

INTERVIEW SPIEGELMAN/BEAUMONT
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Spiegelman: Jacques, what I had in mind was - I was reading William Jean Claus in ????? - and I thought it would be good to get some of the problem areas for UNICEF to see which among them can be added to this; it should be mutually decided, you know, which is the best one. For example, Charles Egger, in an interview that Jack Charnow did with him on the Emergency, said that "UNICEF's non-political humanitarian position has not always earned UNICEF praise - there are divisions between the western world and socialist countries, different viewpoints between developed and developing countries" Can you think of any examples that would support this?

Beaumont: Well, it is absolutely true that people at the critical where UNICEF ??? worked on both sides.

Spiegelman: For example?

Beaumont: For example, in Vietnam North and South. Thinking that if you work on both sides you were approving both sides, and certain things which people think of, for example Vietnam Law, were really condemning of the activities of the ??? of South Vietnam, and what we had really done that worked on both sides, was to concentrate on the need of the people, and in a certain way refused to use our involvement to approve or condemn certain activities - North or South; I don't know if I am clear in that, but by refusing to take a stand, for or against, we automatically were in the ??????with ?????? on this side or that side.

It always ????????, and we said no, it was not the role of UNICEF to pass a political judgement either on one side or the other. The job of UNICEF was to bring colleagues and services to children irrespective of the position of the side ????????

Spiegelman: Jean Claus wrote that the Nixon administration was against UNICEF's opening a Hanoi office in '73.

Beaumont: I'm not sure that it is in the book of Jean Claus.

Spiegelman: Yes, do you want me to show it to you? But the real question is, can we say who was for it?

Beaumont: I'm surprised, I didn't know the administration was against it.

Spiegelman: What do you think of the book by the way? Page 108.

Beaumont: "....In 1973 over the opposition of the ????? administration UNICEF opened an office in Hanoi. As a result of this initiative and a subsequent work????? Labouisse himself was personally on good terms with Prime Minister ?????????? In May 1979 he hoped that this would have helped UNICEF to gain access to"

Beaumont: Yes, yes, yes.

Spiegelman: Okay. So my question is, who was pressing UNICEF that we should be in Hanoi?

Beaumont: I don't think that historically it is true as it is written there. I'm not aware of an express condemnation or opposition of ???????

Spiegelman: Reluctant?

Beaumont: Reluctant? If I remember - it is a long story, it began in 1970 by the Poles as well as the Swedes saying what about the children and the bombing in North Vietnam.

Spiegelman: This was in '70?

Beaumont: Yes, and what happened was that in the beginning of 1973 which was ?????, Labouisse wanted to prepare us for working for the reconstruction of the whole of Vietnam. At that time they did not conceive two years or more of work - '73-'75, and when I was sent to Hanoi in June '73 , in fact it was to ascertain the possibility of working for children in all parts of IndoChina, in the three parts, IndoChina being divided into three political parts - then to reconstruct Vietnam ???????????? for the provisional ??? development and the democratic credibility of Vietnam, and this is the reason why we visited the northern periphery and the ??????????, but the main concern of Labouisse was to be able to work for all children irrespective of the political condition - North and South.

Spiegelman: So the Swedes and other European governments -

Beaumont: The Swedes were in favour of us working anywhere, and they were also, I would say - I would not say unofficial position of ?????? but certainly we were in need of people to convince Labouisse that he had the ?????? to do it.

Spiegelman: Then he would not have a lot of trouble with his biggest governmental support. Was their public opinion in favour of that position?

Beaumont: ??????????It was more than hoped that in fact reconstruction would become inevitable, because they were thinking that the ?????????? because they did not conceive it for more than two years long.

Spiegelman: Well, why were there two more years of fighting? I don't remember, Jacques.

Beaumont: Because the South signed the agreement but the work was not ?????? in the South.

Spiegelman: But the bombing of the North stopped?

Beaumont: The North was relatively in peace, from '73-'75. It is the reason why we began construction of schools, equipment of hospitals in the North.

Spiegelman: And what happened in the part of the South, the war was being?

Beaumont: We did a little bit of construction as in ???, but I would say that in IndoChina from 1973-1975 we tried to be helpful to children in all parts of IndoChina.

Spiegelman: During the period when the Americans were in Vietnam, up until '73 - say between '68 and '73 - what was the relative impact of the war on the children in the North and the children in the South. Who was worse off? And was there a difference in the kind of conditions and injuries that they had?

