

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN M. BEGG

U.S. Department of State, 1941-53: Assistant Chief, Cultural Relations, 1941; Acting Chief, Motion Picture and Radio Division, 1944; Chief, International Information Division, 1944-46; Chief, International Motion Pictures Division, 1946; Assistant Director, Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, 1947; and Director, Private Enterprise Cooperative Staff, International Information Administration, 1948-53. Also served as consultant, U.S. Delegation, London Preparatory Commission, UNESCO, 1946; Vice-Chairman, U.S. Delegation to International High Frequency Broadcasting Conference, 1947; Special Assistant to U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands, 1949; and Deputy Examiner for Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service, 1952-53.

Washington, D.C.
July 11, 1975
by Richard D. McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library

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MCKINZIE: Mr. Begg, scholars are interested in why people go into Government service. Could you explain something about your education, your background, and why you decided to go into Government service in 1941?

BEGG: Well, my education happened to be rather diversified. I was educated in Central America, France, England, Spain, Switzerland, and other places because my family happened to

be there. In the future, my education was going to help me in the State Department, but at that time it was just a matter of where I was.

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I decided to go into Government in January, 1941. The war had already broken out in England and the situation was pretty desperate. I felt very strongly that we, in the United States, would get into the war. Therefore, I thought I might as well go down to Washington and get into Government or the Army or Navy before we got into the war.

When I went to Washington I wanted to get into the Navy. I applied to the Navy, and they said that they would take me and then asked me why I wanted to get into the Navy. I said, "Because we're going to get in the war sooner or later."

They said, "Mr. Begg, you've been misinformed or you don't read the papers. Haven't you seen about the destroyers that we've given to England? We're not going to get into this war. This is one we're going to stay out of."

I said, "Well, that may be true, but I would still like to get into the Navy because I have a different idea of the subject."

They asked me, "What do you want to do?"

I said, "I want to be an officer."

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They said, "Well, all right. You're going to have to go to officer's training school."

They asked me where I had been educated and I told them I was an honor graduate of Oxford and Harvard. They said, "Well, that seems pretty good. Now, Mr. Begg, where were you born?"

I told them that I happened to be born in Central America. My father was a doctor there, and I was born in Costa Rica.

They said, "Well, we're sorry but you can't become an officer of the U.S. Navy."

This is something that I hadn't known and most people don't know. Naval officers, just as the President, have to be born in the United States. I was very disappointed, but I left and didn't think anything more about it.

Somebody told me later that that law was abolished in 1942 so that people who had been born outside the United States could become naval officers.

I then went over to the State Department. I had a good letter of introduction from an Acting Secretary of State, Norman [Jezekiah] Davis, and I

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was asked what I wanted to do in the State Department. I told them, again, that I thought we would be getting into the war and I'd like to see what I could do in the fields of radio and motion pictures. I was told that the fields of motion pictures and radio was not part of the State Department's work. I left rather disappointedly, but I came back the following day. I was told that if I really was interested in radio I should go and see the man who was in charge of radio. I went to the radio division man and he asked me what I wanted to do and why. I said, "Mussolini and Hitler are sponsoring broadcasts to the world giving false impressions of our country, doing a great deal of damage to us while we have no means of counteracting that false information. I would like to see whether we could do something about it."

I was told, "Don't you realize that we broadcast radio messages to every Embassy in the world?" I was surprised at that but then I realized that we weren't talking on the same beam. He said, "Well, maybe we can find a job for you. How many words can

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you transmit in Morse code?"

When I told him that I couldn't transmit any, I didn't get the job.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Begg, please insert something about your work prior to coming to Washington in January, 1941.

BEGG: I had been working in private business, in the radio and motion picture fields. Most pertinent to what I was trying to do in the State Department probably was this work. In motion pictures I had been with Fox Movietone News and subsequently with Pathe News. I ended up editing the newsreels before they went out to the theaters.

In the radio field I had developed a program called "Pathe News of the Air," a recorded program of interviews throughout the world done by our cameramen but without benefit of photography; simply as a recording. That type of program was very simple to do some years later after the new techniques were developed in radio and recordings. In those days recordings had to be done on film.

MCKINZIE: How did you finally get the job in the State

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Department?

BEGG: I decided, as I watched developments in Europe and the war, that I better try again. I remembered that I was, I suppose, pretty well acquainted with Latin America and I heard that there was a Division of Cultural Relations that had been just recently formed in the State Department. This time I was given an interview by the Chief of the Cultural Relations Division, Mr. [Charles A.] Thompson. I told him that I would be glad to do anything I could to develop cultural relations, particularly in the fields of radio and motion pictures, with Latin America. Just about that time, I was also offered a job in private industry to direct international radio programs,

which is what I really had wanted to do in Government. I had to take it more slowly in Government, as one has to.

I was in the Cultural Relations Division and I stayed for several years. Our work eventually became important enough that the administration decided that the work, as far as radio and motion pictures were concerned, should be extended to other

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countries. There would be cooperation between the Office of War Information and the Office of Inter-American Affairs, which had then been set up outside of the State Department to carry on informational activities and cultural activities. The Cultural Relations Office of Radio and Motion Pictures was made into a division on its own. I was made Chief of the Division of Radio and Motion Pictures. Some eight months later, because we had got involved in various press and publications activities, the name of the division was changed to the International Information Division. It was from these last three divisions that I used to attend joint meetings once or twice a week with the Office of Inter-American Affairs and the Office of War Information. I represented the State Department in terms of policy and content insofar as it was necessary.

MCKINZIE: Was there generally agreement among those people about the content of programs leaving the country?

BEGG: There was general agreement on content but the

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great difficulty was in following up. You could give directives to the various producers, starting off with the group that we met with, who relayed them to the actual technicians and producers. What they actually did and said in their languages (after all they were broadcasting in 46 languages or more) was very difficult to follow up on. Whether the policies were always followed up or not was quite a question at that time. I found out later on, when I became Assistant Director in charge of media for the State Department's operations in radio, that some of the programs were not carrying out the instructions being given. It's very possible at that time, when the State Department was not directly concerned with production of programs, that it was also happening.

