

Oral History Interview
with
MILLARD CASS

Attorney, Securities Exchange Commission, 1941; attorney, National Labor Relations Board, 1941-46, legal assistant to the general counsel, 1945-46; Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Labor, U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1946-47, to the Under Secretary of Labor, 1947-50; special assistant to the Secretary of Labor, 1950-55; and Deputy Under Secretary of Labor, 1955-71.

Washington, D.C.
October 5, 1977

by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

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CASS: My name is Millard Cass. I served in the National Labor Relations Board as legal assistant to the general counsel at the time that David A. Morse returned from active duty with the United States Army and became general counsel. He inherited me, along with a desk and certain other people, and stated that he would keep me and see how we got along. We got along

very well and I continued to serve as his legal assistant until he went to the Department of Labor as Assistant Secretary for International Labor Affairs.

He went over there in, I think, the first of July, 1946 and told me he would send for me; he did, and arranged for me to come to the Labor Department as of September 3, 1946 as a special

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assistant to him. I stayed at the Labor Department until the 31st of January, 1971 in the Secretary's office.

I was the only person whom David Morse took from the NLRB to the Labor Department with him, and I stayed with him until he became Director General of the International Labor Office and left for Geneva near mid-August 1948. He invited me to come to Geneva with him; I declined the offer and remained in the Labor Department because I did not care to go overseas. And since he stayed at the ILO twenty-two years, I'm inclined to think, although it meant I was no longer with David Morse, for whom I have great respect and deep affection, that my decision was correct.

The Department of Labor had had an Assistant Secretary, a 1st Assistant Secretary, and a 2nd Assistant Secretary prior to the time that Lewis Schwellenbach became Secretary of Labor. He obtained a congressional reorganization of the Department of Labor in 1946, which for the first time established, as in other departments of the Government

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an Under Secretary and Assistant Secretaries on a different basis from the previous arrangement. He had an Under Secretary, who of course was the number two man in the Department, and three Assistant Secretaries. The legislation did not provide for it, but in practical terms there was an Assistant Secretary from the AFL, an Assistant Secretary from the CIO, and an Assistant Secretary for International Labor Affairs. Dave Morse became the Assistant Secretary for International Labor Affairs, which was the neutral spot, as opposed to the AFL and CIO Assistant Secretaries. Keen Johnson was the Under Secretary and Phil [Philip] Hannah was the Assistant Secretary from the AFL and John Gibson was the Assistant Secretary from the CIO.

Dave Morse's background was very deep in both the international affairs area and in the area of labor-management relations. Also he was a lawyer, whereas neither Hannah nor Gibson was a lawyer, and neither was Keen Johnson. The latter also did not have a background in labor relations, but he had experience in politics as former Governor

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of Kentucky. He had had a business background, too.

Therefore, Lewis Schwellenbach utilized David Morse in a far wider area than that of international labor affairs. He utilized his labor relations background. Also he was aware of the fact that David Morse had had substantial experience in Government before coming to the Labor Department, and that was very helpful in the administrative area and in the intra-governmental

and inter-governmental relations fields. So, David Morse was a very useful person in a wide variety of areas.

I had no experience or training in international relations whatsoever. I did have a background in labor relations, having been five years at the NLRB and having served as a general assistant to Dave Morse. Some of the other people whom he brought in had specific expertise in international relations or in economics, and filled gaps in both Dave's and my background.

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FUCHS: How did you happen to go to NLRB; was that right after you were out of college?

CASS: No, I had been previously in the Securities and Exchange Commission and before that in private law practice. I had a very brief but exceedingly intensive background in private practice, the kind that few people would get in twenty years, because I was in court every day. In the morning I was in the police courts and the civil court, and in the afternoon I was involved in jury cases primarily. We were exceedingly busy, so I had intensive training there.

With Dave Morse I had to learn the international field rapidly. I don't say I ever became an expert in the true sense of the word, but I knew my business and did it. So, when Dave Morse became Under Secretary on the resignation of Keen Johnson in 1947, I became Morse's assistant again.

Dave Morse's own situation was an unusual one in that, although he was "only" an Assistant Secretary, he had direct access to the President

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of the United States and the Secretary of State, and other top officials of Government, to a degree which Assistant Secretaries before him and since him have not had, to my knowledge. He could talk, and did talk, directly to General [George C.] Marshall and Dean Acheson whenever and as ever he needed to, and frequently saw the President of the United States as well as the President's top assistants.

This made it possible for him to operate on a basis which meant that what he was doing was going to be it. He didn't have the layers of supervision above him that would impair his ability to make decisions and make commitments and to do things. It was a unique situation in my thirty-odd years of experience in Government and one which I think both bespoke his own unusual ability and the confidence that his own bosses had in him. It also was perhaps a measure of the times.

