

Oral History Interview
with
JONATHAN B. BINGHAM
by Richard D. McKinzie

MCKINZIE: I would like to ask you how you happened to get into the Point IV program, how you came to the Technical Cooperation Administration.

BINGHAM: Yes, in 1951, about the middle of 1951—no, earlier in 1951, I had thought of coming back to Washington. The Korean War was on and I felt, I had an urge to get back into public service. I was practicing law but I was bored with it. And I considered particularly two opportunities. One was to go back into Price Control, which I had been in in 1941, and the other was to go into the State

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Department. I talked to Dean Acheson, whom I knew through the Yale Corporation—we were both members of the Yale Corporation—and he put me in touch with a man named Thomas B. Cabot, who was then head of the foreign aid program, in a capacity that didn't last very long. That was one of the many reorganizations of the foreign aid program and they were setting up something new in the State Department called ISAC, International Security Affairs Committee; and he was the chairman of that. This included representatives of Defense, and ECA. That was the Marshall Plan agency, and they were setting up a new setup in the State Department to coordinate foreign aid under Mr. Cabot. There were four assistant directors and I was offered, and I eventually decided to take, a position as assistant director for international security affairs, non-NATO affairs, everything but NATO. I worked at that for about six months under Mr. Cabot.

As I say, it was a setup that wasn't very successful; it was dreamed up by some of the management people in the State Department. Theoretically,

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he was supposed to have the status of an Under Secretary and as Assistant Directors we were supposed to be co-equal to the Assistant Secretary, but it didn't work out that way.

Well, anyway, after about six months there—the Department had apparently been looking for a deputy to work under Dr. Henry Bennett, the president of Oklahoma A & M, who had come in to be the head of the Technical Cooperation Administration, or the Point IV agency—and apparently they settled on me as a good candidate for that. I was approached, and it sounded interesting. I had an interview with Dr. Bennett, we hit it off, and that was it.

I hadn't really any background in the field. I had served once in the State Department previously back in 1945-46, but in a totally unrelated operation, and I had no technical competence in any of the fields that Point IV was interested in; but apparently as a generalists, who seemed to be able

to get along in the Department and get things done, I guess it was an appointment that the Secretary made. Originally it was not a Presidential appointment, but in the legislation that

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went through the following year, it became a Presidential appointment, and I was appointed by President Truman, and confirmed by the Senate to that Deputy Administrator job.

In the meanwhile, Dr. Bennett had been killed. I went in and started, I think, in September or October and...

MCKINZIE: Now this is 1950?

BINGHAM: '51.

MCKINZIE: I see.

BINGHAM: And in a very short time he was killed, just before Christmas came around, and I was acting administrator for about three or four months.

Now, that's the answer to that question.

MCKINZIE: May I ask what your impressions were of Dr. Bennett when you first met him? He was a rather different kind of man when he came to Washington.

BINGHAM: Yes. Yes, he was quite unique. He had a marvelous manner, a courtly old-fashioned gentleman.

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I think of him as something of a Southerner. He was terrific with the congressional committees. I can remember his answering a difficult question about such and such an item, maybe a couple hundred thousand dollars in the budget was for, and he would answer something like, "Well, Senator, I can't rightly tell you exactly what that item is, but I want to tell you that not one dollar of this program is going to be wasted." And somehow or other the committee would take it, and they just wouldn't pursue it any further.

It is true that he talked in terms of a small program. He was uncomfortable with anything over \$25,000,000 world-wide. He said he wouldn't know how to spend it wisely. I think he had a very oversimplified idea of what it would take to transmit and transfer modern techniques to the underdeveloped world, and I think we were all somewhat bemused by some of the legends that he felt. For example, if he could get the Indian farmer to put a steel tip on his plow, worth \$1.95, that that was going to solve India's food problems. He did go along that way.

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He was very enthusiastic about Ethiopia, I remember that; and he talked at length about the beautiful black soil in Ethiopia and said that it was the finest soil anywhere in the world and it was capable of feeding the whole Middle East easily.

He got President Truman quite interested in that subject.

MCKINZIE: He had been to Ethiopia, as I recall.

BINGHAM: Yes, he had.

MCKINZIE: Were you involved in that argument, that evidently was raised within the State Department, between the advocates of this small person-to-person approach and those who argued that massive injections of development capital was a better solution? That evidently eventually ended up in President Truman's office.

BINGHAM: Yes, I was involved in that to some extent. I would say it wasn't quite the way you put it. I would say it was more that we felt that technical assistance had to be something more than just sending

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out experts on a kind of hit or miss basis. I was very much involved with trying to get the country programs organized on a country basis with a rationale for each country, a plan to be worked out with the host government; instead of having, as had been the case previously, sort of hit or miss projects in which agencies of the American Government would be asked to send out experts for this, that, or the other thing, and with very little coordination. During the early months I was there, we got an agreement, got it cleared, that each country mission would have a country director and that pretty soon led to the idea of having a program officer in each country mission, and also the notion that technical assistance to be effective had to be backed up with a certain amount of economic development and money for demonstration projects, equipment and the like. I felt very strongly that we had to go for a program of perhaps 100 or 150 million, and this was an issue that continued for quite some time.

I had heard, learned through the grapevine, that they were about to appoint Mr. John Hannah,

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who is the present director of AID, to be director of TCA, administrator of TCA. I had had some contact with him because he had been president of our advisory board during the preceding period and I felt that he shared very much Dr. Bennett's approach, for a small, narrow program, I mentioned this to Dean Acheson and said I thought that this would not be a good appointment, and Dean Acheson was impressed apparently by what I said, "but, he said, "Do you have anybody to recommend?" And I said, "I think Stanley Andrews would be a fine choice. He's been working for us as a consultant, and I would recommend him without reservation;" and in a very few days he was appointed.

MCKINZIE: I see. There were a number of names that came up. John Hannah I suppose, was the most prominent, but Eric Johnston, who was, you may recall—for political reasons, I suppose—considered, and then probably for political reasons rejected.

BINGHAM: I don't know, I'm not sure. I don't know whether Eric Johnston would have been interested or not. He became chairman of this same advisory

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board during that period or later on...

MCKINZIE: A little later, I think.

BINGHAM: Yes, I think it was a little later, and I remember he was very concerned about the decorations in his office, wanted to get new curtains, and new carpeting, and we had to...

[Tape ended abruptly]