MCKINZIE: Did you, while you were in those three divisions that you have just mentioned, have direct contact with radio programs, radio stations, program directors, and motion picture producers?

BEGG: We didn't have direct contact except when they

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came to us and asked for guidance which they occasionally did. We didn't have any direct contact with the programs that were being produced by the Office of Inter-American Affairs and the Office of War Information. That was their responsibility. We did have, however, a rather special committee in the Cultural Relations Division which was continued during most of the war and after called the attestation for content committee for slide films, motion pictures and

subsequently radio programs. That attestation was given as a help to private industry because private industry, if they got an official attestation clearance of the State Department through our Cultural Relations Attestation Committee, did not have to pay any customs duties. Industry was very pleased to send their stuff into us for attestation.

MCKINZIE: Had there been a controversy over the export of a film like *The Grapes of Wrath*, which presented an aspect of American life about which many people weren't terribly proud? I believe that you did favor the export of that particular film.

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BEGG: It's not that I personally favored the export of that kind of film. It is a film which did show certain aspects of the American life, of course: the Okies, leaving their problems and crossing over to California. We did not think we wanted to use it in our program by sending it overseas, or taking parts of it and sending it overseas with our documentaries. We raised no objection to the industry sending it overseas, because we had no right to raise an objection. It was their product and we were not in the censorship business. As a matter of fact, they did send it to Chile. They may have sent it to other countries, but I remember a report from our Embassy in Chile saying that they had been quite upset that that kind of a film was to be shown in Chile, but they'd gone to the theaters and listened to the reaction to it and wanted to report that the reaction was very good. The people of the theaters pointed to the Okies as having sneakers and broken-down cars. It was obvious that these were the poor of the United States at that time, but it was also obvious to these Chileans who had never seen a car,

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broken down or not, and were barefooted, that they were very well off. They figured that the United States must be all right if the poor there had as much goods to use as the Okies had. You can never tell what the reactions are going to be, really, when you come right down to it. That was an example of not being able to tell. Of course, we thought we could tell other things, and did.

Since we're on the question of censorship -- we had another rather interesting case. The reason we got in on it was not because we wanted to censor; we always wanted industry to censor their own. *Reader's Digest* came to us because they could not get their Swedish edition into Sweden without the Government's help. It was published in Sweden but the original copy had to be flown in first. The only way it could be flown in was above the Nazi occupation of Norway, so it had to be flown in a very high-flying airplane. We had to arrange for that because we approved of the Swedish edition of *Reader's Digest* getting into Sweden. Because we were helping in it, we were in the position of having to more or

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less attest to its value, and the editors of *Reader's Digest* would send down their copy for us to look at. I found that by circulating this copy to various political area divisions, there was always comment on some phrase, or paragraph, of almost every article. It was impossible, therefore, to set ourselves up as censors. I changed the approach to it and said we do not wish comments on the individual articles, except a statement on whether or not any individual article is detrimental to the United States; not whether a paragraph or sentence is detrimental. That was the way it was

carried out. Whenever we felt strongly that an article would be detrimental we asked the *Reader's Digest* to eliminate that particular article. It was very seldom done, and I only remember one case: an article about Russia. At that time our negotiations with Russia were at such a point that it was better not to have that coming out in an American magazine in Sweden. That's about the only time that I can remember that we actually said "no" to something.

MCKINZIE: During and after the war you preferred, if

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censorship were necessary, that it be industry censorship rather than Governmental censorship?

BEGG: I have always preferred that industry be its own censor. I think it's fair to say that it probably came from my own background. I had worked on motion pictures, and in press, publications, and radio. I, at that time, felt rather strongly that the Government should not interfere with what we felt was all right.

MCKINZIE: Did you feel that industry before the war had done a good job in self-censorship?

BEGG: Censorship during war and in peacetime are very different. In wartime some censorship can be justified, as I have said, on the basis that it's detrimental to a country. It would have to be very obviously so in my estimation. In times of peace, censorship applies not to something that is detrimental to the country, but in terms of decency; whether the public will want to see it. Industry is best qualified to do that kind of censorship. I remember for instance in a case of my own when I was editing a newsreel story of the burning of the

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zeppelin, the *Hindenburg*. We had cameras there as it landed. Cameras took pictures of everything, passengers dropping out of the gondola on fire and catching on fire as they landed, running off screaming, dying. We had to issue the subject for the theaters because it had been all over; everybody knew about it. I saw no reason, though, to let the public see the horrible things that were happening. We censored, if you like, so that the story told the tragedy and the horror of it but didn't go into the things that would be hard to take if an audience was seeing it. The same sort of thing happened in another story that we covered in newsreels, the burning of the *Morro Castle* off the coast of New Jersey. We had cameramen out there covering that. Passengers were running to portholes trying to get out and they'd get stuck in the portholes. They would be burning to death with their heads sticking out and they'd be screaming as they died. We had those pictures, but there was no point in showing them to the public in my estimation. As an industry man I thought this would not be a good thing to do, and we didn't show

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them. Call it censorship if you like; it was really cutting out something that we didn't feel was contributing anything to life.

MCKINZIE: In wartime did you feel that industry had this same code of decency plus a concern for what might or might not be detrimental to the United States?

BEGG: I don't think that industry was in just as good a position to censor in terms of what might be detrimental to the United States. It might be a very good story -- just take the case of the *Reader's Digest* article. Industry saw it as a good story and it was, but from a point of view of the Government it was not. We didn't stop that article and couldn't have in the other editions of the *Reader's Digest*. We simply could say to them, "We are taking this article out because we don't think it should be in there, particularly for Sweden." Now after that, if they wanted to, they could have eliminated that article. They didn't eliminate it from the American edition because we had it in that, but they may have

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eliminated it from other editions because their own people in those countries may have told them that they didn't want it.

MCKINZIE: How did you get involved with radio people in the information program?

