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Interview with Mr. Al Davidson*
Conducted by Jack Charnow in Greenwich, Connecticut
on 1 November 1983

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Interview with Mr. Al Davidson
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(To supplement the chapter Mr. Davidson has prepared on his
UNICEF experiences in his autobiography)

Starting operations in Europe

Charnow: Al, is it not true that when UNICEF took over from UNRRA, it was very largely, at least at the beginning, a continuation of the supply lines and the use of food distribution centres and health stations and so on already in place, so that the job of getting organized was an easy one? Also you took over, did you not, a number of UNRRA staff?

Davidson: Well, I think to characterize the task of getting UNICEF going as being easy rather overstates the case. It was easier in countries which had UNRRA programmes, obviously, because there we were in a sense simply continuing. But that was limited to really three countries: Greece, Italy and Poland. The majority of UNICEF assistance went to the Soviet satellite countries like Rumania, Bulgaria, etc., in which UNRRA had not worked. That's where the bulk of UNICEF aid went; that's where the problems were, and in fact I refer in the draft that you have to the fact that in the negotiation of the UNICEF agreements with the various countries, there was no problem at all in signing up countries which had already had UNRRA working there because UNICEF principles were much the same; but that in these new Soviet satellite countries, of course, they had no experience with that and also the governments were much less stable. They never had been under Communist regimes before. But let me add one thing. I think there's a figure in the Executive Board report covering the years of my work with UNICEF, which says that there were five million children receiving supplemental feeding from UNRRA, and our target was much the same with UNICEF except that we were dealing with more countries.

Charnow: So, in essence, the children we reached in each country had to be spread over a larger number. Is what you are saying?

Davidson: Yes, but the point is that also conditions were improving slowly in the different countries so the need wasn't quite as great, but at the same time, as I now recall it, our original targets were higher. I think we originally had the objective of feeding maybe six and a half million children, but I don't believe we ever got much beyond five million.

Charnow: Was it a matter of finances?

Davidson: I think it was a combination of finance and ability to organize, especially in these new countries which wouldn't simply have the organizational ability to do much more.

Charnow: Al, in your chapter you discuss the political problems that arose when the Cold War started. Would you like to say something, however, about what you saw before it started - the welcome that we may have had for being a continuation of UNRRA or starting new in the other countries? While there was suspicion of our observation, wasn't there also some feeling that our people could make helpful suggestions or help the people who really wanted to do something for children, support them with the rest of the bureaucrats within the government, and so on?

Davidson: Oh, yes. The real point was that the people on the spot, the people doing the work, the local staff that were assisting UNICEF staff were all more than happy and very appreciative of UNICEF help. There was never any doubt about that, and in practically all cases the welcome was warm and genuine. The place where the problems arose was, if you like, in the bureaucracies and, so to speak, we were enlisting those associated closely with our missions and who understood the workings of their bureaucracy better than we could from the outside, we were enlisting them as spokesmen to try to solve the problems and the differences which arose from the bureaucracy in those countries.

UNICEF viewed as temporary organization

Charnow: Did you have any feeling at the time you were in the Paris office, or even at the time UNICEF was being conceived, that we were to be a temporary agency, or do you think that Rajchman and some of the others had in mind that we would continue for an indefinite period of time? I know that no time limit was set on our life in any of the legislation.

Davidson: Well, I think I can say this, and certainly I believe Maurice Pate and, I think, my own feeling was the same. He conceived of UNICEF as a temporary organization and as a kind of special war relief organization in the area of children and mothers to take up the job which UNRRA was dropping, and I think this was reflected in the very name of the organization - the International Children's Emergency Fund.

Charnow: In other words, you never had any sense that we were anything but something temporary?

Davidson: Yes, temporary.

Political non-discrimination in Greece

Charnow: As you well know, the original UNICEF legislation, the resolution by the General Assembly, states that we don't operate in a country

except at its request. Therefore, your comments in your chapter about General Marcos in Greece and the opposition is something that I'd like you to elaborate on, because I suppose that's the first instance where we were trying to be flexible in the interpretation of that legal doctrine.

