

Oral History Interview
with
HENRI LUCIEN BONNET

French diplomat who served as Ambassador to the United States of America, 1944-55.

Paris, France
June 29, 1970
by Theodore A. Wilson, University of Kansas

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WILSON: You were appointed in late 1944, as I recall.

BONNET: That's it.

WILSON: Presented your credentials in January 1945.

BONNET: The first of January.

WILSON: Yes.

I wonder if you might begin by giving your impressions of President Roosevelt at that time?

BONNET: It would be a pleasure. I had great admiration for President Roosevelt, as did everybody in Western Europe at that time. I was grateful for what he had done for helping to liberate our countries. I was struck when I saw him, by the false impression,

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unfortunately, that he was still in fairly good health. I knew that he had had two or three full weeks of rest at his country place, but he was gay, and he wanted to chat with me. Two or three times General [Edwin M.] Watson came in to indicate discreetly that people were waiting, but President Roosevelt did not pay attention. He continued asking me for information about the economic situation in France, and on various things. He'd joke with General Watson, and finally I left with the impression that he was still strong and able to face the heavy duties he had. Unfortunately, I did not have a good impression from the point of view of health, because 20 days later, for the inauguration, he looked more tired; and you know what happened later.

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: Anyway, I keep a vivid souvenir of that first conversation. I left him with greater confidence still, in the way that victory would be used for the good of our two countries.

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WILSON: Was he reasonable with you about American-French relations at that time? There had been some difficulty, of course.

BONNET: There had been some difficulties, but they were certainly minimized. He told me that his position had been badly interpreted concerning his feelings for General de Gaulle. He spoke, I remember, rather warmly of the French resistance inside the country against the German troops. I had really a good impression from the public declarations made some days later. In the State of the Union message he made a very strong and frank declaration that France would recuperate and fight again in the world affairs, after its complete victory. I've used the quotation several times in which he spoke very, very firmly about not only the French-American relations, but also about the importance of France in world affairs. From that point of view, I had no doubt that it would be possible to renew friendly and easy relations between the two countries. I had no illusions either, for I knew that there would be some difficulties, and that France

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would need aid and help -- that would raise some problems.

The first time I met Harry Truman, he was Vice President-elect, but not Vice President. I had to pay official visits, first to the President and then to the Vice President. I paid my official visit to Henry Wallace, who was Vice President, but I asked for an appointment with the Vice President-elect. In the first days of January, a few days after having seen President Roosevelt, I went to the Senate and I had the first conversation with Senator Truman, Vice President-elect. I was very, very glad for having done that because we spoke about the war, about desecration, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes. I had had twenty minutes with President Roosevelt about the same thing, and later a friendly conversation with President Truman, who spoke about the French situation. He was pleased, of course, as I was about the coming victory, and he asked me

about the situation. I explained to him that France was liberated and the people were enthusiastic about the help of the American Army.

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I had seen that with my own eyes, of course, but I explained also that France was bled white. There were no supplies, nothing in the shops, and thousands of the bridges and railway stations had been destroyed. He knew all that, but he was very much interested in hearing me. I had the impression that he was really in the same line of thinking as President Roosevelt from that point of view. One of the more important reasons we had to be grateful to President Roosevelt was that in early '41 he got the lend-lease bill through the Congress. In my opinion, lend-lease meant that there should be in the future, at the end of the war, an equitable and just division of the losses, that is, financial and economic losses between the Allies. That would mean we would not have again the quarrel like that of the debts after the First World War. From that first, short, casual talk I had with President Truman, I brought back a strong and just impression, that he had the same conceptions and the necessary solidarity between the Allies.

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WILSON: You did have the impression that he was well-informed about these problems?

BONNET: Certainly. While we did not discuss them in detail, he realized what the situation was in Europe. I had entered the necessity of a complete solidarity, not only during the war, but for reorganizing the world. That was also the impression that I had had from the speeches given by President Roosevelt: the State of the Union and the declaration he made some days before to the Congress, on the 3rd day of January. In that speech he mentioned the situation in France and his conception of the help and the role my country would have later on.