BEGG: We used to get a number of radio programs from private industry which we sent abroad for use to our Embassies and USIS [United States Information Service] officers. Those programs were primarily educational. In those days there were several stations that were concentrated on educational programs. We used their programs a great deal and subsequently developed some of our own, such as the teaching of English, which were very successful, particularly in Latin American countries. Whenever we found that there were programs that would be of interest we tried to get them for broadcasting overseas. Of course, it was only for broadcasting overseas. By law, we couldn't broadcast domestically.

Another way of getting in touch with the radio people was by pulling into our operations people who

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had been in the radio business. I remember when I was in the International Information Division and was trying to get the State Department more and more interested in international radio, I got Mr. [David] Sarnoff, then head of the RCA [Radio Corporation of America] and NBC [National Broadcasting Company], to let me have his Chief of Educational Radio Programs, Mr. Sterling Fisher. He came down to our office in Washington to try and help. He knew where educational radio programs were in the industry and through him we were able to get them, along with many ideas as to what could be done with radio. He, of course, was given a Government salary and whether he did or did not get the difference between his original salary in NBC and his salary in the State Department, that was a matter for Mr. Sarnoff to decide and I don't know how it was decided. But he did come down. He was a very useful man. So there were two ways of operating with radio people: personally, and in terms of information about programs.

MCKINZIE: You developed a belief that the representation

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of the United States abroad is more than a matter of sending a person gifted in matters of politics or economics. He must also be a diplomat for the American people and American culture. You sent a memorandum in 1943 to Harley Notter, who was in the Planning Division of the State

Department, in which you suggested a radical reorganization of the Department after the war which might bring into operation this cultural component. Could you elaborate on that?

BEGG: Well, let me start off with where I got the idea. I got the idea for doing it based on various concepts. One was in history; when I was in the University of Oxford I graduated in so-called "modern history." By the way, modern history at Oxford at that time ended after the Napoleonic wars; so it wasn't very modern, but I had lived through a good deal of history since then. It seemed to me that in the early days, contacts between countries were between the kings, emperors or later on Presidents of the country; more so in the days of the kings and emperors where they would arrange for marriages as for

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relationships between countries. When we, as a country, became independent, it was again the ruling groups that had the contacts, but during this last war, radio, motion pictures, newspapers, and fast communication had developed an interest in the people; they wanted to participate. This was democracy, in my mind, in international relations. The people should know about other people; who they were, how they lived, what they wanted. If those people, in turn, understood better how we lived in the United States, they might support things on behalf of us that their leaders might or might not want to develop. It was inevitable, in my mind, that we should have people involved in international relations. After I wrote that memorandum to Harley Notter, it was shown that people wanted to get involved in international relations. We started the People to People program. There we had some forty to fifty national committees in all facets of American life developing projects and contacts with people overseas, whether it was with town affiliation or letter writing or sending a "Hope" ship to teach people how we do things in

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the medical field here. All of this was proven years later, after the war. I was thinking about it during the war. I sent it to Harley Notter because he was the key man in a group that was supposed to develop plans for the State Department to carry out after the war.

MCKINZIE: Was there a sense of optimism about the possible outcome of these proposals?

BEGG: If I had been really optimistic that they would be carried out I don't think I would have put them down on paper. I wanted them to be on paper so they could be brought up again and again in the next few years. Whether or not the paper was read by anybody during the next few years when some things were done along the line suggested, I don't know. If I'd been really optimistic I think I would have just talked about it and said, "Well, it's going to happen; I'm optimistic about this."

MCKINZIE: Why did they create the International Information

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Division in 1944? You've mentioned that it went through three metamorphic changes.

BEGG: The International Information Division was created because I found that more and more the State Department was being called on to give ideas and policy guidance to the other

Government agencies, particularly the Office of Inter-American Affairs and the Office of War Information. This was not only in the fields of radio and motion pictures, but also press and publications. I felt that we should have, in the State Department, some specific division where this kind of policy could be evolved. After checking it out with the Geographic Division we could be the funnel, for channeling ideas to groups that were actively engaged in using those media. We were using them in a minor way, some educational and cultural exchanges; but not in the active grace that the Office of War Information and the Voice of America were. Interestingly enough, because that division

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was created it became the focal point for the transfer, by executive order of President Truman, of many of the activities of the Office of War Information and CIA to the State Department. Had there not been that division I doubt whether it would have been as easy to have transferred those activities. Having a division where we had had contact with those operations, we knew about them. It was just really more or less a matter of pulling over into the State Department the technical and administrative work of developing and producing programs. This would be used throughout the world on the new basis; closer to the work of the State Department itself. That division played an important role in the ultimate setting up of the OIC [Office of International Conferences]. That office was more or less the key for the future development of a much bigger office, the Office of International Information and Cultural Exchange. Mr. [William] Benton, subsequently Senator Benton, became the first director and in that office assumed the

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responsibilities which were taken over from the OWI and CIAA. In doing so they formed an Office of Media Operations in which there was a specific division of radio, another for motion pictures, and another one for press and publication. It operated under the terms of the executive order of President Truman.

MCKINZIE: How sympathetic were political and geographic desk officers to the information program after you assumed operational responsibilities; after OWI and CIAA had ceased their wartime operations?

BEGG: That's a good question and one that can only be answered by saying that it depended so much on the individual. If the individual thought it was good we thought he was a pretty good individual. If he didn't think it was worthwhile we wondered why and thought that possibly he had not been properly oriented on the benefits of such an operation.

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We found that that feeling against the operations of information was fairly prevalent amongst the Foreign Service officers, probably because they really didn't understand what it was doing. Over the years, as it has gone ahead, they have come to realize that it is a very important part of operations and it can be used to their benefit; turning to the information officers overseas for the writing of speeches, the stopping of certain rumors, and all the things that an information program can do. They found that it was helpful to the total picture of diplomatic relations overseas.

MCKINZIE: At the time these organizational matters were in such flux, you were appointed the alternate representative to a committee for strengthening democratic processes, a part of the Far Eastern Commission. Did you have any influence on that committee

BEGG: I doubt whether I had much influence in that

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committee. I sat in, I gave some ideas; but it was a pretty strong committee of its kind and they had their own ideas. I don't remember having had any specific influence on it. I was interested in it, I was glad to serve on it; but that's about all I remember of the committee.