Davidson: Yes. I don't recall the legal rationalization we worked out for my contact with General Marcos, but I think it derived from Mr. Pate's general feeling, which everyone was ready to accept, of the fact that politics, boundaries and all of the legalism simply didn't count with children and mothers who were suffering; that our job was to try to help them and that we just assumed that everybody felt the same way as we did. And I have some vague recollection that, well it's not so vague now that I think of it, in going back to Mr. Pate's World War I experience with Hoover, we know, of course, that the Hoover relief operated in Russia on both sides of the controversy even though the place was in a revolution. So that he had, if you like, a precedent for himself of a relief organization which ignored the political aspects. But as I say, it never came, so to speak, to a crucial vote. I don't think the question was ever discussed in the Programme Committee or in the Executive Board. I doubt it very much simply because of my inability to work out a system of getting supplies to the tiny area in the mountains of northern Greece.

Charnow: Did you have a feeling that the opposition of the Greek Government was a profound one, and that had you worked out a supply thing, you would have been interdicted or that they would have gone along with it, sort of closing their eyes?

Davidson: I think for the record they had to oppose it because in theory they were in control of the whole of their own country. But in fact, I don't think they would have interfered if we could have managed to get into areas that they couldn't get into.

Charnow: Even though this would have strengthened the opposition?

Davidson: Well, we are talking about very small numbers. There were many Greek children and a number of mothers in the bordering countries of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and in visiting different feeding centres, I saw them and met them, so that I knew they existed and we were helping them, but of course, as part of the general population of those countries.

Charnow: These were refugees?

Davidson: These were refugees and probably, in many cases, sent by the soldiers fighting in the guerrilla forces who wanted their families in a safer place and taken care of.

Diversion of supplies

Charnow: Was there much in the way of misuse or diversion of UNICEF supplies?

Davidson: No. I have a deep conviction that there was probably no diversion except in the case of Albania. Even after I reported that we had the distinct impression that there was diversion, I recommended, and the top command agreed, that we should continue anyway in the light of the new promises that were made to me; but then later, when Walling became Mission Chief, the whole thing became impossible.

Observation and publicity

Charnow: In your chapter you discuss the adherence to the principles of observation and publicity and trying to get adherence to the basic principles which were set forth in the agreement. You mention that you were generally supported by Maurice Pate but that Rajchman, supported by Dick, felt that you might be taking too rigid a legalistic point of view and could have been more flexible.

Davidson: This was only towards the end when the problems began to bubble up. In the early part of the programme it was a question of urging them to get going with publicity or to facilitate access by our people to certain areas, but the real trouble came after the Albanian episode because Rajchman specifically urged that we drop our principle of having on-the-spot observers; that we send people in every month or so from time to time, and that that would be satisfactory. But the strong feeling that I had and that Maurice shared was that, unless you are living with problems like that from day to day, a quick trip and a quick visit simply doesn't provide enough opportunity for someone to know what's really going on.

Charnow: In retrospect now after all these years, do you still feel as strongly that your position and Maurice's was correct?

Davidson: Yes, I do. In fact I would apply my own feeling, for example, to commissions like the Kissinger Commission in Central America, where I doubt all of the big-shot names and so on are going to get out into the country to find out what the people are really thinking.

Charnow: Yes. Well, in addition to the general point, if you felt that there was not a great deal of danger of diversion because of the types of supplies and so on, was it really so essential to hold these countries to these principles under the circumstances? If we had eased up, could we have continued longer? Could we have helped more kids? This is really what I am trying to get at.

Fund-raising implications

Davidson: Well, I think that there's another aspect in it apart from diversion which, as I said, I never felt was in any general way a problem at all. The other things, such as publicity, were more important in Maurice's view and mine in order to maintain the flow of funds from the contributing countries. They didn't want to make the effort and really sacrifice — whatever they gave was a real sacrifice in the immediate post-war period. As a practical matter we couldn't continue the operation if the people were going to be left under the impression that this was their own government which was providing all this assistance.

Charnow: So there was a fund-raising aspect to this, and beneath that perhaps a bit of a political motive?

Davidson: Yes.