WILSON: That's very interesting.

What was the organization of the French Embassy when you came to the Embassy? Were you also in charge of the arrangements for lend-lease in the United States, or was that a separate agency?

BONNET: No. I reopened the Embassy that had been closed for two years, and I reorganized it. But, there was an economic mission under the head of Jean Monnet.

WILSON: Oh, yes.

BONNET: You'll see him, no?

WILSON: Yes, I hope so.

BONNET: Jean Monnet had a group of collaborators with him, and when we were in Algiers, he and I were members of the provisional government. He had been sent to the United States to discuss questions of rearming the French troops in Africa and to discuss the lend-lease affairs. Later, when I was in Washington, he was still there and was dealing with all those questions with

a great competence, and he had certainly inspired full confidence in President Roosevelt and his associates.

WILSON: With whom did you deal primarily in that first period, with the United States administration? With Stettinius, I suppose, and then Byrnes as Secretary of State?

BONNET: Yes.

WILSON: Are there any particular people in the Department of State that you might think about?

BONNET: I cannot name all of them.

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: Certainly I had a close collaboration with Secretary Stettinius, and a very close collaboration with Jimmy Byrnes, and his associate. I was a good friend of Ben Cohen for instance.

WILSON: Oh, you were?

BONNET: Yes, surely.

WILSON: He was very important.

Did you have the impression that in this period of transition, after the President's untimely death, that there was perhaps a natural confusion about the direction American policy would take, or was President Roosevelt's policy carried through pretty much without any change?

BONNET: You mean carried out by President Truman?

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WILSON: Yes, and the administration generally.

BONNET: I had the impression that there was a feeling in some circles, which felt that that would not be the case; that President Truman maybe was more conservative than President Roosevelt. That's the impression I got from conversations on the day of his death, and the day after, with people important politically or socially in the United States. It was not my impression because I had had that first conversation with President Truman. Furthermore, a few days later, I had a conversation with a gentleman who was a great friend of President Truman. He was a man from Missouri, and he did not stay long in Washington. But he told me about the character, and the mood of President Truman. He told me not to believe that there was some weakness in him, just the contrary. He was very enthusiastic about him. He told me, he's a man of steel, on the contrary, very strong-willed, and you shall see that. I had been struck by that relation -- coming from one of his colleagues.

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WILSON: Yes, exactly.

BONNET: I'm sure he was right, because I had many opportunities to see that he was right. So, personally, I had no great fear of a change in the political line. First, it would not have been easy, because the victory was in sight, yet not still there. There was no doubt about the patriotism of President Truman, about his determination to renewal, and he assured that later on. Concerning his political convictions, I have always been very interested in American politics, and I had the impression that he was a convinced Democrat. Consequently, he was not very different from the point of view from President Roosevelt.

WILSON: There has been considerable controversy among historians in the United States, about the origins of the cold war. Concerning the dating of the origins of the cold war, there is one view that President Roosevelt was still trying, at the time of his death, and still hopeful that there could be some understanding between the United States and the Soviet

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Union. According to this view, President Truman immediately took a much harder line toward the Russians. Might you comment on that?

BONNET: That is a question that I followed as closely as I could. Undoubtedly, President Roosevelt had hoped that there could be a good understanding between the Allies after the common victory and, primarily, an understanding with the Russians.

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: There is no doubt about that. If President Truman had had a different opinion from Roosevelt it would not have pleased public opinion in your country because there was a great enthusiasm. The world is right about the Russian help, and about the Russian victories. Litvinov was a very popular man in the United States. He was a genius, too, when touring the United States' great cities and giving speeches. President Roosevelt had support of public opinion and, in that respect, nobody felt that the Russians would separate themselves from the rest of the world. That was not the

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question when President Truman came into power. In my opinion, that question did not exist, for everybody thought that there could be a certain amount of understanding. Of course, deeply in American opinion there was an anti-Communist feeling and there is no doubt about that, and it was very strong among the members of Congress. But, there was no question of what became the cold war.