MCKINZIE: Did that have anything to do with your appointment to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Economic and Social Council

BEGG: I don't think it had much to do with it. My appointment to that was, I think, based on the fact that I was one of the few people in the State Department who had had experience both in cultural relations (where I had been Assistant Chief of the Cultural Relations Division) and in the media division (where I had created Radio and Motion Pictures Operation Division and the International Information Division). When they wanted to have a delegate to that preliminary conference for the creating of UNESCO [United

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Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization] who knew media, I was chosen. As a matter of fact, after I had been named to that position, the person who was going to handle the humanities side of the UNESCO operations was unable to attend. I was induced to take that job on as well. I can't tell why it was. Possibly my education had given me a chance to know something about the humanities, but not as much as the person who had dropped out.

MCKINZIE: After this reorganization period, you went off to Europe to establish information offices in the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, and Sweden. Would you narrate some of your experiences on those organizational trips?

BEGG: I was instructed to go off by the State Department. At that time the actual operation of an international information and cultural program had been taken over by the State Department. Several of us so-called "senior officers" in this

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type of work were assigned to go overseas and pick up the remnants of the Office of War Information and try to amalgamate them into the everyday work of the Embassies, as a State Department operation. I remember that another fellow also was selected for it, a senior officer Charles Hulten. Charles Hulten was appointed to go down through the Balkans and meet me in Czechoslovakia. I was assigned to develop this type of operation in the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Poland and Czechoslovakia. I had a very interesting time and Charles Hulten and I met in Czechoslovakia. We exchanged ideas and when we got home we sent out our instructions to the fields. This was just merely for organizational purposes, but again, we came across people in the foreign Service who were not anxious to have the Department set up offices for informational

activities. This was true in the Netherlands where the Ambassador there was definitely against setting up what they now call a USIS office there. Subsequently he became more agreeable toward

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the idea, but when I was there he was not. In other places we found that ambassadors had not yet been appointed. In Norway I arrived before they had appointed a new ambassador there. They were very interested in how this should be operated because, after all, Norway had been an occupied country. The ambassador in Poland was there but, unfortunately, was neither for nor against the USIS. He was suffering very badly from a physical disability and was not able to devote the time that I would have liked to have seen an ambassador devote to the development of a new office. It was set up nevertheless and it worked pretty well.

As soon as we would arrive in a place, the newspapers would get hold of the story and it would be known that we were there. Newspaper correspondents would come round and ask us all kinds of questions, many of which we couldn't or wouldn't answer. Others were quite interesting. In Norway, for instance, I was immediately asked why it was

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that the United States was not sending over new cars, building materials and all kinds of goods to Norway. Didn't the United States realize that Norway had been occupied by the enemy for several years?

My answer was, "Certainly, certainly we knew it. We are doing all we can for you, but we are not sending over new cars because we, ourselves, don't have new cars. I was fortunate to be able to buy a second hand car in the United States before I left. I was not able to get any lumber for building a barn on my farm because it was going to foreign countries."

"But we haven't seen any of it here," they said.

I said, "Perhaps not, but remember, the United States is sending materials to all over the world."
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Well, why can't you buy it in other places?"

"Because," I said, "we don't have that kind of money. We are working very hard." I remember

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using the words, "Dollars don't grow on trees in the United States anymore than they do here." I said, "I want to say something. It may be a little strong saying this, but you here in Norway forget that the United States is still, in many cases, using three shifts in factories to work for materials to come overseas, whereas you here in Norway only have one shift, I've noticed." They admitted that this was true and I think it had a salutary effect on a lot of the people. They suddenly realized that the United States was not there just to serve this one country. The same thing would happen in other countries. They feel their country was most important.

In Czechoslovakia they were talking about going Communist. I was talking to a group there about the United States. They said that they were going to change things in their own country and would be closer to the United States because they were going to have more democracy. I said, "Well, as long as you don't vote Communist you probably

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will. We'd be delighted to work with you."

They said, "Oh, no but we're going to vote Communist because then we can become more democratic. We will have more land from the big landholders and the wealth will be spread around a little more. We'll be able to work more closely with the democracies of your part of the world." I suggested that they might not be able to if the Communists did come in and take over the power. They assured me that this would never happen in Czechoslovakia; they would vote Communist but would still hold the power.

MCKINZIE: In the case of the Netherlands, Ambassador Stanley Hornbeck said something to the effect that he didn't believe the program was an integral part of the diplomat's work.

BEGG: It was rather a touchy situation, of course, because he was the ambassador. Fortunately for me, I was not directly responsible to him for anything I did. I had to work under the jurisdiction

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of the Ambassador but I had been sent by the State Department to do a specific job. An instruction had been sent to the Ambassador saying that he should cooperate with me in doing this job or that I should cooperate with him; we would work together on it. The fact that he didn't was unfortunate, but we were able to get the offices that had been used by the OWI for our new offices and get a man sent out by the State Department to head up our new USIS office. I must say that it was rather difficult for the man who took over at that time, Colter Hyler. His first few months, even perhaps a year of operations, were not very happy for him.

MCKINZIE: Do you remember your first contact with Mr. Hornbeck?

BEGG: My first contact with Mr. Hornbeck was when he was in the Department of State. He was head of the Far Eastern Division, and I used to have to

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clear things with him for our policy meetings if it affected the Far East. I used to get on quite well with him at that time, but he was a man brought up in the tradition of the old State Department. I believe that carried over into his job as an ambassador.

MCKINZIE: To what groups did you aim the postwar information program of the United States?

BEGG: I think I should refer back to the People to People program, where we had some 40 to 50 different types of committees: medical, labor, industry, children, school children, students, etc.

We aimed as much as possible, across the board, and that's the way I think it should be. We tried to get the universities to affiliate with one another to exchange professors and students. We got a special pamphlet written on that for them to do so. The program was aimed not only to individuals with specific interests, but to the public who might be coming as visitors to the

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United States. "Why don't you come to the United States and have a look-see at us?"

All the information activities that I was associated with, and I think this is true of others, were aimed at no specific higher income groups. It was across the board.