Harry Truman was more inclined to be direct and less inclined to be a bureaucratic type; he

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was more willing to deal directly with the people who had the responsibility than were his successors, to my knowledge. Therefore he gave their "head of steam" to, I'm sure, a number of top officials of Government. Whether any other Assistant Secretary had been as free as Dave

Morse to deal directly with the very top echelons of the Government is doubtful, but others would have to speak to what they saw at the time.

FUCHS: You would say then that Secretary Schwollenbach deferred largely to David Morse's judgment in the field of international labor affairs?

CASS: No question at all. And not without cause, because he had somebody who knew the area and who had the ability, and whose later career demonstrated he was uniquely qualified for it.

FUCHS: Do you recall any occasions where the Secretary might have differed from Morse on a particular matter? I know that that's difficult to do.

CASS: No, I don't. I'm sure that if he did they

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talked it out and reached a rapprochement and came out with a decision that would be satisfactory to them both. I do know that in dealing with the AFL-CIO split, Schwollenbach probably had ideas of his own, but I feel that they were sufficiently discussed with Dave Morse so that they found an accommodation that they could both work with.

FUCHS: Did you have occasion to see Secretary Schwollenbach frequently?

CASS: Oh, yes. I saw all of the top officials in the Department of Labor very frequently, very easily, and on a "whenever I needed to" basis for twenty-five years. I didn't find any of them either inaccessible or sufficiently impressed with their own importance to be unwilling to see career staff people. At least none of them was ever inaccessible to me, and none of them ever felt that my position was such that they didn't need to see me. It was a relationship which made it possible for me to do my job because they were willing to trust me as a

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careerist to do my job.

On the other hand, when I needed the top policy guidance that could only come from the Presidentially appointed and Senatorially confirmed people, I could get to them anytime. I was treated well by all. I have no complaints.

FUCHS: Do you have a general assessment that you could make of Secretary Schwollenbach as a Secretary of Labor, maybe viewing him against his predecessor Mrs. [Frances] Perkins, or as against [Maurice] Tobin or those of some of the later administrations?

CASS: Frankly, I could assess every Secretary of Labor from Perkins through to the present, but I don't care to. I don't think it is up to me to try to assess a man's place in history or by any comments I would make to influence historians of the future in trying to determine what the individual Secretary's strengths and weaknesses were. I don't think that's fair. I think it's very presumptuous of me. I don't want to try to play the great

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evaluator of the people for whom I worked.

I will just say that all of the people for whom I worked treated me well, and I have no complaints about their relationships to me at all. And I'm not going to sit on the sidelines and try to write the definitive biographies of the people who, first, are dead and can't defend themselves, and secondly, were good to me and therefore deserve my loyalty as opposed to my evaluation.

Now that doesn't mean that I would give negative comments with respect to any of them. I am sure however that you recognize that there are failings that all of them have; I could make negative comments about myself. I don't care to do that either frankly. I'll leave somebody else to make the negative comments about me and also about my bosses. I will say that Secretary Schwellenbach apparently recognized the value of persons whom he had selected. He had a very able team. He promoted Dave Morse, which bespeaks his recognition of ability. John Gibson was an exceptionally

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able person, too, as his later career indicates. I'm sure that you either are familiar with it or can get it. And it was a very warm and cordial relationship. All of these people worked together nicely and they liked each other, obviously, and they were all very decent human beings.

FUCHS: Did you think there were certain drawbacks in having representatives of two of the principal union groups as Assistant Secretaries, and their being, more or less, so designated?

CASS: Well, they were not "more or less;" they were specifically designated in those roles. That relationship had both strengths and weaknesses. It gave you the advantage of having a direct line to the top levels of AFL and CIO, from persons whom they had indicated had their confidence and support. It also gave you, without going directly to the trade union movement, a feeling for how they would react to certain things, because people were on the inside who

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could tell you how they would react.

It had the drawback that you could not utilize those individuals in the broad range of relationships in which you could have utilized a person who was neutral with respect to it. You couldn't, for example, send them to the business community to serve as your liaison in certain relationships. You couldn't send them, for example, to veteran's organizations and that kind of thing. So it did have that kind of drawback.

It had some pluses. But it was ultimately abandoned and never resurrected, and I guess that is probably the final judgment concerning its utility. Successive administrations and successive Secretaries of Labor did not feel that that was a situation they cared to resurrect, and I assume that is the final historical note with respect to it. But at the time, and under the circumstances, and in the context in which it operated, it had both pluses and minuses and I'm not prepared to say that it was right or wrong.

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It existed, and it operated. And don't forget it was in a stage when the Department of Labor was moving from a structure so different from other agencies, from other departments, that it was just sort of feeling its way into the "big league," so to speak. Previously, as a department, it had been sort of a stepchild, and now it was getting the kind of structure and the kind of recognition that other departments had had.

FUCHS: I believe there had been sort of a feeling that the philosophy of the Labor Department should not just be as an advocate of labor, but also should represent management. Am I right about that? Do you have any comments?