Davidson: I did occasionally get into the fund-raising aspect through the fact that, as I mentioned, Willy Meyer was the European fund-raiser, and so from time to time I got into it, but not very much. I was more in the way of being informed than I was of making any contribution in this area myself.

Start of Greeting Cards

I would like to emphasize again that it was Willy Meyer's own individual idea for the Christmas cards which started this whole thing.

Charnow: Haven't a lot of people claimed paternity for the Christmas cards?

Davidson: Well, the first UNICEF Christmas card came from Czechoslovakia, so is practically impossible for anyone else to have done it but Willy, because the thing was just starting.

Charnow: I had the impression, although I haven't yet been able to document it, that when it started, Maurice felt that it really wasn't right for UNICEF to finance it, so he did personally until it started taking off.

Davidson: I am afraid I don't remember.

US Committee

Davidson: It just occurs to me that I've left out here all reference to the United States Committee for UNICEF and, of course, I didn't have anything to do with them officially, but I knew of their existence. And Mary Lord made a couple of trips to some of the missions, I remember, and maybe that's how Betty Jacob got into things. Maybe she came with one of the committee members.

Maurice Pate

Charnow: Would you like to talk a little bit about the personality and style of work of Maurice Pate, Dick Heyward, Borcic, Sam Keeny, Mike Sachs?

Davidson: Well, sure. Let's start with Maurice Pate. Maurice was kind of an archetypal character from the Herbert Hoover story book, that group which included Hallam Tuck, with whom I later worked in the IRO, and others were mostly, as Hoover himself was, people well placed in industry and with personal wealth and an air of command.

But Maurice was a much more gentle character than a hard business tycoon type. Of course, he would be because he was interested in the first place in relief work, but I would say that he had an almost religious feeling about relief assistance. It was just good and it couldn't be argued with. It was in a way his religion which he wanted to live out with good deeds.

And I think he could barely understand and wasn't terribly interested in the normal bureaucratic shuffling around as between staff, some of whom were perhaps too ambitious and maybe some who weren't ambitious enough, and he wasn't basically interested in the mechanics of a United Nations agency except as he knew about the nuts and bolts problems from his World War I experience and had to feel his way with the United Nations procedures and committees.

I don't think he was ever too happy with his contacts with the Congress because there was he was on the firing line because, as I said before, the greater part of UNICEF's work in Europe was in the Communist countries. Although McCarthy hadn't reached full bloom when UNICEF started, he was getting to be in quite full voice by the 1950s. So I think he was very uncomfortable about that.

Davidson and McCarthy

If I may, I would like to switch to something for the record. After I left UNICEF I had some loyalty trouble of my own when I was in the Secretary-General's office in the United Nations, and Maurice supported me fully and courageously right at the peak of early 1953. He never made any political comments about anybody, or certainly about McCarthy as far as I know, but he had the courage, and I believe, in other cases of UNICEF staff members, he also stood up for them.

Hoover

Charnow: To what extent were you aware of any support Maurice had from Herbert Hoover for the nonpolitical nature of UNICEF in getting appropriations from Congress? You did mention in your chapter

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Charnow: To what extent were you aware of any support Maurice had from Herbert Hoover for the nonpolitical nature of UNICEF in getting appropriations from Congress? You did mention in your chapter

that Rajchman thought Maurice would be good because of this kind of background.

Davidson: Yes, that's true. I seem to recall vaguely that from time to time, but not frequently, Maurice would consult with Herbert Hoover. It is possible that Joan Dydo was with Hoover in those times and could add some detail.

Charnow: I think what you are confirming is my impression that whatever contacts he had with Herbert Hoover were kept very quiet and very discreet. I suppose it's only if we get Maurice's or Hoover's personal papers that we will find out the extent to which Hoover was a part. In some versions of the origins of UNICEF, Hoover is given credit for having started it rather than Rajchman. Hoover was very popular with certain groups that had to be reached and Rajchman was not.

Initial concept of head of European Office

Charnow: I might say that I found it a little bit incredible reading your chapter that Maurice somehow or other thought that our European operation could be handled by somebody part-time commuting when he offered you the job.

Davidson: I was astonished that he offered it to me at all.

Charnow: Yes, but to have that concept of what was required which was ...