There is a legend in Europe about the relations with Russia, that I called the Yalta legend. I wrote some articles disputing the legend that the world was divided in two parts. At Yalta, there was Stalin and Roosevelt, but the legend is not true. One has only to read the complete transcripts of Yalta to see that it is not true at all. Yalta was devoted partly to the organizations of the United Nations, and politically there was the false hope that democratic governments would be

established in central Europe. The truth is that President Roosevelt, if he had lived longer, would have seen that Stalin did not keep the promises he had given. At that time, there was no quarrel between the two

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big powers, thus no question of the cold war. Relations broke down little by little, during the years '45 and '46. It was a rather slow revolution. Personally, I had the conviction that the split became almost final in February '46, that is, one year after Yalta. There had been all sorts of motives of irritation during '45, even at San Francisco; but at San Francisco the understanding was maintained. There were concessions made to the Russians at Yalta with the three votes. It was exploited by propaganda and by polemics, but that did not mean anything. So, there had been many causes of irritation.

Still there was no break when Jimmy Byrnes went to Russia in '45 in the hope that it would be possible to come together on many, many points. When he came back, however, he realized that the situation in the United States as far as Russia was concerned, had become more tense. I think that President Truman at that time had strong doubts about the possibility of a good understanding with Russia. It was not before the end of February that Jimmy Byrnes gave his speech, which did not leave a great hope for a

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good understanding. Also there was the Belgian affair at the United Nations a little later. I was in France during that session, because the special Ambassador had not yet hired me. I was appointed only six weeks later. But I saw finally that the Russians attempted to leave as a legion. Gromyko at that time, I'm sure, still had the hope that it was possible to maintain some understanding between the two countries, but the situation was already very bad. Moscow was still concerned about many crucial problems. So, I would say that the first six months of '46 was the beginning of the cold war.

WILSON: That's very interesting. You did not have the feeling that the Truman administration was taking an inflexible line; but that this was a reasonable response to the Soviet actions?

BONNET: It developed little by little.

WILSON: Yet, there was considerable criticism in Europe that Americans tended to react emotionally to communism in that sense, but this was a rational...

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BONNET: When I think of it, no. The reaction in America became stronger and stronger, at least among the majority of the people, because of a series of blows about Poland and later about Hungary. It culminated in 1948, with the Prague affair, with the coup in Czechoslovakia; but it had begun with Hungary, of course, and before Hungary the difficulties in Warsaw in Poland. There was a response in America to all those difficulties. Anti-Communist, anti-Bolshevik feelings. But in my opinion it was a gradual change.

WILSON: One of your responsibilities was to try to interpret to the government in Paris the shifts of American opinion.

BONNET: I did my best.

WILSON: Yes. I'm sure; and a very difficult task.

Did you have any feelings at the end of the war that there might be a resurgence of isolationism, that America might turn away again from the world? Was this a serious concern to you?

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BONNET: At the end of the war?

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: You mean in '45? In '45, no. I did not have that feeling.

WILSON: On the other hand, one of your responsibilities was to try to get across the problems and needs of Europe, particularly of France to the American public. What was the understanding of the American public and of Congress, about particularly the economic crisis in Europe in the period '45-'46?

BONNET: There was a strong feeling that the economies of Europe should be restored. It was not unanimous and I cannot go through the details of many conversations and misgivings that I had. There were many important debates and conversations in Congress, in both the Senate and the House, and the polemics in the press. I had no documents other than my eyes, but, I'm sure that at the White House and among people who were great friends of President Truman and good friends of mine like Secretary of the

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Treasury Vinson, and Secretary of Agriculture Clint Anderson, that there was interest in the question of sending supplies to Europe. Among all those people there was a strong feeling that the shaky colonies of Europe should be restored. There is no doubt about that and to add proof, in '45 and '46 big loans were made to the European countries. Speaking only of the main countries, like Great Britain and France, very important loans. Great Britain received approximately more than four billion dollars, while at the same time France received one and a half billion dollars. That was important.