CASS: Well, it depends on the person to whom you're speaking. The labor movement feels that the Commerce Department certainly doesn't represent the labor movement's point of view, and the Treasury Department certainly doesn't, and the interior Department certainly doesn't, and therefore

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they feel that somebody ought to and Labor is the one. They say they see no more reason for the Labor Department to be impartial in matters affecting labor and management than for the Commerce Department to be impartial. They say, "We never heard a Secretary of Commerce come out and say, 'Well, we really must be fair to labor,'" and therefore, they're not prepared to have the Secretary of Labor come out and say, "Well, you know I've got to be fair to management."

On the other hand, I think the general public, and most students of the thing feel that there is a different situation in the Labor Department, in that the Labor Department has many programs which dramatically and vitally affect the welfare of business as well as of workers. They look for a more even-handed and a more balanced and statesmanlike approach to it from the Secretary of Labor. That kind of situation was reflected by individual Secretaries along the way. I do not believe, however, that it became departmental policy, as

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such, until Jim Mitchell enunciated in that regard in late '53 or early '54.

I think that there was a somewhat different orientation prior to that, even though the Secretaries did not come from the ranks of labor in many instances. I think they felt that to provide a balance against the business viewpoint that was being expressed by Commerce, Treasury and other agencies, that they certainly ought to ensure that the labor viewpoint was expressed. And individual Assistant Secretaries or Under Secretaries such as Dave Morse, would, of course, present a more balanced and a more statesmanlike view of the whole structure, while recognizing the needs of labor and fighting for them when they were legitimate, and so forth.

FUCHS: I believe it is traditional that the Labor Secretary has had some sort of a labor background. Do you feel that that is...

CASS: No, I don't think that that is traditional at all. Schwellenbach certainly had no labor background.

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Perkins had a social service background but no special ties to the labor movement, and Tobin had no labor background at all.

FUCHS: I thought he did in the state.

CASS: No, he had been a mayor and a governor, but no labor background at all.

FUCHS: Well, I have read an account by an historian who did say people who served as Secretary of Labor generally had had some kind of a labor background, but you say it is not traditional.

CASS: Well, Jim Mitchell came from business. You've had a number of Secretaries: George Schultz was a professor, Jim Hodgson came from business, Willard Wirtz was a lawyer and arbitrator. I would think that if you went through the entire list, you'd find more Secretaries of Labor who did not come from the labor movement than who did.

FUCHS: I don't mean from the labor movement, but who had dealings with labor in some relationship such

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as arbitration.

CASS: Well, most of them, let's say, were well-known to the labor movement. Most of them, I think you'd have to say, were acceptable to the labor movement, but there's never been a Secretary of Commerce who came out of the trade union movement. Yet there have been a number of Secretaries of Labor who came out of the business community. So I'd say that the Secretaries of Labor have had a more balanced background than the Secretaries of Commerce, or of the Interior, or Treasury, or other agencies have had. I've never heard of a Secretary of the Treasury who came from labor, or a Secretary of Commerce who came from labor. Therefore, I think that the fact that a number of businessmen and professors have been Secretaries of Labor bespeaks a balance that other agencies might well emulate.

FUCHS: Very good. You mentioned the Secretary of the Treasury, and I was thinking of one historian who referred to Secretary of the Treasury, Snyder, as being a "labor baiter." "anti-labor." Did you ever

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hear that and have you any reflections about Secretary [John] Snyder and the Department of Labor?

CASS: No, I never heard it within the Department of Labor. Of course, I read the papers and I know the, general feelings that were expressed. But there was never, so far as I knew, any feeling

within the Labor Department that he was out to get labor or the Labor Department as such. We did our job and then we seldom tried to evaluate other Secretaries.

FUCHS: Another historian writing about the Truman administration, in general, said, "Schwellenbach's most distinguished feature was an amiable ineptitude." Would you care to comment on that?

CASS: Well, I think it's very easy for some snide person to sit back and destroy a human being without knowing him. Let's put it right on the line. Secretary Schwellenbach had been a United States Senator, a U.S. Judge, and a Secretary of Labor. Now if somebody's

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going to say that, with a career like that, he was a man of ineptitude, then I would say there was an awful lot of people fooled an awful lot of times along the long path. They might judge him vis-a-vis other Secretaries, and say that relative to these he was not one of the greatest Secretaries, that would be a fair comment, if they wanted to make it. You know, it's very easy to criticize, but it's awfully hard to produce. And I'm not prepared to say any of that. I think that the fact that he was the guiding force in reorganizing the Labor Department into an effective Cabinet structure, comparable to other Cabinet departments, and that he, with or without the aid of other people, selected extremely able persons to assist him in this regard bespeaks some achievement, and no small achievement in that respect.