Davidson: But I think that this again fits into my general picture of Pate. At that time Hallam Tuck, the other Hoover man, was the head of IRO. Pate didn't pay much attention to agency lines — that we were all one happy family in relief work and that Hallam would just co-operate and make whatever time was needed and that he would co-operate if I had to do something for IRO. And I do think this is probably more to the point in the letter which Joan dug up, his first letter to me. He didn't offer me a job as Chief of Europe or anything else. What he said was that he was thinking in a kind of vague way of having a small Paris office where I could help out. I think those were his words. And so I don't think he ever envisaged the structure and organization which in fact we created. No doubt, I was partly responsible for that because, first of all, I paid very little attention to the initial approach because I didn't know what he had in mind. I pictured always that it would have to be a fairly extensive organization, and the idea of a small Paris office didn't fit my thinking. So I think the real truth was that Maurice had no preconception of the extent to which UNICEF would have to organize. I don't know, but I think maybe when he was the Hoover Mission Chief in Poland, he may have been the only man there helped by a few Poles who were on his local staff, and that he probably was thinking organizationally in terms of how World War I relief worked.

Confidence in financing

Charnow: Do you think maybe part of that approach was simply because of the great uncertainty about whether we'd even have any money to continue for a while and also his feeling somehow or other that he didn't have money to meet payrolls, therefore he assumed that Hallam Tuck would pay part of your salary?

Davidson: My recollection is that UNICEF received quite a big chunk of UNRRA's residual assets totalling over \$30 million.

Charnow: But not immediately.

Davidson: No, but I think he had confidence even before he got it that he was going to get funds in that neighbourhood. Since the original US appropriation without strings was \$15 million, he could count on a fairly substantial amount. I don't think he was influenced by uncertainty as to finance. He sometimes was much braver than I would have been. He just didn't act concerned about where the resources were coming from; if he thought that something should be done he went ahead with it as much as he could.

Charnow: In your UNRRA days and the origins of UNICEF, did you have any feeling that the other agencies in the UN system felt unhappy about a children's agency which might cut across their fields or might take UNRRA residual funds which otherwise might come to them?

Agency attitudes toward creation of UNICEF

Davidson: There probably was some competition, without doubt, for UNRRA's residual funds and UNICEF, as I recall, didn't get it all, but we did get the biggest chunk. But the real answer to your question is, I think, that outside of WHO there was no real pulling and hauling. All those agencies were just in the process of formation. They wanted it all. They practically had no resources yet or were just in the process of getting them, and so I think, in general, although in the case of WHO and to a smaller degree with FAO, there was some perhaps jealousy or bureaucratic fear; the main thing is that they were all just in the process of getting started.

Rajchman

WHO attitude toward Rajchman

Charnow: But you did mention in your chapter that there was a feeling on the part of WHO about Rajchman because of his background and personality. Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that one?

Davidson: Yes. I think, to make it clear, we should know that Dr. Rajchman was the head of the League of Nations health section. He had world-wide experience. He was purely, in a professional capacity,

no doubt the leading public health doctor in the world, and apart from that he had a track record of enormous accomplishments in dealing with other post-war problems. After the League of Nations died he represented Poland in connection with, for example, I remember immediately after the war, a US post-war loan; he took the lead and was successful.

Charnow: A loan from whom?

Davidson: From the United States Government. He was there and was enormously successful with that, and then he turned up as a delegate from Poland. I think the Polish Government had a supply mission in Washington, and I think just as Jean Monet was the head of the French supply mission and during the war, Rajchman was the head of the supply mission for the Poles. So he was very effective with that and, in a very difficult situation where everybody was trying to get something out of the United States, he was very effective and successful. Then, as delegate to UNRRA for the Polish Government, he was very successful in getting programmes started in Poland.

So he had a world-wide reputation from his League of Nations days and from his post-war experience as being a very intelligent, able, dynamic and successful man. Well, to the fledging WHO organization he represented a formidable character who was not going to forget all of his experience in the League of Nations and his professional standing as a public health doctor. And so some of them were very nervous that in effect he would set up a rival health organization, at least in the field of children and mothers, which they would have to combat to protect the very integrity of the World Health Organization as responsible in all areas of health. Right at the beginning it might be split apart.