Something that was explained and felt in the United States, was the lack of coal in Europe, in France especially. It was bad for the people during the winter, of course, but it was worse for the French industry which had to recreate roots that were lacking. Also it was strongly felt that there was a lack of wheat and lack of food. It was realized later in '47, by President Truman and his associates, that those big loans, especially the British one, which was the biggest, had not been enough, and that the situation was still bad. It

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was very bad in France, especially in the summer and autumn of '47, when it was realized that those loans were not sufficient. It was then felt that the generous American help should not be conceived as a help to a special country, France, or Italy, or Great Britain, but to Western Europe as a whole. There was the need to create a solid, strong appeal of prosperity and of democracy, in face of Russia, and a good understanding with the United States.

WILSON: I'd like to return to that in a moment. As a historian, looking back at all of these documents, it's difficult to avoid a sense of inevitability. That is, lend-lease, leads to UNRRA, leads to IBRD loans, to Bretton Woods, and then inevitably to the Marshall plan and the OEEC. Is that correct, though? You suggested, perhaps that there was a stage step by step when the United States and others thought that these loans and relief aid would be sufficient, but then it gradually became clear that this would not be sufficient and you had some decision to...

BONNET: There is no doubt that when the loans were granted

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to various countries in Europe, there was a hope that it would be sufficient. From all the talks with Secretary Vinson, for instance, and certain Senators and Congressmen, that was clear. The fact is that it was not sufficient, and everybody could realize that. That is the first reason why one went to another conception, and that was the Marshall Plan. The second reason was the increasing attention with Russia. There were two factors for that evolution of American thinking and they were equally important. But you cannot, nevertheless, neglect the first one, because that means that your offer was not on its feet again, in spite of the roles; and that something more would be necessary -- that means grants. However, that was a decision for the Congress of the United States. It was a big decision to make and it did not come all of a sudden. It was developed gradually and from that point of view, the second motive I indicated is important. I followed that very closely and I tried to inform my government as well as I could. Undoubtedly it's in that, especially during the first part of '47, that the conception of a

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United Europe began to develop in the United States, the idea of a help for Western Europe. You had willingly included Czechoslovakia but the Russians stopped that. By the end of '46 and the first months of '47, I had no doubt that something would occur in March of '47. I saw the idea slowly developing in the American mind, the White House, the State Department, and the Treasury Department, that it was finished with the loans to individual countries, and that one had to think of Western Europe, as a whole. That was the origin of the Marshall plan.

WILSON: Did you have conversations, or were you sounded out by people about possible French reaction to aid to Europe as a whole in this formative period? There was some confusion about just who was responsible for the Marshall speech, and for the idea. Some people say Kennan and the Policy Planning Board in the State Department; while other people say that Will Clayton took a trip to Europe in the late spring and came back with the idea.

BONNET: All of them played a role, of course. At the

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State Department Kennan had played a role, and some other ones, too. The committees of inquiries that were created at that time, by Congress, also had a role because the facts were that the rights of the people and the situation was here to be seen. When Secretary Vinson was replaced, and he became Chief Justice, he was replaced by John Snyder, who was exactly of the same disposition. He was very close to President Truman, as you know, and became a very good friend of mine. I am very grateful to him. All of those people recognized the facts, yet, the mission to Europe developed slowly. They all surely played a role, but all those European countries had Ambassadors too, who were able to tell what the situation was. When I was sure that the conception of a help for Western Europe was gaining, I was obliged at the end of the summer of '47 to negotiate the loans with the Export Bank. We were helped at that time, in buying coal, food, and by all possible means.