Incidentally, I may say, because I do think it should be put on the record, for any historian at some later date to say that about a dead man is not the way it should work. I mean all of us

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are subject to being assessed relative to others, but we can be assessed more charitably I'm sure. Another thing, I think it's fair to say, is that Secretary Schwellenbach died, at least indirectly, as a result of performance of his duties. He worked very hard, he worked very long hours, and he did have a fall there at the Labor Department after an all night mediation session, and that undoubtedly, I have heard, was a contributing factor to his death. On the basis of that I just don't think it's kind, and therefore, I won't associate myself with it in any respect.

FUCHS: I believe Secretary Schwellenbach didn't want to take the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service back into the Department for purposes of housekeeping. Do you recall something of that? Some former Labor Department people thought that they probably should have taken it back. Do you have views about that separation?

CASS: Well, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation

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Service was taken out of the Labor Department by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. And Schwellenbach died June 12th of 1948 if I recall correctly. It wasn't in the cards at that point, because the Taft-Hartley Act had just been passed the year before and over President Truman's veto. I think it's sort of academic and moot to consider whether Schwellenbach wanted it back or

didn't want it back, because he couldn't have gotten it back that soon after the law was passed over President Truman's veto anyway.

FUCHS: Do you think it is better to have it as an independent agency?

CASS: I'm not prepared to comment on that at this point. It's been independent so long; that's another whole area. I think that in the Truman era it was better to have it where it was in the Labor Department. But whether one could say that now, at this stage, after it's been independent for 30 years, is something I don't care to evaluate.

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There are very strong arguments both ways. I did not think it should be taken out when it was.

FUCHS: You didn't.

CASS: But now that it's been out so long, independent so long, there's a very different question and I express no opinion on that.

FUCHS: Did you have any views about some of the other bureaus that were taken out of Labor such as the United States Employment Service, which was moved to the Social Security Administration?

CASS: Oh, yes, I thought it should be moved back and it was moved back. I have no doubt at all that it was improperly removed, and properly returned.

FUCHS: Why did you feel that way?

CASS: Because the work it did was directly and intimately connected with the work of the Labor Department and with the charter which the Labor Department was given by the Congress in 1913. There is no doubt

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that that was a labor function in any sense in which you define the term. And it is so intimately related to other labor programs that I think it suffered by its absence and the other labor functions suffered by its absence.

FUCHS: Did you ever talk to Robert Goodwin about this?

CASS: Oh, yes, many times.

FUCHS: Did he feel the same way?

CASS: I'm sure he did, at the time. I don't know what his judgment would be today, thirty years later. I know that he felt at the time it should remain in the Labor Department and I know that he felt when it returned that it was properly back. But what he would feel today, you would have to interview him and find out.

FUCHS: Well, I hope to. I might say that we're interested largely in things as you remember them at the time. Were also, of course, interested in your later assessment of things and your feelings now as you just indicated.

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CASS: Well, except this. I'm not prone to use hindsight to decide thirty years later whether it was or wasn't right, I don't think that's the way for a person who was there at the time to do it, and it's just a little too snide to say they were wrong to do that, when I've got a thirty year hindsight to evaluate whether it was or was not right. That's rewriting it and I don't want to rewrite it. Anybody can do that, but I think that those who do aggrandize themselves at the expense of somebody else.

FUCHS: Yes.

CASS: I might see things now that neither they nor I saw then, and it's not fair for me at this vantage point to say they were wrong. I might have been just as wrong at that point as they were, and maybe it wasn't wrong at that time, but it's wrong in the context of later history.

FUCHS: That's why we generally would like for an interviewee to recall how he felt at the time, because

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at that time you might have been an influence acting upon a problem with a superior.

CASS: Well, let me just say that you'll understand the context in which I am going to do it, because I do it always in this context. Whenever decisions of the Government of the United States were influenced by me, it was by leave of somebody who had the full responsibility and happened to be willing to take my judgment. I'm not prepared to take responsibility or credit for his judgment, and I'm not prepared to say, "I told you so, and ergo he did right," I don't think that's right. I was there to advise, neither to get credit nor blame. If it went wrong he took the blame; if it went right he deserves the credit, and whatever I did I did as my job. And I don't need a footnote to history saying "I wrote for this, I advised for that, and that's why he did it right." No thanks!

FUCHS: Very good.

CASS: I may be different from the average guy but this

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is my way and all I have to sell is integrity. There are a lot of small people around. But integrity, as we found out in recent years, is a heck of a lot more important than brains, because some very smart people lacked it.

FUCHS: You mentioned Taft-Hartley, and I believe Assistant Secretary Hannah resigned because of the passing of the Taft-Hartley Act. Do you have any reflections on that? Were you sorry to see that happen?

CASS: I've seen a lot of people resign from the Government because of that law and other laws and that's their decision. That's their decision and they can make it. It's important that everyone do whatever his own conscience tells him to do. I neither praise nor criticize those who follow the dictates of their conscience. I think it's fine if everyone follows the dictates of his own conscience, and whether his conscience leads him in a particular direction is up to him.

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FUCHS: When Judge Schwellenbach was appointed he brought in what was referred to as the "Secret Six" to help institute his reorganization. Do you recall anything of that? Of course, it was a little later when you came over.