UNICEF/WHO cooperation

This was not true of everyone. Dr. Borcic was very sympathetic and not afraid of Rajchman's position in this matter, and in my own thinking I always tried to make the distinction which existed. The World Health Organization had no money for supplies or equipment or for helping to build up the public health services of the different countries. It wasn't, in fact, ever intended that they should have the funds to do that work. As far as they ever got was to get authority and money to put on demonstration projects, especially, as I recall, in the field of malaria, but no doubt in many other fields too. But Rajchman's conception was entirely different. Rajchman's conception was that UNICEF could work with WHO, and we would request WHO for staff to work with us. We borrowed a third member of WHO, Louis Velnastrate who was on the WHO staff as Chairman of the Maternal and Child Health Committee. He came to Paris, had an office in our office and worked along with Borcic and with Mike Sachs in connection with paediatric problems and the health problems of children. So that

although in some ways it was grudging, in fact we did work out a viable method. I think that the major bridging of the gap came with the fact that Dr. Borcic was bound to us and had a high position. We gave him responsibilities other than health. He was my senior deputy, and when I was not there he was responsible as the acting head of the European office.

Charnow: Would you say however that while WHO may have grudgingly accepted all this and seen us as a source for providing supplies and equipment to carry out their purposes, that we on the other hand had some independent ideas and therefore acted as a catalyst with WHO?

Davidson: Yes. I think the truth was that with Rajchman and Prof. Debré on our medical subcommittee and Dr. Holm, who had also been chairman of the tuberculosis section of WHO, we had the brains and we were thinking ahead of them. I don't recall any cases where we had requests from the WHO to provide supplies or whatever to programmes thought up by the WHO. The concept which Rajchman built into the whole UNICEF approach was to strengthen the child and maternal care health systems and the nutrition systems of the countries. He wasn't just saving lives for today but trying to give life and support to the efforts of the countries themselves in building stronger post-war services for children.

BCG

Charnow: Now, you mentioned BCG and Dr. Holm. My impression was that Rajchman, together with the Scandinavian associates and Holm, went into that despite considerable scientific reservations on the part of WHO, and we just forged ahead. Is that your feeling too?

Davidson: I don't recall the reservations, but I would suspect that the reservations were not so much in the medical technical side as, again, that WHO was, as far as world knowledge went, kind of in a secondary position. After testing sixteen million different children in Europe, the BCG was known to almost everybody in every village, and whoever heard of WHO with their one or two demonstrations, if they could manage that much. So it was difficult for them. I might say this again, elaborating a little on what's in my chapter, and that is, as you notice, I refer to the fact that a number of the Mission Chiefs were suggested by Rajchman. Some were colleagues of Rajchman in the League of Nations like Van Hamel, Madson, and, I seem to recall, a third Mission Chief who was in the League of Nations. And I was glad to get such experienced international people who were, one might say, at a level that no other UN organization could recruit.

Rajchman as Board Chairman

Full-time occupation

Charnow: My impression of Rajchman in the early days was that he made UNICEF virtually a full-time occupation. I remember that he had an office in UNICEF Headquarters and was getting the flow of papers, through one means or the other that Pate or anybody else, the Mission Chiefs, produced — and he was breathing over everybody's shoulder, which was rather an unusual role for a Chairman of the Board, organizationally speaking. Did you also find him breathing over your shoulder, kind of second-guessing you, and so on?

Davidson: Yes, we had, now that I remember it, made available a temporary office for him when he came. But I resisted and never did give him a permanent office, such as I think he did have in the UNICEF Headquarters. To answer your question, he did make UNICEF a full-time job or more than a full-time job, and secondly, wherever he had an interest, he didn't mind delving into the greatest detail and getting down to the lowest secretary or whatever in order to find out what was going on and get something down.

Attitude about UNICEF in developing world

Charnow: I had one other impression, that despite his enormous vision, he was primarily interested in Europe and had a lot of reservations about what UNICEF could do in the developing world. I know that there were a lot of controversies with the UK delegation in the Board, which felt that we should go into Asia. I think Rajchman's reservation stemmed in part from a feeling that large-scale feeding programmes were not practical in Asia, that often you didn't have stable régimes, how could you reach the people and so on. But did you have any feeling that, despite his great vision, he was also interested in more for Europe and especially more for eastern Europe and more for Poland?

