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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

BERNARD H. FRASER

by

ROBERT CUBBEDGE

August 25, 1971

at

Mianus River Road
Bedford, New York

For the
HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY
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This interview was by Robert Cubbedge. It was edited and approved by the respondent and by Mr. Henle, Director of the Program, and Catherine J. Kenny, Assistant Director of the Program. Research on names, dates and historic references was by Mr. Henle and Miss Kenny. The transcription from raw tape was by Doris M. Goddard. The typing was by Grace J. Vodola.

Tape 437
Side A

MR. CUBBEDGE: I am happy to be with you to talk about Mr. Hoover. What would you consider the most memorable contact which you had with him?

MR. FRASER: After having been with the Commission for Polish Relief and the National Committee on Food for Small Democracies, I paid a visit to Mr. Hoover in his apartment in the Waldorf Towers concluding my duty with the National Committee. The work could not proceed because of opposition by the Roosevelt Administration and I asked Mr. Hoover, "We have not been able to help Belgium, Netherlands, and all the other countries, how about helping China?" Knowing that he was an old China hand, I thought I might ask him this. He sat there and puffed on his pipe and then he said, "China is a vacuum." That is a remarkable statement to make. In the light of today's events it looks particularly significant. If one were to apply this remark to Southeast Asia as a whole one might wish that some other President might have had the same view. Even today as Mr. Nixon plans to proceed to China sometime soon, one would hope that somewhere along the line he would have the wisdom to realize that China is such a vastland that it is almost a vacuum. That is a statement that has long stood out in my mind.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Did he go into it any further than that?

MR. FRASER: No, no. I do not recall that I asked him to go into it further because that is a statement that explains itself. You don't really have to explain a vacuum.

MR. CUBBEDGE: One of the parts of his Memoirs that stands out in my mind is his recollections of China. They are so vivid. I guess many of the people and many things have changed but the situations haven't changed. How did you first come in contact with Mr. Hoover?

MR. FRASER: That goes back to the start of World War II in Europe. I had been in the shipping business until the start of World War II in September, 1939, and it was in December of 1939 when the Commission for Polish Relief became active. I had heard about a need for a shipping officer and applied. The gentleman who hired me was Colonel Joseph Krueger of Bowling Green, Kentucky. I remember he told me once he had been on General Pershing's staff. He was one of Mr. Hoover's close associates who responded and was available for relief work.

The Commission for Polish Relief could not undertake shipments because the opposition was too severe. In 1940 the Lowlands were invaded and the Scandinavian countries, too, and the National Committee on Food for the Small Democracies was formed. The Commission for Polish Relief became a unit in the National Committee. I did research work for Mr. Maurice Pate who had been the head of the Commission for Polish Relief and with whom I became very closely associated. The research work consisted of statistical material to establish that the Nazi-occupied countries could not really feed themselves because they were dependent on food and feed imports even in normal times. It was in this manner that I became acquainted with Mr. Hoover. In March 1941 I prepared a chart about three feet by two feet with statistics and a map of Europe,

with arrows showing in small heavy lines normal flow of imports of foods and feeds. It was this map that he placed at a meeting before some experts. He mentions this meeting in Volume IV of his An American Epic. On page 48 he says that in order to check our information again we requested a committee of experts comprising [John Lee Coulter, J. I. Falconer, Asher Hobson and E. V. McCollum] to review all of the data. My sheet was one of the documents presented there on which these experts gave their blessing. This was sort of a highlight for me.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Was this a U.S. agency?

MR. FRASER: No, it was a non-Governmental group of American experts called in to assist the National Committee on Food for the Small Democracies. That committee was a privately organized and financed agency and was established under the sponsorship of Mr. Hoover with participation of many prominent citizens. This book by Mr. Hoover deals a great deal with it. There was much opposition by the British as well as the Roosevelt Administration. The committee lasted from the start of the occupation by the Nazi's of these small countries until late in 1941. As I say, I left in June of 1941 to go to the War Department in Washington. No real activity had been generated. No real shipping activity; there were so many obstacles to overcome though. Mr. Hoover felt it could be done under neutral supervision, at least mothers and children in those countries could be fed.