CASS: No, I've never heard the term, and I was not there at the time.

FUCHS: John R. Steelman was one of them, of course, and...

CASS: Well, I knew John Steelman, but I did not know him at that time and in that context. He was in the White House when I knew him.

FUCHS: Some people have criticized the use of Steelman so strongly in labor matters by President Truman. They have said that there was a division of authority and that labor problems were taken too quickly into the White House. One former Labor Department official has said that Steelman was "too eager to get into labor matters." How did you feel about it?

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CASS: Well, I'm not going to assess Steelman's role. There was a division of authority, there's no question of that. The authority of the Secretary of Labor was considerably less because an expert whom the President trusted and who had background in labor relations and exercised it, was in the White House. But I'm not prepared to evaluate his role vis-a-vis the Secretaries and say it was right or wrong on this or that. If the President of the United States hadn't wanted it to exist, it wouldn't have existed, because nobody pushed Harry Truman. He did what he felt was right and if that best served his purposes, I'm not going to have a person at my level, thirty years later, sit back and say it didn't serve his purposes. He was running the country, and I was working for him, and that was it.

FUCHS: Well, this would not be a judgment of yours. Did you observe anyone in high authority in the Labor Department who had strong feelings about Steelman?

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CASS: Yes, there's no question about the fact that various persons in the Labor Department during the years that he was in the White House did have strong feelings. I think it was generally felt that his presence diminished their own authority and stature and to that extent naturally it would be less welcome than otherwise.

FUCHS: He was said to have been offered the Secretary of Labor position by President Truman, but refused it.

CASS: I have heard that, but I didn't know it.

FUCHS: Do you think he would have been a good Secretary of Labor compared to the...

CASS: I'm not prepared to evaluate who would have been what. He's obviously a very able person and what his achievements would have been vis-a-vis those of others I'm not prepared to evaluate. It's what Roosevelt used to call an "iffy" question.

FUCHS: There was an official of the Labor Department,

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named John T. Kmetz. I've found practically nothing about him. Do you recall what his background was?

CASS: Oh, yes. He came out of the Mineworkers Union from Pennsylvania, and his residence was Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. He had very close ties to John L. Lewis and the other top officials of the Mineworkers. He was a very fine human being, a very conscientious, affable person. His ties to the Mineworkers were very helpful in dealing with that particular segment. The fact that he did not have ties to other segments limited the ways in which he could be used, but still he was acceptable to the labor movement generally.

FUCHS: How would such an Assistant Secretary be used by the Secretary. Can you think of some examples?

CASS: These Assistant Secretaries, depending upon the extent to which the Secretary was willing to rely upon them, and depending upon the breadth of their own background and knowledge, would either be used as general advisers or only as specific advisers.

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These Assistant Secretaries made a great many trips; they served as liaison with the labor movement; they spoke to labor conventions; they consulted with labor officials; they reported back to the Secretary on how the labor movement would feel about certain proposed legislation, or administrative action; and they frequently tried to influence the labor movement to support certain proposals which the Secretary wished to make. That would be their general role. Some of them, for example, a John Gibson, would be so broad-gauged in his ability and his experience, that he could be used as a general adviser almost across the board in anything.

Other Assistant Secretaries whom I would not care to name, because I remember all of them by name, and by role and by background, would be of less use in the broad-stroke area, but would nevertheless be utilized directly in the dealings with the labor movement.

FUCHS: Another one in this category was Robert Creasey, whom I probably should know more about but don't.

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CASS: Oh, yes, Robert T. Creasey, of course. Robert Creasey came out of the labor movement in Texas, the CIO area, and had very broad experience in the labor field. He, again, was a very fine human being. I liked these people. I liked nearly everybody I ever worked with. He was a very fine person, a very able person, and he had a strong relationship with the whole CIO wing of the labor movement.

FUCHS: In regard to Taft-Hartley, the principal opposition was from the Secretary of Labor, wasn't it? Did the Labor Department feel that it was as invidious as, say for instance, Mr. Truman made out that it was?

CASS: Oh, yes. No question. The Labor Department supported the position of the President all the way.

FUCHS: Here's another one I was going to ask you to assess, if you don't mind. A Labor Department official has said that Tobin and Mike Galvin were

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very poor administrators, although they did wonderful political work for the Administration. Do you think that was a fair assessment?

CASS: I'm not going to evaluate the relative merits of the Assistant Secretaries, the Under Secretaries or the Secretaries, as administrators. I like to think my own expertise was in the field of administration as well as in the field of labor-management relations and other things. I'm not going to evaluate them. I could on a scale of one to ten put all of them into proper order, but there again, it's presumptuous as heck for me to do it. Let others, who probably have considerably less knowledge than I, evaluate the people. I was the special assistant to the Under Secretary, and I was special assistant to the Secretary, but I am not going to try to say who was better than anyone else. They were all kind to me, and I'm going to be kind to their memories.