Davidson: Well, certainly those were his priority interests, but I would hazard the guess, knowing him pretty well and how his mind worked, that his reasons for coolness towards work in other areas — although I never discussed this with him — were for entirely different reasons. And first of all, he, as well as Borcic and, I think Eloesser, worked together in China. Now, one of Rajchman's basic principles, which I believe was sound, was that an international organization, to be worthy of its work, had to be able to make some substantial (not just a flea-bite on an elephant) contribution towards improving the situation in particular countries. And I would hazard the guess that in the case of China, which he knew so well and which Borcic and Eloesser knew so well, UNICEF's resources and ability to make any impact of any great significance was practically miniscule.

Charnow: We did work there.

Davidson: But I doubt if what we did amounted to much more than a flea bite. I would certainly never ascribe to Rajchman the fact that his general vision was in any way narrow. I think he had a feeling of professional competence, that he wanted to do something worthwhile and that UNICEF resources weren't going to be great enough to do much. I think, now that I think about it, that I had to share that feeling when Pate approached me with the idea that I should go to the Far East for UNICEF. I mean with teeming millions, what do you do?

Political orientation

Charnow: You've put in words the dilemma that UNICEF faced at that point. Let me ask you what your impression was of Rajchman's political orientation and his relations with the Communist government in Poland. I believe he wanted to live in France, and his interest in the International Children's Centre seemed to keep him fully occupied along another track but living outside of Poland.

Davidson: I think the best thing to say is that in this new and young Communist government in Poland that there wasn't a great deal that he could contribute. I think he felt, as I feel myself today and the reason that I live in France, I think I can accomplish more because of my knowledge of conditions outside of my country than I could do within my own country, and that's why I live in France today.

Charnow: Accomplish more for the United States, you mean?

Davidson: Yes, and in my own profession. But now speaking of him. There was never any doubt in my mind that he was a Socialist, say, in the Norman Thomas conception of Socialism, and left-wing by American standards, no doubt about it. He never acknowledged it to me, but I am sure he was never very happy with the excesses that took place in Russia or in Poland. I think he was able to keep the ship steady, and he intervened many times in Poland when difficulties came up with the government — he intervened on behalf of UNICEF. And certainly in the early years, I never recall having any, so to speak, doctrinal disputes that UNICEF shouldn't have an observer or something and he never interfered in that respect in his own country. But the situation changed. Our relations soured after Albania. I was quite outraged at what happened. When I came back and reported the sabotaging of Walling's car and his inability to perform his duties, Rajchman agreed that I was correct in stopping the programme. But then, a couple of weeks later when we got to the United Nations and came before the committee, he shifted his position, and I felt this was a double-cross of his early support of me, for one thing, and secondly, that there was no justification for it. I think at that time he crossed the line, if I may say so, where he felt he had to

support the Communist line — right or wrong.

Debré

Charnow: Let me ask you about Debré and his influence on UNICEF.

Davidson: I don't recall that Debré was ever a creative force in the way that Rajchman was. He was more in a supporting role to Rajchman because of his eminence. He was the leading paediatrician in France and therefore a man of great professional stature. If my memory isn't wrong, his older son was later Prime Minister under De Gaulle.

Charnow: A little later. For a while he was a black sheep, we thought.

Davidson: He was in Debré's eyes a black sheep because he was a right-winger. He had another son, incidentally, who was an artist, but Debré basically acted as a front for the medical sub-committee as Chairman -- a medical sub-committee front for Rajchman — and a support, and certainly in the discussions of technical matters no doubt made a real contribution.

International Children's Centre

Charnow: It's my impression that the International Children's Centre in part had its justification in that the French Government, that the franc as a contribution to UNICEF could only really, because it was a soft currency, be used within the country, and therefore some ingenious way had to be figured out for using the franc.

Davidson: I don't think there was any such notion. I think the franc was convertible.

Charnow: Even in those times?

Davidson: Yes.