Thus, I could mobilize the remaining funds of a loan, which was to come later, in order to meet

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the expenses of making troops' pay, and advance, the things like that, in the amount of 30 to 40 million dollars. It was a very difficult situation, and I was negotiating a loan of approximately 300 million dollars with the Export Bank and with the CCC for the sending of coal and food items. When President Truman took the decision to Congress in November of '47, we had interim aid. We discussed the conditions of that interim aid at the State Department where I was helped by Italian and Austrian colleagues, but I was the main negotiator of that arrangement. That was a fantastic help for us. We had already to repay big loans -- I was not fond of making another loan. I tried with a great conviction to get it, but I did not consider it a good thing. The initiative of President Truman helped France because instead of loans, we received 200 millions of dollars in grants. Americans organized a wonderful system of sending supplies to Europe, because one of your countrymen organized that fleet of ships and cargoes, bringing millions of tons of coal and food.

Yet, in my opinion, the change in American

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public opinion from a help to former Allies, to a help for a Western Europe, formed little by little during the first part of '47. The technicians in the State Department who were working on that and Under Secretary of State Bob Lovett, too, were convinced of that. General Marshall was a wonderful man, too. All those new conceptions came into being little by little, but it was very clear, and I realized that myself, that the change was coming, very early in '47.

WILSON: Very interesting.

BONNET: And I'm glad it did.

WILSON: Yes, I think we all are.

BONNET: By the way, I'm sure that President Truman was rather early convinced that a United Europe would be a good thing because the Schuman plan, in '48, provoked a great enthusiasm in

your country right away. I remember when the Schuman plan, the community of steel and coal was announced, I went to the Capitol. There I was greeted by some Senator friends

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who were enthusiastic. Some of them had had the reputation of being longtime isolationists, and to them the reconciliation between France and Germany was considered a great attainment. But, President Truman had some formula speaking of a new, strong, democratic state formed by Western Europe, and associated with the United States for reorganizing peace.

WILSON: How important a role in the American support for Europe and necessity for European recovery did American concern about German recovery play?

BONNET: That appeared very, very early, and I cannot mention everything. But certainly, that was a great difficulty with France.

WILSON: Yes, of course.

BONNET: There were many discussions about that. I realized very early that the American opinion would want to alleviate the expenses you had to make in Germany by seeing a reorganization of German industry and recreating a fairly strong economy

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again. These discussions did not come all of a sudden, but I know that they stopped very, very early, maybe at the time of the Marshall plan.

WILSON: The Morgenthau plan was not seriously considered?

BONNET: No, it was finished. Morgenthau proposed his plan while the anti-Nazi feelings were fortunately and justly at their peak, but later on, there was no question of that anymore. On the contrary, very early, even when we discussed the Atlantic Pact, there was already a strong feeling in many American quarters and especially in face of Russia and the Russian concentration, that Western Germany, at least, should be put on its feet again. Of course, we were not of the same feeling in France. There was a strong dislike for that idea; and we strongly wanted a Federalized government in Germany, not a centralized one. We did not want to see the cartels recreated, not mentioning also that we felt it was right to see the western bank of the Rhine reoccupied militarily. The French Government was asking for very strong guarantees in those fields. Also, there

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were real difficulties in negotiations in Germany about the position taken by General Clay. But, it went to prove that there was a continuous discussion going on between France and the United States for years. In America, during the same period the feeling became stronger than it was necessary to reorganize a prosperous Germany.

WILSON: That's quite clear from the documents and indeed it's fairly clear, to me, that the American concern and perhaps obsession about the German recovery played a very strong role. I

am somewhat confused about why there was this emphasis. Was it the people who were making policy that had some particular interests in Germany?

BONNET: It would be difficult for me to evaluate the policymakers, and the particular reasons, because the roles had already been played. You had, especially in the Middlewest, people who, in the past, had been well disposed toward Germany, because they and their ancestors came from Germany. During the war they had been great patriots, of course, and they had

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fought and given what they could, including their sons for the goal. Maybe there was still some feeling of sympathy in some quarters for Germany. Also the military people played a great role in that revolution. I don't mean to say that some of them had a great sympathy for the Germans but they were preoccupied with organizing the defense of Europe, and that was the great preoccupation at that time in France, as well as in the United States. In the Benelux countries, among old former Allies, and quite naturally in the minds of the military people, came the idea that maybe the German soldier could be...