MCKINZIE: There is a question about whether the informational activities, 1947 thru 1952, could be called "pro-American" or "anti-Communist." Is there a substantial difference?

BEGG: I think there is. I would say that they were "pro-American." They were only "anti-Communist" in the sense that we tried to counteract false statements or impressions, that the Russians or Communists were trying to develop, of the United States. A full and fair picture, it was called at that time. Whether we got it by being anti-Communist or not, it was a full and fair picture that we tried to put out.

MCKINZIE: In 1947 you attended something called the

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High Frequency Conference which had to do with shortwave radio. Why would shortwave radio have been so important in 1947?

BEGG: Shortwave was something that had proven itself during the war and in the several years after the war. It was a marvelous means of communication between nations for informational activities, which we were carrying on and for propaganda activities, which other groups may have been carrying on. Shortwave radio was something that everybody wanted, but if the United States was using some wave and another country wanted to use that same wave because it was a good shortwave, there would be no program at all. It was inevitable that the countries of the world would get together to try and divide up the available wave lengths. Each one would have his channel of communication to the rest of the world. Without that it would have been a terrible mess. Interestingly enough, at that meeting more nations were represented than there were in the United Nations; more nations than had

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ever been represented in any international gathering. It was vital to every nation that they should have such shortwave rules. Amongst other things, they created an office in Switzerland to continue, in between these annual meetings, the rules that had been laid down. Dividing up the air was a very difficult operation. Some stations were already broadcasting and using certain wave lengths. You had to tell that country that they weren't to use it anymore, because Peru, Chile, the United States, or Russia wanted to use it and would use it on the basis of agreement. We tried to divide it up as fairly as possible.

MCKINZIE: Was there any bloc voting regarding the allocation of the wave length?

BEGG: In every international conference that I've known about there's been some bloc voting. Naturally there were certain groups that would get together and say, "If you vote for me or so much of this and that type of wave length,

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I'll vote for you to have more." There was a group that was trying to get a lot of the wave lengths away from the United States. They got together and agreed to vote for it on the basis that each of them would have so much of the United States' wave length. It would have left us with very little in comparison to the others. That had to be stopped, and then finally an agreement was made.

MCKINZIE: I understand that because of your knowledge of Spanish you came into prior knowledge of that?

BEGG: Yes. I was mistaken by one country's chief of delegation as being the chief of delegation of Costa Rica, because I was speaking to him in Spanish. He told me about this plan that they had; that they had written a speech and wanted me to deliver it. I laughed and said, "I can't deliver it. I'm Vice-Chairman of the American delegation."

He said quite rightly, "Yes, I know. You

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told me you were an American but we're all American."

I said, "Yes, but I'm a North American."

"Oh, you're a North American. You mean from the United States?"

I said, "Yes."

"Oh," he said, "now that you know what's in it, you might as well deliver it anyway."

Of course, I didn't, but it was delivered and we did know beforehand. We had suspicions of what was going to happen.

MCKINZIE: In 1948 the budget for the State Department was cut drastically and it ruined many of the programs. How was your work affected by that cut, and did it affect your superiors and their attitudes?

BEGG: Those people in higher positions that were for an information program were, naturally, very upset by these cuts. Those who were of the old line, feeling that the State Department should be

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primarily a diplomatic operation, didn't feel so badly. By and large we had a good deal of support. We got support from the hearings, Senators, people from overseas, and ambassadors who said it was very important to have. There were many instances of this type of appeal for money. In spite of that we were cut very badly. We had to fire hundreds of people from their jobs overseas, because it was in the millions that we were cut. Particularly the media operations were cut, press, radio, and motion pictures. We had to dismantle some of the organizations that we had in the State Department as well as overseas. The radio division, the motion picture division and the present publication division of the State Department were done away with. I, as Assistant Director in charge of media, was very upset by this. I did my best to see what could be done to get private industry to step in; not to give us money, but to do the job on their own. In fact, I wrote a memorandum on that subject. I also decided that I should go back to the idea that

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people should speak to people; as well as government to government, and kings to kings and so forth. I was wondering how this could be set up. I remember one time (this is just a little story of how things start), I was in an office with a secretary, which was about all that was left of the organization I had been head of. A man came to the "Oh, I want to get some guidance from the State Department on what countries need more food, particularly in Europe." I asked him where he was from and he said he was from the CARE [Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere] organization. I said that I had just returned from Europe and that, from the information that I had, food was not a real necessity in European countries now. I said there was one thing that they really needed; food for thought in the form of books. I believe that that was the origin of the CARE book program. We helped a great deal

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on it. More and more we turned to the public for operating a People to People program in terms of letter writing, of university exchanges and affiliations. I believe there's a list of some 40 or 50 different operations that we developed. We also developed an organization to carry through with them, the Private Cooperation Division that I organized and headed up.

MCKINZIE: This was done at pretty much your own initiative?

BEGG: Most of that work on the Private Cooperation was done on my own initiative and it turned out to be very good. During President Eisenhower's time he decided that he would like to have it known as President Eisenhower's People to People Program. We set up committees, I went to operate in each field, and the President got so interested in it that he agreed to write a letter to individual people to head up committees. We, though it wasn't commonly known, wrote letters, suggested the people,

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and sent the letters into the White House. He would or would not sign them or might have a suggestion of his own. Most of the time he would sign. This was very helpful to us. It's rather interesting, with all the trouble that Nixon has had, that I just found something here that in 1960, the then Vice President sent a greeting to the People to People Committee chairman that President Eisenhower had asked to serve. When they all came into Washington to develop a program which would have their support, Nixon sent them a special message from the President

supporting it. It's interesting because he says, "People to People has become a by-word to millions of Americans whose genuine interest in their world neighbors has been expressed in direct and dramatic contact with peoples of other countries." That sums up pretty well what I had in mind. That's the point that was in back of the People to People program.

MCKINZIE: Just prior to this Private Enterprise Cooperation

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staff you did undertake one additional special mission in the Netherlands. As I understand it, it was aid to the information programs at a time when the United States was having some difficulties over the Indonesian question. Could you discuss your mission and how you went about achieving it?