Charnow: Okay, I better look into that. I had understood that it was a factor, certainly, in those original training courses UNICEF financed in Paris before the Centre got started.

Davidson: Rajchman, I think, was conceiving of a permanent children's centre called the International Children's Centre that might carry on after UNICEF had had its day.

Charnow: Do you want to talk a little bit about the style and personality of Sam Keeny?

Sam Keeny

Davidson: Keeny is always a pleasure to talk about, and the records of UNICEF must be replete with evidence of his character, style,

personality and whatever. As I recall, almost as soon as he got to the Far East, he started some kind of circular letter which he put out which can tell the story about him better than I can. I had known him slightly in UNRRA days where he was Chief of Mission in Italy. Sam was another Hoover relief man, although I don't know that Maurice Pate knew him in those times, but he wasn't one of the business-type Hoover relief people. He came up the ranks. In carrying out his duties in Italy, he always did it with a flair and he was kind of a little MacArthur within the UNRRA organization. He did everything with what I would call panache — style — and in a big way. He was not an ideal administrator because he never worried much about cost of staff or expense in any manner, shape, or form. He was a good equivalent of some of the generals in their post-war living styles in Germany or Austria. But he was effective at high levels. That was the one thing that was important. He had no hesitation in going to see a Prime Minister or in dealing at the highest levels, and that was easy in UNRRA because — well, not many things were very easy, but the fact is that Italy had, if anything, a disproportionate share of UNRRA funds and was very dependent on UNRRA economically. So he got to know not only the Government well, but the Vatican.

Borcic

Charnow: Is there anything more you would like to say about Borcic?

Davidson: Well, I think of Borcic with enormous pleasure because, not only was he fulfilling a large role in the UNICEF organization, but he became a close personal friend. Borcic was another top international public health officer at the highest level in international health matters. He had been holding the post as Chief Health Officer for UNRRA in China, although I had never met him personally at that time. He had also been an early colleague of Rajchman and Dr. Eloesser in the Far East in the League of Nation days. He was a man of complete integrity, professional competence and great personal charm. I never heard of anybody who didn't like him. He was never the source of any controversy, no matter what his position. He could be firm, but he was intelligent and knew how to gain his point without raising animosity, and he shared with us Dr. Rajchman's concepts of doing the most good for the most countries over any substantial period, of bringing outside aid in to support and expand the governments' health care agencies, in their own development.

Mike Sacks

He brought with him from WHO Dr. Mike Sacks, who stayed long after I was detached from UNICEF. Mike was also a cheerful, even more dynamic character, who knew his job in the special field of programming and selecting medical equipment and supplies for country programmes. He did well and was well liked in the years that he served in Paris.

Heyward

Dick Heyward I first knew as a member of the Australian delegation to UNICEF, and there I formed a high opinion of him. In general, he was more articulate in support of Rajchman's approach to dealing with UNICEF problems than any other member of the Programme or Executive Committees. There is no question but that he was a very intelligent fellow. As time went on, Pate felt the need of having a Deputy. Rajchman had suggested that Dick Heyward might be prepared to leave his official Australian post to come over to the UNICEF staff. I approved this appointment because Maurice tended to get lost in all the details and really did need someone who could act for him. Later, as tension developed with the East European countries, he took decisions at variance with mine and generally felt that I was demanding too much of the Communist governments in terms of strict compliance with the agreement; but, in fact, Maurice Pate always supported me and our differences were out in the open, as they should have been.

Main challenges to Davidson in UNICEF period

Charnow: What would you say were your greatest challenges in UNICEF?

Getting organized

Davidson: Well, I would say the first great challenge was to create an organization of, I forget how many, but twelve or fourteen missions in the end - create a UNICEF organization overseas which didn't exist when I arrived in Paris in 1947. On the telephone, I had employed an UNRRA travel officer whom I happened to know from my visit during the UNRRA time, and he found me a French secretary, Madame Abady, an indomitable Frenchwoman who survived the early, inevitably chaotic, first days of UNICEF's organization. The recruitment, so quickly, of top staff where none existed, top staff for Paris, the selection of Mission Chiefs, was a challenge, and one which, looking backwards, I feel was met with satisfaction.

