that you're asking the question, [that] while he developed a feeling for poor people and the problems of poverty much in the way that he did for similar people in other countries through his Peace Corps experience, and believed in this whole thing overall, I don't think he really understood beans about the deeper problems of social change, what really had to go into bringing about change or dealing with some of the problems in welfare systems and in education systems. I think this showed itself in his frequent inability to understand some of the projects that were proposed to him, and consequently in his drawing back from support of them.

Perhaps it's unfair to ask that a man of his background have the same understanding as, say, a man like Mitchell Ginsberg who comes out of years of the social work profession. But then you can't have everything. He also was a salesman of such ability that we got quite a bit more than we might have if it hadn't been for him. I don't mean money, but support from many quarters. So that's probably as much as one would want to say.

G: Have you seen any discernable differences in either policy or management or administration, and so forth, since Shriver has left and Harding has taken over?

T: I don't know Harding personally at all. While I'm tempted to say, yes, I do, I at the same time wonder if the kinds of administrative changes--so-called belt tightening and streamlining of personnel, financial practices, and general managerial systems and ways of

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budgeting and planning--that I see now wouldn't have taken place if Shriver had still been here. So I don't know how much to attribute to Harding. I think that the trend was already moving this way at the time Shriver left. When I say it this way, you know, I don't mean to be too gloomy about it either, because actually there are still a lot of important things taking place. It's hard for one who was here at the very, very outset to measure perhaps in as fresh a way, because you're looking back in time when we were bold in a way, which may not always have been good, but bold in a way which we are not now. So in terms of the boldness factor, it has been diminished. Probably it began under Shriver, and it has continued under Harding.

G: Could you comment on the Green Amendment of 1967, what you know about its construction, its passage, the circumstances of it, and its impact on Community Action?

T: I really don't know as much about its origin as others do, and I think it would be better to discuss that with somebody like Bill Bozman and still others. What I could say about it is that from where we sat it was no surprise that something like this happened. It was seen when it came as, "Well, that's it. Now they've finally killed it." Of course, that's not necessarily so. But those of us who felt that did so because we were witness to the kinds of changes we've been talking about for the last few minutes, that is more and more concessions to the capital "P" political world and to the administrative necessities, those kinds of things, with its constricting

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effect on programs. So this was another blow seen by some of us in much the same way.

G: Do you feel that the potential, and for lack of a better word I'll use this word, the potential radical nature of OEO has ever been realized?

T: No. Realized in what sense? Recognized by some of the people in it?

G: No. Well, you can answer that first.

T: Yes, I think so. I think more so in the beginning. The implications of the program were certainly contemplated by its early members, who saw that all kinds of things could conceivably happen. But when you asked the question "realized," I thought you meant in a sense of substantiated, and, no, it never happened. For instance, there was a very interesting election among the low income community in Philadelphia a couple of years ago. When they were asked to turn out and vote for members of the governing board something like 3 per cent of the ghetto population showed up for that. Of course, depending on where you sat it was either a great turnout, or a little turnout. From certain quarters that you might expect it was labeled a miserable turnout from a bunch of apathetic people, and, "See, they don't vote anyway." On the other hand, considering the vagaries of the issue and, "What the hell is the Community Action board anyway?" it was the beginning. It could be construed as quite a potential there, you know, a seed that was planted.

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After all, if people are going to be asked to elect individuals to serve on some entity, if it was to come to have control of a vast range of social services, there was potential there. The election process itself had potential. These people who were being brought into the fold in this manner would be the same people who would be more aware of the issues vis-a-vis their congressmen. There might be questioning then of who serves best, "If we're voting, which person should get our vote?" There are tremendous implications. Sure, these were seen, but nothing happened. So to the extent that realize means happen, there haven't been any major political shifts, but certainly the potential is there.

G: Is this because of the political hydraulic atmosphere that OEO has been put in since the very beginning?

T: You mean the pressure?

G: Yes.

T: I think so.