BEGG: I was sent, accompanied by my wife, to be with the Ambassador who was going to the Netherlands. It was a situation which concerned us a good deal. The people of Holland, as well as the people in their government, were very much against the United States, feeling that we had been the cause of their losing Indonesia through a vote in the United Nations. This idea was being not only developed in Holland, but was being promoted by other countries against the United States. We, as an information outfit, were trying to counteract this wrong information. We did not wish to take Indonesia away from the Netherlands. We did happen to vote for

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independence in the United Nations committee, not only for Indonesia, but for other countries that became independent. It was not aimed at the Netherlands. We had to do something to counteract that. The feeling against the United States was being expressed against the Ambassador and the Embassy and we wanted to stop that before it got too far. I spent three months in the Netherlands working with the Ambassador. I'm glad to say that at the end of my stay there, we had been able to alter the opinion of the Government and people.

MCKINZIE: In order to work this closely with the new Ambassador, did you have some special relationships with him or did you work through the information office that was already a part of the structure?

BEGG: We did both. We did have a special relationship with the Ambassador because he was the man representing the United States over there. What he said and did was very important. One of the

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first things that we did that proved to be very beneficial was to accompany the Ambassador on the ship to the Netherlands. Since my wife was a native of the Netherlands, we were able to prepare for the Ambassador a speech in Dutch, which he delivered on his arrival in the Netherlands. Being the first time an American Ambassador had ever spoken Dutch, this made a great impression. We got out newspaper articles on that point and the newsreels covered it as he made this speech to the people gathered to greet him. When the newsreels came around and wanted a few words with the Ambassador, we said, "Repeat your speech." He repeated his speech and it appeared in all the theaters in the Netherlands. I went to the theater on several

occasions to listen to it and it had a very good affect on the people. He immediately became a friend of theirs because he spoke their language. That was one way of showing that Americans were interested in the Dutch.

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MCKINZIE: Beyond the expression of interest in the Dutch there were some hard substantive issues there. The Dutch were, in fact, losing a great deal of potential and real wealth. They must have talked about the importance of that to you.

BEGG: Well, they would. It was a difficult question to answer because they were losing a good deal, but so were other countries. That fact didn't affect them very much, please or displease them, so I took another attitude. I said that Americans felt that the Dutch were a great nation and had a great future in the field in which they were really good; the industrial field. I suggested that they get American industry to set up their factories in Amsterdam and Rotterdam and make it a center. It could be a crossroads for industry, going back and forth through Holland to the rest of Europe from the United States. We would do all we could to urge American industry to do that. This pleased them and they did, in fact,

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get a lot of business out of that suggestion. I remember one occasion when the minister of economics (or industry) was sitting next to me at a dinner party. He suggested that the Americans were not really very friendly because they weren't buying much of the chocolate that the Netherlands depended on for their exchange. I expressed the idea that they liked the chocolate very much, but they didn't like the way it was packaged. The Dutch, now that they were getting into a new field of competition, should study American ideas on packaging. After I had explained it fairly carefully he did take the idea to heart. Subsequently Dutch chocolate has been sold very extensively in the United States. It was a result of one of those suggestions.

MCKINZIE: You said earlier that they ought to put chocolate in wooden shoes and tie bows around it. Is that right?

BEGG: Yes. This shocked them because they said,

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"We've been trying to get away from the idea of wooden shoes all our lives; we can't start it with chocolate."

I said, "If you want to sell chocolate put them in tins with windmills."

"Windmills! We only have a few left."

"Well, put them on tins and put the chocolates in." They did and they were very successful as a result, and for other reasons.

MCKINZIE: You mentioned there were some fifty-odd areas in which the Department cooperated with private industry and other organizations of the Government. Aside from the CARE "food for thought" thing, which of those are you most proud?

BEGG: There were so many of these opportunities and they all played a part. It's like playing favorites with children; it is pretty hard to say which one. I was very, very keen about the town affiliation program. There was a great salute, from Boston to Rome, and there was one very

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interesting affiliation between Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, where Tito was born, and a city in New Jersey. This one irritated the Russians very much because Dubrovnik celebrated with all kinds of American dances, exhibits and so forth, and were very pleased at what the counterparts were doing. This city affiliation had a great deal of interest for many people. San Diego was affiliated, I believe, with Osaka. Osaka paid for a very beautiful fountain in San Diego, and the Mayor of San Diego was invited to go to Osaka.

Going with that were affiliations between universities. We had some 30 or 40 universities affiliating exchange students and professors. Temple University and Hamburg University was an outstanding case of that kind of affiliation.

Then, there was the *Good Ship Hope*. We started off with one head of the People to People Medical Committee. He was a very well-known man, head of the American Medical Association, but he didn't have the feeling for what we had in mind in terms of

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exchanges and information on medicine. He felt that it could be done just in a university, like it had been done in the past. We were grasping for something new. I remember that one time I was having dinner at a party in Washington. After dinner somebody said, "You know, something happened today that I think would interest you."

I said, "What was it?" I turned to Captain Holman who was then on the staff of the Chiefs of Staff.

He said, "At the meeting this morning we were putting into mothballs two baby flattops and two hospital ships. It seems a shame that they should be put into mothballs. Can't you think of some idea for these two items? The Government will be glad to turn them over, I'm sure, if it were for something useful."

I thought about it for a while and I came up with an idea for the hospital ship. It ultimately turned out to be the *Hope* hospital ship, going to other countries and helping them

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to learn how to take care of their health and protect themselves. I also thought that industry could use one of these flattops as a floating exhibit, to go to other countries with American goods to sell. After some difficulties we were able to get the *Hope* ship idea going. I had trouble in the State Department getting wholehearted support of it. There were some old timers, even though

they were friends of mine, who didn't think it would do any good; it might cause trouble going to overseas countries. Others supported it. I won't mention names, but there were some very important people in the State Department against it.