MR. CUBBEDGE: I am sure during this time he must have expressed some opinion about what was going on in Europe and what was going to happen. Did he think eventually they would settle down in a permanent Nazi occupation? What was his opinion?

MR. FRASER: I cannot really comment on this. I was not part of any of those discussions. Even Mr. Hoover himself was probably more concerned with the immediate task of trying to help mothers and children whom he saw in great need. What views he had of the ultimate fate of those countries I do not know.

MR. CUBBEDGE: It sounds as if he thought this might be at least more than short term.

MR. FRASER: Yes, that could be. As it was, the war lasted four more years.

MR. CUBBEDGE: A lot of people thought that in those days. Many thought Hitler was sure England would sue for peace after the Continent was conquered.

MR. FRASER: Mr. Hoover was very kind to mention my name in this book; on page 5 he says here:

"In the New York headquarters of the Commission for Polish Relief, McCormick and Pate had the invaluable devotion and experience of Columba P. Murray, Jr., Colonel Joseph Krueger, and Bernard Fraser, all veterans of the American Relief Administration."

There is a slight editorial error because I do not belong to the generation which worked for Mr. Hoover after World War I. The other two apparently did.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Are you Polish by any chance?

MR. FRASER: No, I was born in Bremen, Germany. I came here in 1929. I had a chance at one time to tell Mr. Hoover that in Bremen

as a youngster, in 1922, thereabouts, when I was about 13 or 14 years old, I took part in feeding which was sponsored by the Quakers. In fact, as I recall it, it was called "Hoover Speise," or "The Hoover Meal". I mentioned this at one time to him because I felt it might be interesting for him to see at least one who had been fed, and he seemed to enjoy it.

MR. CUBBEDGE: It is amazing how many people he must have run into in his life who could have told him that.

MR. FRASER: I don't know if there are that many. Did you find that there were?

MR. CUBBEDGE: There were at one time. So many people came to this country who later on became successful.

MR. FRASER: In the case of UNICEF, where I am now in my 25th year, we did some large-scale emergency feeding after the war in the European countries, and it is rather astounding how few people I have met and I think others have met who have in some way benefited from the food. I sometimes speak to young diplomats who come from countries like Italy or Romania, asking them if they remember the dry skimmed milk which UNICEF shipped to those countries in '48, '49, and '50. Some remembered the name UNICEF but when I asked them "Do you know anyone who has benefited by it," they answer usually "I cannot recall." We fed millions of kids but it is something people forget.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Maybe it is a memory they blot out later on.

MR. FRASER: Not purposely. But, especially children, I think, they take it for granted.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Of course, you dealt primarily with children, didn't you?

MR. FRASER: Yes.

MR. CUBBEDGE: I guess the original Hoover program also did feed adults but the children were the primary concern.

MR. FRASER: Right.

MR. CUBBEDGE: You have explained how you became associated with Maurice Pate. Did that relationship continue until you went to the War Department and later?

MR. FRASER: Yes, I went to the War Department in the office of the Quartermaster General and then of course, Pearl Harbor happened and shortly thereafter I joined the Navy, first as a chief petty officer and after a little while I became an officer. I went up to the Aleutian Islands and later to Hawaii. In 1945 I married, and my wife and I settled in San Francisco where I was with the Pacific American Steamship Association.

It was there that Maurice Pate passed through on his trip around the world with Mr. Hoover. You remember Mr. Truman's suggestion that Mr. Hoover make a trip to survey the food needs. We renewed our acquaintance in San Francisco.

In 1946, the General Assembly of the United Nations established the United Nations International Childrens' Emergency Fund. Maurice Pate was

the first director. In March, 1947 he telephoned me in San Francisco and said he needed a shipping officer and would I join him for a year. I left San Francisco in June, 1947 and started work for UNICEF, and this is my 25th anniversary.