Beaumont: There was also bombing in the Southern areas, for example, Camp one and Camp two and all towns in the ??? areas were completely destroyed, as well as certain parts of the South, so children were allocated. In the North the recreation was done in a much more ordinary way.

Spiegelman: But were they worse off, then, the ones in the provisional

Beaumont: They were all worse off, they cannot be compared. Honestly, I don't think you should ask the question like that - who is worse off because you do not measure suffering in the quantity that we weigh, if the child was being forced to migrate to the slums of Saigon, and to prostitute himself, being a girl or a boy, is it worse or not so worse than a child who is suffering around the bombing in the North. You cannot compare one with the other.

Spiegelman: Tell me, Jacques, when you got to Hanoi what did you find in the North? What struck you?

Beaumont: Yes, yards, cotton for children's uniforms.

Spiegelman: Were these children in Orphanages?

Beaumont: No, schools. This is one of the funny things, as soon as you say uniforms you think of orphanages, but all regular schools in Asia are in uniforms, in Thailand or in Taiwan.

Spiegelman: Is there a colour to these uniforms that they wanted? Did they specify a colour? Blue?

Beaumont: Yes, blue, dark blue.

Spiegelman: What were the children wearing when you saw them?

Beaumont: They were wearing the uniforms. This is also one of the things they wanted in Vietnam, was the relaunching of an educational system; they were quite aware of that because as it was they had not time to deal with education. The children were their main capital for the future.

Spiegelman: You're saying the wearing of the uniform is an Asian tradition?

Beaumont: No, it's not an Asian tradition, it's practically used in many many countries. Not only the Communist countries.

Spiegelman: I'm wondering about the conformity aspect of a uniform. Is there a classlessness attached to it?

Beaumont: I would say you're much too ideological on that. I would remind you that you should refrain from these ideological conclusions, because you have not seen children in schools in Thailand, as well as in Japan, as well as in Taiwan.

Spiegelman: Okay, very good. You give a very interesting view to it. I don't know whether it's something new but we're here to find out, so I don't mind asking questions that may seem silly or stupid.

Beaumont: I've already been asked these questions time and time again, is the school uniform a sign of military reason, ideological quality, and therefore Marxist or classless society.

Spiegelman: So among the public at large besides the Scandinavians, the Swedes, also

Beaumont: You should know that in North America we're concerned about helping people irrespective of politics.

Spiegelman: So there was some support in the US?

Beaumont: In the US, in foreign agencies, NGOs and things like that.

Spiegelman: That brought these issues to UNICEF; that wanted UNICEF.

Beaumont: Who didn't know that UNICEF was trying to be helpful irrespective of ????. And I would say it was the same at the beginning of the Kampuchean relationship.

Spiegelman: Was that an important issue for Canada?

Beaumont: I think that the Canadians were very much in favour of trying to help ??????, but I don't remember the ??????

Spiegelman: How long did it take UNICEF to - was it a number of contacts over a period of time until the North was ready?

Beaumont: I would say - and this is for your general background - it is never easy to overcome years and years of distress, and you remember that the Vietnamese certainly had to open up to discussion with international agencies, with the UN agencies, and it took them quite a long time to become fully aware of what it meant, therefore I would say working with that is not something that happens overnight.

Spiegelman: Did it take a year, two years to achieve it?

Beaumont: In Vietnam, it took about three to four years to establish the first regular operation in Vietnam, so called because it still was not a regular programme or regular operation, accepted and discussed jointly, even if from the beginning we insisted on discussing it with them. They also had to come out of their own ways of doing things which was leaving shopping lists, and things like that.

Spiegelman: Shopping lists? You mean they sent a long list to UNICEF? We want the whole supermarket, right? Send us UNIPAC?

Beaumont: What do you think the ??????

Spiegelman: And then they had to come to terms, it was like a negotiation, yes? And you were the chief negotiator.

Beaumont: I was one of the negotiators.

Spiegelman: Then they were happy with the clause. And then I'm curious why they wanted the - were war-wounded children the issue of the North? Handicapped children from the war?

Beaumont: Yes, these handicapped children - it was more easy to be handled by one of the agencies, the specialized services. What they were concerned with UNICEF was more the child at large. The child which suffered from hunger or needs to be nutritionally rehabilitated or ?????????? I think that the Vietnamese did look to UNICEF for a kind of more general service of children than ?????

Spiegelman: But what they basically asked for is schools, I thought?

Beaumont: They wanted schools and they wanted medical services.