WILSON: Oh yes. Yes.

The idea of giving State Department control over the occupation of Germany was talked about within the Truman administration for about a year, in 1945. Did you have any indications that this was going on and place any importance upon it?

BONNET: No, I don't remember. I have no impression that the authority of the military people in Germany was an impending question. I don't mean to say that they

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could have done anything, but their influence was great. People like Clay had a great authority.

WILSON: Yes, very great.

BONNET: Wholly, wholly.

WILSON: Would it be fair to say that it was run as a sort of a military fief? I ask you this question because there is very little information in President Truman's library about the occupation of Germany. This gives the suggestion that the White House had very little to do with the idea, that it was pretty much a military affair as long as there weren't any serious problems.

BONNET: That's my impression, it was mainly a military affair. Of course, they were in touch with the State Department. The State Department had to deal daily with questions relating to the occupation, to the relations between the French, the British, and the Germans, and to the organization of relation between the three zones. Not mentioning, of course, the other question of the Russian loan. They

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also had to deal with the question of cartel of the Ruhr. Certainly, discussions were held with General Clay, too. All sorts of problems were dealt with, but the role of the military was prominent, no doubt.

WILSON: These issues were brought to your attention as Ambassador through the State Department? I mean, if the War Department had a particular position on internationalization of the Ruhr, did it come to you through the State Department, or did you often deal directly with War and Defense?

BONNET: No, officially, it came through the State Department. Personally, I always had good relations with many people in the Pentagon, and when General Marshall became Secretary of Defense and Bob Lovett, Under Secretary, and then later Secretary himself, I had the best possible relations with them. I had to see them very, very often. There were some difficulties between the military in Germany and the State Department, but bluntly speaking, I cannot tell you anything.

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WILSON: Was it difficult in a personal sense for you to deal with all of these agencies within the administration, which had responsibility or interest in European affairs? You've mentioned so many people and so many agencies, Treasury, Agriculture, Commerce, and this is, of course, a function of postwar American policy, that not just the State Department, but the War Department, Defense, all of these agencies had some...

BONNET: And the White House.

WILSON: And the White House, of course. Did you have the feeling, though, that there was some chain of command, that the White House was on top of all this?

BONNET: Oh, the White House was certainly informed.

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: Even for comparatively unimportant things, I had to ask for a decision through the State Department, for example, the signature of the peace with

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Japan. Each time I had a conversation with the Secretary of State, he told me, "Well, all right, it seems to me to be quite well, but I must consider the President." They were very, very cautious about that. I think President Truman was kept aware of everything.

WILSON: I have the impression that he used his staff in an excellent way, that the White House staff was a true staff in comparison with President Roosevelt's period, when it was much less organized, as you can perhaps appreciate.

BONNET: You mean about the organization of President Truman's staff?

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: Well, I think it worked very well and smoothly. Maybe he had reasons for complaining about one of the top men, but I did not know. It was not evident and I never heard of an explosion.

WILSON: Of course, the Wallace affair.

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BONNET: There were some surely, I have no doubt about it; but I had the impression that during the eight years of President Truman's mandate the machinery of the White House worked smoothly. Except for some incidents, there was a lot of good understanding with the subordinates of the President. I think that the system of the Presidential Cabinet worked rather well.

WILSON: I have that impression in this period, that he was President.

BONNET: I had that impression, also. I think it was a difficult period with all sorts of great decisions to be made, about the end of the war, the Marshall plan, the Atlantic Pact, and cold war with Russia. It was a very difficult period without mention of Korea and many other things. I think from the point of view of all the people who study, especially constitutional history, it was a period during which the Presidential system and the system of a Presidential Cabinet worked well.

WILSON: At the time that the Marshall plan was presented

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to Congress, were you confident that Congress would pass it in the fall of '47?

BONNET: I was anxious to see it pass through Congress. There was some resistance surely, but there was a good bipartisan support at that time, for such a plan.