FUCHS: Very good.

It's also been written by historians about

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yourself, that you provided kind of a stable basis for continuity in the Department. Did you have Civil Service status or what kind of appointment did you have?

CASS: I was a career civil servant. Dave Morse brought me over as Assistant to the Assistant Secretary, and then when he became Under Secretary, I became Assistant to the Under Secretary and stayed in that role until the Korean emergency when Tobin made me Special Assistant to the Secretary. I was a career person throughout. Jim Mitchell made me Deputy Under Secretary in 1955, and that was the first time that any career person had ever been made Deputy Under

Secretary of any Department in the history of our country. I remained Deputy Under Secretary until I retired in 1971. I was a career person the entire time and prided myself on trying to serve loyally all the people who were put in charge of the Government by the persons we elected President of the United States.

I don't care to assess my own role except to say that I did the best I could for over

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twenty-five years, and I was Deputy Under Secretary for sixteen.

FUCHS: Well, it's been said, you had a distinguished career there. I gather you had no regrets about leaving NLRB?

CASS: Oh, no. No, no. I made the right moves at the right time, not because I was wise, but because I was lucky. People consider that an undue humility sometimes. It's not; it's the truth. The truth of the matter is that all of us as we walk along the path of life tend to take this fork in the road or that fork in the road, sometimes because we are wise, sometimes because we are lucky. I think I was very fortunate. I did the best I could, don't misunderstand me; a lot of people of equal or greater ability than I were not as fortunate as I. That's my assessment of my career.

FUCHS: Are there similar career positions now, and is there the continuity between Secretaries that existed in your career?

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CASS: There is no doubt in my mind that the structure created by Jim Mitchell has been eroded over the years to the point it no longer exists. He put me in as Deputy Under Secretary and then he put a Deputy Assistant Secretary behind each of the Assistant Secretaries. Over the years the positions of Deputy Under Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary have become political. Even when the person taken was a careerist, the selection process was obviously a political one. Well, through successive administrations, both Democratic and Republican, an erosion has occurred, so the present process no longer serves the same purpose Jim Mitchell had in mind. I think the fact that I served in the same job for sixteen years, indicates that that position was designed for a certain purpose. Whether it fulfilled that purpose, others will have to evaluate, because I was the person in there. Whether I did it well enough to justify the concept, I don't purport to be able to assess. My viewpoint of it would be perhaps even unfair to me, but certainly unfair.

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Incidentally, you may be interested in one aspect that I don't think you'd know to ask about. It is probably not generally known that Maurice Tobin had no doubt at all that Harry Truman would be elected in 1948.

FUCHS: That's interesting.

CASS: In fact, I am told, not by him, that he made a very healthy wager at very great odds on the election. He and John Gibson both were out campaigning vigorously for Truman. Both of

them told me, personally, and I'm sure they told many others, that Truman was in. When I asked them why, they said that the crowds were vigorous, enthusiastic, and large.

Well, the newspapers were seeing that and discounting it. They said that the crowds were out because the President was the President, and it was the usual interest in seeing the President. But Tobin who had been mayor of Boston and defeated Mayor [James M.] Curley in the only defeat Curley ever suffered, I think, and who had been Governor

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of Massachusetts, was able, I felt, to assess the political climate better than other people. And he told me between trips that Truman would win.

Gibson told me that he knew Truman would win because the crowds were out to see him, an Assistant Secretary of Labor, and that indicated to him that they weren't just out because they wanted to see the president of the United States. These two gentlemen called it clearly, with no equivocation and no hedging. And they told me weeks before the election, "Truman will win and count on it."

The other thing I recall was that Ralph Wright was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of Labor on election day, 1948. I'm pretty sure it was election day -- it could have been the day before but I think it was election day. One of the reporters asked him, "How come you're willing to take this job when you're going to hold it such a short time?"

And he shouted back, "I'll be there for four years and you can count on it." And he was, and they could.

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I just think these things are interesting because not many people were that decisive in their confidence, but these gentlemen were.

FUCHS: Did they increase your confidence that he might be elected?

CASS: No, I did not have an independent judgment because I wasn't knowledgeable, not in the political field. But I assumed if they said he was going to win, and he said he was going to win, he was probably going to win. But I'm no politician and I don't know enough to judge it personally. I just accepted their analysis. They were out there, and they came back, and they said it. And he said he was going to win.

FUCHS: What occasions did you have to be in the presence of President Truman?

CASS: Oh, in receptions that he held either when he came over for some function involving the Labor Department in the Departmental auditorium, or receptions at the White House. And when he came

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to the breakfast meeting with the ILO Governing Body in San Francisco that Dave Morse had for him, I was there, too. Of course, that was a small group. Dave, I noticed, covered that in his oral history with you, because I've seen what he worked from.

FUCHS: Of course, public opinion polls showed him very low at the end of his administration. Did you feel then that that would change as history took its view?