Spiegelman: Do you think the self-correcting and the self-criticism on the school rooves could be phrased properly enough to put it in here?

Beaumont: You're not speaking straight enough.

Spiegelman: But by the third batch the material was identified or the trees had grown or what?

Beaumont: Five years after the third batch.

Spiegelman: Suddenly things had improved in five years, is that it? I would certainly hope that five years would improve the situation. Well the issue of who gets UNICEF aid when its food didn't come up in Vietnam, Jacques, did it?

Beaumont: It did not come up in Vietnam too much because we were not in the food business, except for children. I must say that for children I don't think we had much we could press upon that children in the north and the south should get food. We have much more difficulty now For example, for five years the EEC has not sent food to Vietnam even to children, because of the occupation of Cambodia. They are just now sending (400 pounds)?

Spiegelman: Were we ever sending food throughout all parts of Vietnam after 1975?

Beaumont: Yes. After 75 we did not have the same problem because ?????

Spiegelman: And when we were sending medical care was there an issue over who got UNICEF medical care? Medicines could be used for soldiers. That issue never came up? It was not a sharp issue?

Beaumont: No, because the reason why we concentrated on ????????, for example, in the north, a stronger day-care center/organization, was because we were sure that they would fight against what they wanted. It was the strongest women's organization in the north. ????? I think it would have been difficult to resist the strong chairperson of the day-care center, who was also the vice-chairperson of the ????????. The woman in Vietnam would have screamed.

Spiegelman: So in addition to the school rules the prefabricated schools also aided the day-care center.

Beaumont: The day-care centers and the institutions quite a lot. Both in the (assigned)? cities and both in rural areas.

Spiegelman: So that brings us to the complicated morass of Kampuchea. Which let me tell you, I don't know how do you feel about this book. How do you feel about the book?

Beaumont: I am wondering, I have an advantage over you since I have lived the whole story. I can probably follow much more easily than somebody who has not been involved in what you call the morass.

Spiegelman: Yes. Well I can follow it, God knows, but you have to really want to follow it.

Beaumont: It is slightly complicated for somebody who has not been involved.

Spiegelman: Well, I think he did a wonderful job, and I think that you did a wonderful job, too.

Beaumont: What are you going to do with that tape?

Spiegelman: Listen to it. We might have it transcribed. Especially the thing that I wanted to ask you about Kampuchea: is the issue of controlling who got the food and what you feel the balance sheet is on inside Kampuchea and on the border camps?

Beaumont: Can you be a little more precise on what you mean by "balance sheet"?

Spiegelman: Okay. Let me go back a little further. It sounds as if UNICEF has this large mandate as UN lead agency so that normally we want to feed children and mothers. In this situation, our objective included feeding starving adults, correct?

Beaumont: Yes, definitely inside Kampuchea, the objective was to feed the population and what in fact happened is that...??as well as cooperating with WFP, and FAO, we succeeded to feed our population without food, basically in the towns, allowing the government to leave the food used by the people in the country, so that the people in the country would move to the town more than the people that were necessary????the towns. They stayed.

Spiegelman: So we were feeding the whole population in the towns inside Kampuchea which kept the farmers on the land.

Beaumont: The food in the farmer's land, therefore stop the movement of population from the rural areas to the town which would have been a much greater disaster even than the war would bring.

Spiegelman: But why would they come to the towns if the food--

Beaumont: Because they were starving.

Spiegelman: Yes, they were starving, but the food is grown in the country, right?

Beaumont: The food was not grown in the country during the first year. After, a little bit of food was grown in the country.

Spiegelman: So who fed the people in the countryside?

Beaumont: Themselves, by any kind of means, secondary crops, eating whatever they could.

Spiegelman: And in the camps on the Thai side?

Beaumont: In the camps on the side you have to take care of the need of the whole population too.

Spiegelman: I see.

Beaumont: Basically one of the efforts was to put them into a position of power producing this themselves, some complementary food even in the Thai camps.

Spiegelman: And that's when UNICEF provided seeds?

Beaumont: Now, also seeds were provided inside Kampuchea and through the coast guard operation so the people can grow food the second year.

Spiegelman: And this was basically rice?

Beaumont: Yes.

Spiegelman: And this could be grown in these camps, or was there enough water to grow rice?

Beaumont: No, rice was never grown in the camps, only secondary crops.

Spiegelman: What are secondary crops?

Beaumont: All vegetables.