We tried to get industry to back the flattop idea. I went to New York, I went to industrial firms, and they thought that it wouldn't work. The chief obstacle to it was that in some of the places where they'd like to see such a flattop exhibit, it couldn't get into the harbor. Finally, the plan died, but I think this is worth noting;

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the Japanese knew that we were doing this. They took one of their little flattops and did exactly what we had recommended a year before; sent it to all up and down South America and to Europe. They increased their commerce terrifically and they had no problem getting into harbors. They anchored outside the harbor, sent little boats in and out for the people, and brought them aboard. In that particular case, the People to People program that might have been very good and useful to industry was dropped by industry.

MCKINZIE: I understand that you are one of the instigators, if not the instigator, of the program of Mediterranean lights on U.S. naval vessels docked in foreign ports.

BEGG: Yes, that's quite an interesting story. It was during one of my trips to Europe. I was on one of the panels for the board of examiners of the Foreign Service, examining people for transfers into Foreign Service for class one, two, three,

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and four. I was coming home and I noted that in Cannes there were great numbers of American battleships lined up. The sailors were on shore in the evening and had girlfriends. The girlfriends weren't too happy; they'd look out at these menacing ships. The war had just been over and to them battleships meant war. I didn't feel happy about it and I'm sure the sailors and their girlfriends were not feeling happy. The next night I was in Monte Carlo and in the harbor was somebody's yacht. For all I know it may have been Onassis' or somebody else's. It had electric light bulbs going from bow to stern and connecting with the two masts and it looked so festive and bright. You know perfectly well that there was no danger of war and that kind of thing. When I came home to Washington, I called in the man who was the liaison between the Navy and the State Department and suggested to him that the Navy, could help. The Navy, in this People to People program, had done a very fine job. They carried books overseas and developed a program of their own called the Naval People to People Program (so did the Army). I asked them why they didn't put lights on the ships. I explained that the lights would be festive and people would look out at sea and say, "These people aren't bad. They don't want war or they wouldn't have these lights on."

A few months later, the liaison man telephoned me and said, "You'll be interested to hear, Mr. Begg, that the Admiral sent an order out to all ships at sea that whenever they were in a foreign port to put up lights from stern to bow and on their mastheads, to be called Mediterranean lights." They are still called Mediterranean lights in the Navy and it is still a custom. I really was quite pleased with that one.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Begg, you were, by 1948-1949, the leading expert in the State Department on matters of information. Why did you not become a Foreign Service officer and make that a career?

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BEGG: There were two reasons. The first is that I thought I had spent too many years in private industry and that I would be older than the other people in whose class I would be. Subsequently, I found out that I didn't have to wait for the age problem to catch up with me; that I might have been put into Foreign Service at a fairly high rank. That was when I served with the foreign Service men in the examining panel. All of them that were in the State Department and the Foreign Service subsequently became Ambassadors. They were very keen to transfer me because we were examining for class 1. I didn't want to. At that time I'd had what I figured was enough of the State Department attitude which some, and I'm glad to say it's only a few, Ambassadors have. They control and give orders that may be against what a junior officer feels. It's alright for him to be told what to do but he should be able to express himself. I was not one of those people who fail to express himself. I always took the attitude

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in the State Department that if they don't want me they can let me go, because I can make much more money out of Government than I can in. I am just suggesting this idea and if they like it, okay; if they don't, okay. I found out while I was in the State Department, and it's true of the Foreign Service too, that if you abide by the rules you seem to get along better than if you come up with new ideas and oppose what has been a "sacred dogma." In fact, there was a fairly good article in my estimation written recently about that very subject in the *Foreign Service Journal*. The title of it is amusing, "It Hurts to be an Avis." It shows that people who are number two people, the best of the number two people, seldom get to be the number one person. There were so many examples of that that I had seen that I didn't join the Foreign Service. Nobody really tried to persuade me, but there was the idea that more people in the information offices should join the Foreign Service. Towards the end of my career in

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the State Department I found that I had reached as far as I was going to go. One reason I didn't join the Foreign Service was because of these acts. Political appointees come into the picture very much, too. I didn't want to be sent as a senior foreign Service officer to some country for which I had very little interest. I would like to go to a country where I did have an interest. In fact, I had been (before the information officers became Foreign Service officers) offered the job of being a public affairs officer in two countries. In one country I gave as a reason, and it was a true reason, that I didn't like the people of the country or their actions. I couldn't do a good job pretending that I was their friend. If you're a Foreign Service officer you can't say that; you just simply go. On the other hand, I think the Foreign Service is a very good service and has some excellent people in it. It's becoming better and better. I found that out when I was serving on their examining

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panel. I thought that the examiners gave a very good examination and that the people they selected were very good. However, many of the people that failed in that examination were taken into the Foreign Service at that time when they were demanding a great increase in the number of Foreign Service officers. This was called the "Ristonization era." On the Riston program they took in some 27 or 30 percent of the people that had failed our examination. I was not too happy about the Foreign Service when that happened.

MCKINZIE: You felt that there was not a great deal of future for yourself in remaining in the Government or in the Foreign Service?

BEGG: That's correct. I found that out after I had done what I thought was important; creating the People to People program and many others. Even the organization that was to back it, called the Office of Private Cooperation, had become a temptation to other people. It had become important

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enough that it could be offered to people as a political plum. On two successive occasions I had a political appointee put in over me. This was very disappointing, and when I saw that it was going to happen again, I decided that 20 years in the Government was enough. I had to get back into private industry.

One of the reasons I didn't stay on, too, was I had hoped that I would get a high position when one came open in the State Department. Unfortunately, I didn't; political appointees were twice put in over me. My hopes had been raised at the time when the Civil Service set up what they called a career executive roster. People were asked to fill out special forms because they had been selected for this special career executive roster and when an opening came they would be put in. As far as I know, I don't believe I ever was considered for any of the jobs. Being in the career executive roster meant nothing to me and I realized that I would get nowhere further.

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Either another political appointee or possibly a Foreign Service officer would be put in.

MCKINZIE: Could you talk about how the life of this agency and your own operations changed after the Eisenhower election in 1952, when John Foster Dulles took over the Department of State?