Charnow: Did you have a pretty free hand in the people that you selected?

Davidson: I had a completely free hand except with Mission Chiefs. I always consulted Maurice before making any appointment final.

Shutting down

The second great challenge, of course, was how to deal with the problems when they arose towards the end of my term in office. What to do with the various problems in the Communist countries, and I think I can only say I feel, sadly, that we were forced to shut down before we felt the job had really been fully completed. At the same time, we felt that we had provided considerable help to many children and mothers who needed it; conditions in the

countries were slowly improving, and Europe was not facing the disaster situation which we found when we started. At the sametime, we shouldn't exaggerate too much what we did; if we helped five to six million people, you must remember that there were five to ten times as many others that we never reached. But many of those - perhaps most of those - were living on farms which were inaccessible to us and which, at the same time, could be expected to have had some food and even clothing resources.

Charnow: Would you feel that if it hadn't been for the Cold War that we, I gather you imply, despite the improvement of conditions which is the reason given in all the UNICEF literature for our withdrawing, that we could have continued and made a continued impact even if we had changed a little bit the orientation of our assistance?

Davidson: Do you mean changed our principles of operation?

Charnow: No, but rather the scope or the type of aid.

Davidson: Well, even today in the United States, twelve per cent of the population is below the poverty level. Those countries, mostly unindustrialized and with a lower standard of living, had such a large portion of their population which did not have acceptable food, clothing and shelter standards that UNICEF could have usefully made a great contribution towards improving the lives of children and mothers in that group.

Permanent impact of UNICEF in Europe

Charnow: I raise this question because we discussed earlier UNICEF's possible permanent impact on some European institutions. In Europe - perhaps this may not be true of all countries - that may be part of the answer. We were not building up institutions to train people but rather rehabilitating and bringing countries up to the level that they were had before they were set back by the war. The professional people were there, the educational level was there and so on. We didn't have the long-range objectives of building up national institutions from a very low level that we've had in the developing countries, but rather just making up for the deficits created by the war period. So that we might have had to get out pretty soon, anyway, from that point of view.

Davidson: No, I wouldn't agree with this.

Charnow: You would not?

Davidson: No, I wouldn't agree with this. The concept of school lunches for example is, as far as I know, an American concept and didn't exist before the war in any European country. And also the idea of a chain series of local child health centres as part of the national health system was, again I think, an innovation in terms of institutional organization in the European countries. So that I

think the greatest contribution that we made was to more firmly establish — well, first of all, to establish institutions and practices where none existed or where they existed in rudimentary form, to strengthen them to the point where they would survive after we left. And certainly, in the area of milk conservation and of BCG, we had a striking impact which I believe lasts through today.

A retrospective look

Charnow: Let me ask you perhaps the final question. In looking back on your experience, what might you have done differently, or what might UNICEF have done differently?

Davidson: It sounds smug to say, but there's no major feature of our organization or of our operations which I would feel that I would do differently today. No doubt, others would have a different view, and I would be very interested to know what they would think should have been done differently. I can think, of course, in any particular programme, there could be programme changes to advantage, but in the broad flush of things I see no major change that I would have made.

Charnow: Well, Al, I think that's a good note to end on - to know that you have this kind of feeling, after so many years, about a major contribution to UNICEF, a major involvement with UNICEF. I might say, for us few remaining old-timers who are still around, in a way we join you in what other people may call a certain 'smugness' about that.

Davidson: For those who are accustomed to TV serials or magazine serials, there are other chapters that follow in my life and in due course I will have an autobiography which will tell you my next step in the United Nations, after I left UNICEF, because I had in fact two other steps, but I won't go into this now.

Davidson: I would like to thank you, Jack, for taking the the initiative to get in touch with me; the UNICEF chapter came out of chronological order in the book that I'm writing. Because I haven't written yet on my UNRRA, IRO and Lend-Lease participation, I had to jump over a couple of decades to get to UNICEF. I'm glad that you asked me to do this because the co-operation and help I've had from you and Joan Dydo will infinitely enrich and make more accurate the chapter on UNICEF for which, however, I take full responsibility.

End of interview