Spiegelman: What kinds of vegetables? Can I ask you to be more specific?

Beaumont: Lettuce, green vegetables, peas.

Spiegelman: Okay. Well, he talks about the Khmer Rouge Soldiers, and that issue as being of the women giving their husbands--

Beaumont: I don't see what it has to do with the pictorial study or these questions. It's more for an auditor as than from pictorial studies.

Spiegelman: Well, no, not exactly, not really, no.

Beaumont: Okay, go on.

Spiegelman: Because this man has read all these books who's the editor, and I must be in a position, if I'm not mentioning something, he can come back at me. I'm not saying we're going to use this, but if he brings something up then I'd like to be able to have an answer about it.

Beaumont: Okay, fine.

Spiegelman: So I'll say like Dr. Ruth Westheimer, "Thank you for asking that question."

Beaumont: I like her.

Spiegelman: Huh? Isn't she cute? When she says, "Thank you--"

(phone rings)

Shall I stay, or would you prefer me to leave?

Beaumont: No, stay. No, I understand why you are asking these questions, but I don't see how it goes into the pictorial history.

Spiegelman: No, but on Nigeria, I wrote this caption and he said, he knows all about the difficulties in Nigeria from Dan Jacobs, so about Kampuchea he will certainly have read this book and looked for UNICEF now that he's seriously considering our pictorial history. So since these issues have been raised, Jacques, what about the...so then we had no objection or were we trying to stop women from giving to the soldiers who were their husbands or was there any way, I understand there was a rationing system from somebody who worked, a way to ensure that children were getting it, or...

Beaumont: No, what we worked out in the border was a direct distribution to women on the basis of women, priests and children over 12 and 14 years of age, and we wanted the direct distribution to women in order to make sure that correct distribution of food was not confiscated by the soldiers. It did not work always but it's more difficult to take the food out from a mother than to--

Spiegelman: Than to take a big sack and haul it off.

Beaumont: Than give it to...right. I will not say this was in any way a fair fact system with the so-called ???????? camps.

Spiegelman: What was the food that was given to them?

Beaumont: It was a family basket of food of the ??? ice, oil, sometimes fish.

Spiegelman: And how was it given?

Beaumont: We put it from the big bag into small plastic bags.

Spiegelman: So then it was transportable by the mother to her home? So what about this system of having blue rationing cards for one day and red for another so that the same person didn't come back in the same day?

Beaumont: We tried all systems of cards.

Spiegelman: What are some of the things that UNICEF tried?

Beaumont: I was never convinced that it was 100% successful in the Khmer Rouge. In the other camps we were reasonably successful.

Spiegelman: There were certain camps that were clearly identifiable as Khmer Rouge?

Beaumont: Oh, yes. Those Khmer Rouge camps were very controlled and what happened behind our back was never completely ????.

Spiegelman: Was there about equal distribution on the Cambodian side and on the Thai side?

Beaumont: No, because inside the same calculation was done from the ration on both sides. The ration was the same. But in the camps people had not much in addition to, those who were in the country inside Kampuchea very quick got something additional.

Spiegelman: So that more food was given in the Thai camps?

Beaumont: I would say more systematically to people registered in the camps. But one of the questions was to get a good registry of people, which was the most difficult thing.

Spiegelman: To get a good registry? You mean a control, the names and...

Beaumont: Of the number of people. It took us a long time to control...it took us a good year to establish a control of the number of people.

Spiegelman: Does that mean identity cards?

Beaumont: And control with the administration of the camps.

Spiegelman: Were there new people coming in to the camps all the time?

Beaumont: Right, new people, people leaving, there were also checking of people constituting reserves, or using food to be sold. The first year there was plenty of illegalities.

Spiegelman: When you say so that this family basket, in other words that more of the amount of food was more per person or per family in the Thai camps--

Beaumont: It was more systematically distributed in the camps to everybody on a daily basis, and on a weekly basis, than inside.

Spiegelman: Than inside the country.

Beaumont: Right.

Spiegelman: But in the dollar amount, which was greater? Inside Kampuchea or in the camps? Let's say on a yearly basis, or even on a total.

Beaumont: It was bigger inside, the number of people was much more inside. Not all people inside were receiving food.

Spiegelman: Let me just show you what we're kind of playing around with. What we've done is consolidated this table and this table in one. And Bert wanted to try and put this information, I think, tallying them on the same table but it's not going to work. The categories are too different. That would make out a separate table.

END OF TAPE SIDE 2.