CASS: I don't recall what I felt then. I liked the President, I respected the President, and I was impressed by the President, but I don't recall having felt, at that point, the stature of the man in the realm of history. I don't know what I thought. I could lie and say, "Oh, yes, I saw it," but I don't recall whether I did see it or didn't see it. I do know this one thing. I had heard all of the things that you know about his

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background, that he had been a haberdasher, that he had been a Senator, and that he was thrown into the presidency by accident, and so forth. I didn't know that I would be that impressed by the individual when I shook hands with him personally, but I was.

When I saw him, on a number of occasions, and shook hands with him, I felt like I was shaking hands with not a small man, but with a great man, and there was no doubt about the fact that he was the president of the United States in stature as well as in name and legally. He was impressive personally, which I was not sure he was going to be, because I had read all of the other things. But he was very impressive personally; he had a firm handshake and he shook hands with you like, one, he was the President and, two, he was glad to meet you. And that's always gratifying to a person who is only a career civil servant and when he's in the presence of the President of the United States. He was very nice. I've been impressed by few presidents, and have been impressed by few people along the way. The fact that a person is a Cabinet officer

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or a president, a Vice president, or a Senator or a Congressman, has never impressed me. But a few people along the way did impress me, and he was one of them.

FUCHS: Did the Secretaries of Labor hold regular staff meetings?

CASS: Some of them did and some of them did not. It varied. There was a long period in which Secretaries did, and I was always in their staff meetings. Sometimes Secretaries, however, held meetings only with the Presidential appointees. Sometimes they relied on the Under Secretaries to hold the staff meetings, and coordinated the views that were coming into them. It varied widely.

FUCHS: Well, did Schwellenbach and Tobin tend to hold regular staff meetings?

CASS: I don't know frankly whether Schwellenbach did. My own involvement was not as a participant in staff meetings with Schwellenbach. I participated on an ad hoc basis primarily when Dave Morse had

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to see him on something. Dave took me in because I was involved in it, or was assisting with it, or whatever I happened to be doing. I was in meetings with Schwellenbach a few other times for other purposes. But I was not a regular participant.

With respect to Tobin, I was a regular participant in staff meetings that he held, as well as in staff meetings of a different kind that were held by the Under Secretary. They both held numerous staff meetings.

FUCHS: Did you ever work closely with Philip Kaiser?

CASS: Oh, yes, very closely. Very closely. He and I were both on Dave Morse's staff when Dave was Assistant Secretary of Labor and on the staff when Dave was Under Secretary of Labor. We worked very closely with him.

FUCHS: What would your typical day be like? Did they give you ad hoc assignments? How did you work with these people?

CASS: Well, very frankly, sir, it's too hard to

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reconstruct a typical day in the life of Millard Cass thirty years ago, or thirty-five years ago. I don't think it would be useful and probably not accurate for me to try to reconstruct what my typical days were like in those years. Of course, they varied from time to time when I was assistant to Dave Morse, and then assistant to Galvin, and later to the time when I was assistant to Tobin,

FUCHS: I was wondering about a statement that other people have remarked about. Schwellenbach, when he came in, issued a statement saying he wished the Department to enforce the laws as they were written and not be interpreters. In short, the Bureau should not be making liberal interpretations of law. Do you think that was carried out?

CASS: Well, I don't know any agency of Government that has responsibility to administer laws that doesn't interpret them in the course of administration. Whether you bring a suit or don't bring a suit is an interpretation of law. The policeman on the beat interprets the law everyday when he decides

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whether to, give you a ticket or not give you a ticket, for driving in a certain fashion, crossing the street against the red light, or crossing in the middle of the block. The inspector who goes out to make an inspection is interpreting the law as well as administering the law. He's deciding whether this particular thing falls within that particular section. It's a fine and noble objective but it's contrary to human nature.

Furthermore, there were whole areas in which the Labor Department was charged with issuing rules and regulations. When you issue rules and regulations you obviously interpret the law. And

your rules are then part of the law. We did that; we had to do that on a number of our statutes. Therefore, I just don't think it was possible to avoid it, under any Secretary. There were rules and regulations issued under the Wage and Hour Act, under the Public Contract Act, and Davis-Bacon Act, and under many other statutes. I can't think of any that didn't require us to do interpretations. Now, you can assess whether the interpretations were more detailed than

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they needed to be, or broader than they needed to be, or reasonable or sound. That's a value judgment, and I'm not going to make that on a hindsight basis either.

FUCHS: I believe there was a proposal that said there should be labor advisers in most of the departments. Do you recall anything about that? I doubt if it was ever in effect.

CASS: Well, I don't think it was articulated as policy. Some departments did have them, and others didn't. When they had them, we tried to work very closely with them in order to ensure that the labor advice they were giving a Secretary was consistent with the labor policy of the Government as enunciated by the Secretary of Labor. For example, labor advisers in the Department of Defense should not be advising the Secretary of Defense in a manner that was inconsistent with the labor policies of the Government as enunciated by the Secretary of Labor. So we managed to develop a working relationship with those individuals in order to assist them.