UNICEF is largely a creation by Mr. Hoover. It's perhaps not fully documented in that form, but the influence was there. At one point Mr. Hoover made the comment, after his worldwide mission, that there ought to be an organization especially to help needy children. Maurice Pate then became the vehicle to set the organization into motion. I regard UNICEF as a monument to Mr. Hoover. Maurice Pate was its Executive Director for the first eighteen years. He was a most faithful follower of Mr. Hoover and very devoted to him and belonged to his inner circle. He so much admired Mr. Hoover that he himself passed away within three months after Mr. Hoover died in 1964, as if suddenly the umbrella he held had vanished, leaving him without inspiration.

MR. CUBBEDGE: How old was he?

MR. FRASER: Maurice Pate was 70 or 71 when he passed away.

MR. CUBBEDGE: What is your position at UNICEF right now?

MR. FRASER: For the first few years, I was UNICEF's shipping officer, the position for which I had become engaged. Later I was overseas for awhile in Copenhagen and Tokyo, but since 1953, I have been helping the Executive Director, first Mr. Pate and since his death, Mr. H. R. Labouisse, his successor, in raising funds mostly from governments. My task is that of a professional beggar, you might say.

[Laughter] Maurice Pate was a great one in that respect. He almost felt it was a privilege for governments to give money to UNICEF. That is the way he approached governments. He had the appearance of a totally sincere, honest person. He could put his message across without difficulty. Over the years, we have been able to raise five hundred million dollars from governments which is really very little, as it covers 25 years. But the impact of this money has been strong because one principle that UNICEF established from the start, except in emergencies, was that each country has to help itself by putting up at least a dollar's worth of its own money in the form of supplies or services for each dollar that UNICEF puts in. Actually, that has worked out to about two dollars and fifty cents equivalent to every UNICEF dollar.

MR. CUBBEDGE: How does that happen?

MR. FRASER: We conduct programs in countries at their request which in one way or another call for investment funds on their part.

MR. CUBBEDGE: In other words, these countries actually become a partner in this. It's not pure charity then. It's a partnership.

MR. FRASER: Oh yes! Definitely! That is one of the strong points. It is not charity. Only in emergencies where you can't expect much; but in the normal run of programs, the assisted governments are expected to put up funds of their own, and the programs are their own.

MR. CUBBEDGE: When I think of UNICEF, I always think of Danny Kaye. Is he a kind of public relations man?

MR. FRASER: Mr. Pate, who met him on a plane across the Atlantic, called him UNICEF's unofficial ambassador. He is very closely identified with us, and he has helped us a great deal in recent years. He has made barnstorming tours just before Halloween, stopping at five or six cities in one day, making airport appearances for TV -- it's fantastic! He is one of our many friends. It is amazing how much children can do. It's a wonderful principle that children do something to help other children. We have been trying so hard to get this followed elsewhere.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Through the years you were working with UNICEF, you saw Mr. Hoover from time to time, didn't you, in connection with UNICEF?

MR. FRASER: Yes. Well not directly, but Mr. Hoover might have some kind of request for Mr. Pate. I remember one time he had written Mr. Pate and he forgot my name -- I didn't expect him to remember it at all -- but he said "Your able assistant may be able to help us," and then I had a reason to go and see him. I saw him from time to time.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Do any of those visits stand out in your mind?

MR. FRASER: Not as much as some of those I have mentioned. I must mention one. It was about 1953. At the end of our conversation,

none of which were ever too long, Mr. Hoover shook his head and said, "Taxes in this country are increasing, and prices, and I am worried about the economy." It was something to that effect. Then I went downstairs and picked up the paper and there was the big headline: "GM Declared Its Biggest Dividend in History." That stands out in my mind, and it left me puzzled for a long time because here was Mr. Hoover worried and here was GM with its biggest dividend. And yet, I can see that there certainly was a connection: If taxes weren't rising and prices weren't rising, dividends would not rise either. Mr. Hoover wanted to keep taxes low and prices stable, and then dividends could have been lower, too. I thought Mr. Hoover's remark there was a wise one again, but it was out of step with the times.