WILSON: Would you say that Senator Vandenberg was the chief?

BONNET: Certainly, he was the most influential Republican in that respect, and he had a great influence for creating that bipartisan policy. In the more conservative wing of the Senate, there could have been more hesitation and more reluctance to go as far as that. Yet, if you forget about domestic situations and positions that depended on geography, it remains that the two great causes were the obvious needs of your former allies, for receiving the means of recreating their prosperity, and the tension with Russia. The influence of those two causes was so great that there was no doubt about the final decision of Congress. I don't mean to say that they did not plainly realize that it meant great sacrifices

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for the United States.

WILSON: Though not as great perhaps as Senator Taft was suggesting?

BONNET: Yes. I knew Senator Taft very well. It was possible always to discuss with him and he was not as stubborn as he was represented at some times.

WILSON: Would it be correct to say that the administration in putting its case to Congress, and arguing for passage of the Marshall plan, and to the American public, gave intentionally stress to the second cause, the desirability of creating a strong Europe because of the Russians? Was this a planned effort, knowing that Congress, particularly conservative members of Congress, would respond to this much more than to an idealistic support for the former allies?

There is this rhetoric of anti-communism and it does seem that the administration used this feeling to get...

BONNET: Surely, that was used. There was no doubt

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about it, because it was a very strong incentive.

WILSON: From your vantage point in Washington, how serious was, in '47 and '48, the threat of subversion, of a Communist takeover in France?

BONNET: You mean the question of communism in France?

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: That influence?

WILSON: Yes, particularly in France and Italy. They were taken as possible arenas of Communist takeover -- it didn't prove out that way.

BONNET: There was certainly a realization in the United States in the year '47 that the economic situation of France and Italy was especially bad. I don't mean that the Americans were completely reassured about the British reconstruction, but there were reports that came through the Congress and the committees of inquiry that concluded that the situation was worse in Italy and France because they had suffered fantastic destruction from the war,

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and had more difficulty climbing back to normalcy.

Was the Communist danger mentioned in that respect? Probably it was mentioned by both Frenchmen, and Americans. Maybe that contributed to reinforcing the incentives that I mentioned. Yet, I think that the main point was the strength of Russia, and the creation of the bank of satellites. The Russians said that it was only precaution security, but many people in the West and in your country thought that it was a threat of an invasion of Western Germany and also that there was a threat of the Russian Army going to the ocean.

WILSON: Yes -- walking very gently.

BONNET: It is difficult to weigh exactly all the influences now. But very early, the question of the strengths of a United Europe, associated with the United States, appealed to the American mind. Very early there was an enthusiasm in America for everything which seemed to show that the Western Europeans had decided to unite. Later, when President Truman was back in Independence, there were great deceptions in your

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country because the trend said, "The United Europe had slowed up, that it did not develop." But around the years '50-'52, to a man in President Truman's mandate, undoubtedly there was a great hope that gained more and more strength in the United States, more strength with the Schuman plan, and with what the world could mean to America. Also, I think Averell Harriman, when he was in Paris, was a very friendly person and somewhat optimistic about the reconstruction, especially in France. He was confident that we could certainly stop inflation and become a prosperous country again. From all those sources came news that created the feeling that America could have a strong ally not only in France, but in all Western Europe.

WILSON: Do you think perhaps that a United States of Europe can be achieved perhaps through fiat?

BONNET: Yes, I am strongly in favor of that, you know.

WILSON: Yes, but there are many problems that we did not face even 170 years ago.

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BONNET: No, I think that one could have done much better, but then that's another question.

WILSON: Yes. Did the Korean war slow down the American push for a United Europe, because of the necessity for rearming?

BONNET: No, it did not. I think it worked the other way, because it created a preoccupation immediately in the United States. It was a proof of the strength of character and decision of President Truman, in the way he had American troops in Korea. I remember all the difficulties, of course, and sometimes misunderstandings between 15 or 16 other countries interested in the way that the war did occur. Yet, I don't think while the attention was concentrated in the Far East that it weakened interest for Europe and for a United Europe. Of course, that interest has always been a little stronger in the East in the United States and on the Pacific Coast, and perhaps at that time the people on the Pacific Coast were looking for...