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The same thing occurred in the State Department. We assisted them in giving advice consistent with our Secretary's policy, and with what we considered sound labor policy for the Government.

FUCHS: Who did you come in contact with in the White House principally, other than John Steelman? Did you have contacts with some of the other assistants?

CASS: Well, over the years I had contacts with a great number of them.

FUCHS: I'm thinking of men such as David Stowe or Clark Clifford, Matt Connelly.

CASS: Not with Connelly. Dave Stowe, yes, and Charles Murphy. And also with Don Dawson and others. Clark Clifford, I did not deal with. Dave Morse dealt very closely with Clark Clifford. They were part of a small group, and I know he addressed himself to this, because I've seen his notes.

FUCHS: Are you thinking of the Oscar Ewing group, the political strategy group?

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CASS: Yes. The likes of which I think has never been duplicated.

FUCHS: Were you aware of that at the time?

CASS: Oh, yes, I knew what they were doing. Dave Morse would meet with them, and I knew what he was doing. I was a very close assistant to Dave, and I knew what he was engaged in all the time.

FUCHS: Did you know Oscar Ewing?

CASS: Oh, yes. I have met him on a number of occasions. I say I knew all these people. We were not socially involved, and we were not buddy-buddies, but I sat in on many meetings that involved these people; that's the thing. I was normally not the initiator; I was just a staff person. I was always conscious of my own role as his subordinate.

FUCHS: Do you have any other remarks about the Taft-Hartley law and the pressures, first, to override the veto, and then to repeal it in '48?

CASS: No, I think that story has been fairly well in

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the public domain. It was open, and it happened as they reported it. I knew all the steps. I was there all the time, and understood and participated in everything that the Labor Department was doing. I was part of the Labor Department group that did whatever the Labor Department did. I didn't make policy, but I helped to write and support whatever policy was made.

FUCHS: A former Labor official has remarked that actually there hasn't been too much change in the Department of Labor from administration to administration; it's just been primarily a matter of emphasis. Do you agree with that?

CASS: I think that's about as wrong as any evaluation could be. Sitting where I was, I saw tremendous changes. The Department was changed. It's not just a matter of emphasis and not just the crossing of "t's" and dotting of "i's" and issuing directives. The Secretaries have been different; the total operation has been different. Responsibilities of the Department over the years have been different.

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Many have been added over the years; a few have disappeared over the years. I think it's totally different. I don't want to write the history of the Department in this interview. That's the point.

FUCHS: Is there something that you think -- if I had been more knowledgeable -- I should have asked you about?

CASS: No, no, you have been very knowledgeable and asked fine questions.

Let me just say one thing, out of respect to your last observation. Anybody who didn't notice the difference wasn't very observant, and I'll rest on that.

Another thing I will say, your questions have led me to a conclusion. An awful lot of people to whom you've spoken have been far more willing to express judgments, evaluations and historical

perspectives than I have been. I think that I should at least advise you that my reticence doesn't come from any lack of confidence in my own judgment, but from a lack of a feeling that it is proper

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for me to stand in judgment of others, particularly of others who are dead and cannot set the record straight if I've been wrong. I would not want somebody twenty years from now to sit down and say, "Well, I worked with Cass and therefore I can tell you he was this, that, or the next thing," when they knew only a small portion of the record in an entire lifetime.

By the same token, I don't think it behooves me to stand in judgment of my fellow man when I saw him as he passed through a certain period, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, for greater, or lesser. They all did the best they could at the time they were there, and I never knew one of them who tried to feather his own nest at the expense of the Government. None of my colleagues did that. They all did their best at the time. Whether their best was good enough, or wasn't good enough, God and history will decide. I don't want to do that, and it's just as simple as that. I think we were fortunate in that they were all honorable people, male and female. There

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was no one I knew in the Labor Department of whom I would say now he was dishonest while he was there, or she was dishonest while she was there. They were decent human beings trying to do their best in their role. Some of them made their mark on history; others did not. But somebody else will have to say, you know, whether they were successes or failures. I just know that they all tried.

FUCHS: I might ask, did you have any observations about the steel case and the President's handling of that that you might care to put on the record?

CASS: I'm not going to sit back here and evaluate. The things and people who were involved directly have had their say. I've read that they've had to defend it, and the court has had its say, and that's history. I can't rewrite it and no one else can. The thing that troubles me about some of these histories, as I told you at the very beginning, is too often I think the people who are interviewed as I am, are trying to make their own mark at the expense of someone else. Or with all

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due deference and with their best effort to be honest, they remember only the things that make them look good, or the people they want to make look good, and don't remember the failures.

I remember both, but so what. We all failed along the way, and we all made mistakes along the way. We hope that history will forget our mistakes and remember our triumphs, and so be it.

FUCHS: Well, very good. Thank you very much.

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