BEGG: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, President Eisenhower became very interested in the People to People program. As a matter of fact, he was very willing to support the creation of the People to People Foundation. He became honorary chairman and people whom he appointed became officers. Charles E. Wilson became president of the People to People Foundation. It showed that he had a continuing interest in it and I would say that under President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles the program had a good deal of support from President Eisenhower. Mr. Dulles was too occupied with his job as Secretary of State to take too much interest in it. I have been told, I don't know

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whether it's true or not, that I had been considered to be more of an Acheson man. A lot of the work of starting these things had been done during the Acheson and Truman era. Mr. Acheson and the President, at that time, were supporting information activities, but that was a curious thing in politics. There may have been some feeling about it, I don't know. I've always been very grateful to President Truman for an action he took when he had a man who, supported by some group, wanted my job in the State Department. The man had given reasons why he should be appointed to the job (this was before the days when political appointees were put in over me) pointing out certain things. The President looked at these and felt that they were not enough to justify any such appointment. He apparently wrote on the memorandum that had been sent to him that "this man (meaning me) appears to be doing a good job. Let him stay."

MCKINZIE: As time passed a number of people at a

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higher rank in the Department exercised a kind of general supervision, a policy control over your office. I wonder if you might comment on their attitudes, beginning with Mr. Benton?

BEGG: Mr. Benton, who was brought into the Department, I found to be a man who had great ideas. He was very willing to cooperate. I had known him slightly in private industry and had worked with him on projects for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Mr. Benton got the idea of information activities very well assimilated into his whole being. He would think in terms of informational activities. He would send memos to me constantly and call me in to discuss things. It was he who appointed me to be Assistant Director in Charge of Media, because he had known my operations not only in the State Department, but in private industry. I got on very well with Senator Benton. I thought he did a good job. He had a really hard time trying to fight for

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funds and failed, but he went on to be a Senator, so that was something. One of his assistants was Mr. Stone. I never did get along very well with him. He seemed to be unenthusiastic about the type of operations that I was carrying on and my ideas, but that may have been just a personal feeling on his side.

MCKINZIE: Would it be your opinion then that Mr. Benton was the most enthusiastic?

BEGG: He was probably the most enthusiastic and the most energetic, though Ed Barrett, who came along afterwards, was also very good. I was also glad to see Mr. [George] Allen come in. There is a very strange thing which I once told Mr. Allen. I said, "When you were appointed by the President to be Assistant Secretary in Charge of Information Activities, weren't you a little bit surprised?" He never was surprised at anything. Mr. Allen said, "Why?" I said, "I'll tell you."

I said, "You remember a committee that you

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served on with me that I created years ago of State and Foreign Service officers? One was Allen and there was another one, two Department of State officers. The Foreign Service officer was this young man called George Allen and I got him on the committee when I was in Cultural

Relations Division and again when I was in the Chief of International Information Division and got him to express ideas on what should be done in policies that should be carried out. But I had a reason for doing it. I thought that if he, an up and coming Foreign Service officer would get to know what we were doing, he would then influence other Foreign Service officers to be on our side, which is exactly what he did. He went up very fast and rapidly in the Foreign Service. He became Ambassador to Iran and when they were looking for a new man to appoint in place of Benton, I suggested that possibly the time had come to get a Foreign Service officer into it. And they -- that is, the people who were most interested in getting

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people appointed -- said, "But what would he [A11en] know about information activities?"

Well, I assured them that he knew plenty about information activities and I got somebody else to assure them the same way. A fellow who had worked for me -- Noel Macy, and there are others - - said that he would be very good.

He was appointed as the Assistant Secretary in Charge of Information Activities. He was the first foreign Service officer to join the program. I think it helped the entire information program as a whole to have him in there. He could influence other foreign Service officers to support us.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Begg, was the experience of Government service worth the personal cost?

BEGG: Yes, very much so. I had always felt, even in private industry, that I wanted to do something which had to do with information internationally. I started off thinking I was going to be a lawyer.

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I didn't go on with that. I then thought of being an international banker and was offered a very good job in the banking field. That didn't satisfy me because it didn't get me into what I got in Government through these information programs: contact with the people and helping the world's people to understand one another. I made educational films, one for Eastman, and was interested in that. But that only was limited in its scope. I went into the International Telephone Company because that was international. I found out that that was really a business and a technical thing that had nothing to do with what I was looking for. Then I produced motion pictures. That was getting me closer to it. When sound started I realized that this is where Mr. McDonald (then Prime Minister of England) and the President of the United States can speak from a motion picture theater to the world. All they need do is to be put on film. I got immediately into Fox Movietone News, which was doing these

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things. I know I was the first person to record in sound and pictures a woman, and that was Lady Astor.

I have in my library many, many books of people that I brought into the studios, at Fox and later on at Pathe, to make sound pictures. Admiral Byrd, for instance, came in and made a sound picture after he'd been down to the South Pole. Clarence Darrow came in and I got him to make a

sound picture. Here I was getting closer to what I wanted to do in life. Many of them came in; all the leading people of that time. I could call them up and say, "Would you like to say something to this country? We could do it from film." I'd work with them, get to know them; authors like Boothe Tarkington and others who were rather interesting. When I recorded Boothe Tarkington I went up to his residence. I always, in a case like that, had one or two of the author's books ready for him to autograph. One of them already had "Booke Tarkington"

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inscribed at the top. I gave it to him to sign and he said, "Who's this?"

I said, "Well, it seems to read 'Boothe Tarkington.' Is that your signature or has somebody just written it in and pretended it's yours?"

He looked at it and said, "No, that is my signature." Then he wrote down, "Inscribed evidently by mistake for somebody and reinscribed for Mr. John Begg."

Here I was getting into it, but I finally had my fill of newsreels. I saw what happened to newsreel men; it's like in the Government. I could go no further with newsreels and I sensed that there was something else coming. Television was beginning to come into being but wasn't known yet. I got into the cultural relations field where I brought the knowledge that I had of using the film and using radio for international effect. After twenty years of it, I'd had my fill. I enjoyed it; I think it was very worthwhile. I feel that I have had some influence somewhere

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and that I've gotten people interested in the international scene as I'd always wanted to. Now I'm back in private industry. I happen to be in the international real estate operations.

MCKINZIE: Mr. Begg, we thank you very much.

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