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WILSON: Yes, as they did before the Second World War.

BONNET: The barrier of protection of the United States.

WILSON: Yes. If I might ask just one more question. You had, in the fall of 1947, President Truman's decision to call Congress back and get through the interim aid, and you had the debates in Congress about passage of the Marshall plan, very much an administrative statement. This is all done at a time when the President would face, within a year, reelection, and there was not very much thinking that he would be reelected. Please describe your views and your activities at this time. Obviously you must have attempted to ascertain what a Republican policy regarding the Marshall plan might have been if the Republicans were elected, and what were your views of the possibilities?

BONNET: I shall tell you two things. First, at the beginning of '48, a crucial year for the President, he was very courageous because there was already a trend in Congress for reducing the foreign aid. That

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was the last time, of course, but the President was very courageous to insist upon obtaining the decisions which were not especially popular and it was dangerous for him who had to run at the end of the period. The Republicans who were strong in Congress, had the majority at that time and everybody thought that the trend of '46 would last throughout '48, and that the Republicans would win. If I had documents I could document that. It was undoubtedly a fact that maintaining his line without concessions to the opinion of the people who liked to spend less money.

Secondly, if I was uneasy in the case that President Truman would have been defeated, when I was in the United States, I did not deal with domestic policies.

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: Limiting that to the straight question of the carrying out of the Marshall plan, I think the Republicans would have been obliged to follow. Of course, John Foster Dulles would have been Secretary of State.

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WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: I think they would have been all right.

WILSON: He had been involved, of course, during the Truman administration.

BONNET: Oh, you cannot imagine. During all those years he was almost an official of the State Department. And he had had many conversations in New York and oftentimes in Washington. Perhaps they would have had some difficulty, but I don't think they could have departed, as far as the relations with Europe, and helped to do what was concerned. I don't think, at least that their leaders, would have departed from the...

WILSON: It was a bipartisan.

BONNET: They could not have departed from that line, because of their leaders, including John Foster Dulles. I don't think it could have been possible. Anyway, that did not happen.

WILSON: That's right. It's remarkable, what you've said,

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that President Truman did maintain this very strong advanced position at a time when he was not given much chance -- he didn't trim his sails, so to speak.

BONNET: No. I remember that night of November '48.

WILSON: Yes. You went out with him in May of '48 to Independence, or June, to attend a reunion of the 35th Division?

BONNET: Oh, yes. I went twice with President Truman to reunions, once in Kansas City, and then in St. Louis. The people of the Division still write to me sometimes.

In Kansas City we spent at least three days, and it was a great occasion. The President was charming, and very courageous, too, because it was about 100 degrees during the parade. I remained in my car, but he walked.

WILSON: They still have those parades each year going by his house.

BONNET: Yes, yes, of course.

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WILSON: Well, I very much thank you for this.

Do you have personal papers, recordings, covering this period. Did you retain your records?

BONNET: No. Do you mean documents?

WILSON: Yes.

BONNET: No. I have some, but what kind are you thinking of?

WILSON: The general documents, both of a personal nature and of an official nature dealing with your office. I'm just curious. I'm not aware of what the status of these matters is in France. In the United States, of course, the Truman Library and other institutions are very much involved in collecting the papers.

BONNET: It's the same thing in France. The papers are collected and are save in the Archives in Quai d'Orsay. I have some letters and some documents, but nothing that is extraordinary or secret.

WILSON: My hope as a historian is that some arrangement will be made for the deposit of those as I'm sure

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they will be valuable in the future. What plans do you have?

BONNET: Oh, there are a lot of mistakes which should be straightened out during all those periods.

WILSON: Yes. Well, thank you very much.

BONNET: If I was not too lazy maybe I should do that.

WILSON: Yes, you're still very active, though, I gather.

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