G: At the beginning in the task force--

T: Excuse me, but you know there was a study of that and a few other elections that we contracted for with the American Arbitration Association, and a well written, brilliant report. They assessed some of the potentials here and laid out some of the issues, analyzed the devices for bringing people in, and altogether performed a remarkably good job. One piece of which was to become a kind of handbook for how to run an election in low income communities, and we never really did that. Oh, yes, there were some elections here and there,

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maybe there still are for all I know, it's hard to keep up with almost eleven hundred Community Action agencies, but it's not an OEO policy. We never took that report and made it a handbook. It never became a policy. We never stipulated, "You must hold elections." It always was one device. We didn't really promote many of these potentials, and I would say probably consciously. We never got behind the election process, electing poor people, even though we support it. We have to say we support it as one device for choosing who will serve on poverty agency boards, et cetera. Sure, we do. But we haven't given all the written and verbal support and technical assistance and promoted it in that sense, because surely that does hold some very, very strong implications for the entire political process.

G: I'd like to ask you about a concept which I think was discussed, formalized during the task force period, and that is the mission of OEO, as to whether it would be a program operating agency or an innovative, experimental agency which would develop and operate programs and then spin them off to other agencies and so on. It's my understanding that this was one of the intents at the very beginning.

T: That's right. I think we saw OEO as pulling together some things that hadn't been pulled together by the operating agencies. There was need for an outsider to come in and start something, and OEO was to start it and eventually spin it off. That's the term used in Washington. This was built in even to the Community Action Agency level. I think that, too, was seen as something that would eventually be absorbed.

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After all, OEO funding was scaled down the first year, Community Action funding was to be 90 per cent federal dollars and 10 per cent local, and then diminishing percentages of federal financing so that the community would eventually take it over. This of course doesn't necessarily mean that the CAA would dissolve, but it might become part of something else as the community developed its own larger poverty program.

But it didn't quite work out that way. We felt, you see, at that same time also, that we would of course have to operate some things at this stage of the game, because the other agencies simply weren't ready. When we made that statement we were quite correct. It may even be correct today. But the fact is that we took that view that some things would just be operational, we would run the Job Corps centers. Eventually, yes, maybe the appropriate body would get this once it had been developed and it was kind of in motion. But first of all, four years went by and no one came along and offered to run these programs. If they did they didn't offer very loudly, and no suggestions were really made. Yet we still had the idea in the back of our minds that they'd be spun off, but it didn't happen.

At the same time, [due to] the fact that it was not happening and the fact that we were operating them, there developed in here a proprietary attitude. These were "our" programs. It then became a suggestion which evoked horror if you proposed that someone else would run one of them. They couldn't; "They're not ready." And one wonders whether after all, in keeping with the original idea, if this was

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innovative. Once it was started it should be put into these other agencies so that they would not only be able to operate it in a massive way, since they had the financing to do it, but it would help transform, ventilate, and improve these agencies just by having responsibility for these programs. Of course, it could be argued that they could kill it, too. But to be consistent, we couldn't argue. Now Head Start is being moved over, and there are people who are petrified, saying, "That's the end of Head Start." And that attitude, partly the result of the proprietary nature of the way we operated these programs, is inconsistent with our. . . .

G: Does it have anything to do with Shriver's attitude also? Is this reflective of Shriver or many people within the OEO?

T: I don't think it's just Shriver. No, I think it's many people within OEO. They were <u>our</u> Community Action agencies. Sure, we're guilty of that in a way. They're <u>our</u> poor people.

G: You mean they've finally found out who owns the poor.

T: Yes, right. In many ways we're guilty of some of the things that we found wrong with existing institutions at the outset when we started.

G: Is there anything that you would like to add?

T: I suppose it's not a very important part of history, but you had asked me about Shriver. I think the biggest influence in his poverty warrior life was a fellow named Edgar Cahn. This is not meant as a tribute to Edgar Cahn, but I think to an understanding of Shriver. To the extent that he understood the kinds of things that were at stake here, I think it was due to the counselling of this most unusual

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fellow. I suppose one sometimes got the feeling that Cahn, who was quite a capable writer and wrote most of Shriver's speeches, or many of Shriver's speeches, was putting words in Shriver's mouth that Shriver wouldn't necessarily have said himself. That, too, is all right, because in the end while he did back off, many of us felt that his ability to sell this program was in some part based on a gradually growing understanding provided him in large measure by Edgar Cahn, much of those writings and work have played a very large role in the program.

G: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

T: It was the most interesting five years of my life. That's about it.

G: Thanks a lot.

T: Okay. Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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