MR. CUBBEDGE: His ideas of what the economy should have been were sound ideas, but, in practice, it just didn't work out that way. We had progressed too far on the road of inflation that turning back had become impossible.

MR. FRASER: That is right. The times were passed. His ideas were sound; that is the point I wanted to make.

I am personally very much indebted to Mr. Hoover. It was only after many years that I learned something I will relate. After I had started in the War Department in June, 1941, Army Intelligence began to make a very thorough investigation of me. Then, it must have been after the end of the war, I heard from Perrin Galpin that the investigators, having learned that some of my material had gone to Mr. Hoover, wanted to see him. Of course, the staff thought that wasn't really necessary

but they insisted and Mr. Hoover was said to have remarked to them that the War Department should be glad to have me. That was the end of it. I learned later about many other things that made it clear that the investigation had been very thorough, and I have a great deal of respect for the intelligence services. Since then, I have been investigated by the Navy Intelligence, and because of my work at the UN, by the FBI. We were all investigated. I remember I went to my dentist and told him that I was sorry I was late and I was tied up because I had filled out a form for the FBI where I had to list all my travels for the last five or ten years, and there were quite a few at that time. My dentist then said, "All this should not be a surprise to you, you have been investigated before." I said, "How do you know?" "Well, when you were in the War Department, they came to me and asked me about you." I said, "I didn't give you as my reference." "Well, somehow they found out I was your dentist."

MR. CUBBEDGE: Apparently you had a clean bill of health.

MR. FRASER: Oh yes. I had no trouble.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Did you see Mr. Hoover right up until the end?

MR. FRASER: No, the last time I remember seeing him was at a reunion of the ARA at the Waldorf which must have been 1960. I remember seeing him and we talked to him for a little while and he left early; he had begun to age. He still had many friends at that time. I was one of the younger ones. You know UNICEF won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1965 which was a posthumous tribute to Mr. Pate. He died in January, 1965

and the award came to us in October of that year, obviously in recognition of his loyal services.

MR. CUBBEDGE: That must have been a satisfying moment in your career.

MR. FRASER: Yes it was.

MR. CUBBEDGE: You said you consider UNICEF a monument to Mr. Hoover. Did Mr. Pate ever discuss this with you, or did he ever discuss it with Mr. Hoover?

MR. FRASER: No. I don't know what Mr. Pate discussed with Mr. Hoover.

MR. CUBBEDGE: Did he ever mention discussing it? Did you discuss it with Mr. Pate?

MR. FRASER: Yes, we both had great respect for Mr. Hoover. He always called him the "Chief," belonging to the generation which created the term, and in statements that he made from time to time at luncheons or meetings, he would sometimes refer to Mr. Hoover and say this was something Mr. Hoover might have done, or something of that sort. But he did not make wide use of it because he was modest about it, too. He didn't want to impress anybody by the use of the name Hoover when it wasn't necessary. There was a time when he called on Mr. Hoover to issue a statement praising the effort that UNICEF was making. That was a need. It might have been at a time when Congress wasn't giving us money in sufficient amounts, or circumstances of that sort, and Mr. Hoover issued a statement praising UNICEF.

MR. CUBBEDGE: It was obviously a close working relationship.

MR. FRASER: Definitely! Mr. Pate did not want to abuse it either. He was a gentleman. Everybody knew he was a close associate of Mr. Hoover's, so he didn't have to speak about it.

MR. CUBBEDGE: I have one last question I want to ask you. As you look back on your relationship with Mr. Hoover, how do you see him?

MR. FRASER: I have great admiration for him. I think no impression of any particular nature stands out, all impressions are favorable. I see him sitting at a desk puffing at the pipe and thinking about the question of China that I asked. [Laughter]

MR. CUBBEDGE: I guess he figured there just wasn't much you could do about China, just let it go its own way. I suppose each succeeding generation of Americans thinks that perhaps it is possible to work out some arrangement with China.

MR. FRASER: I wonder whether there is a Chinaman's chance. [Laughter]

MR. CUBBEDGE: I think you are right. Apparently we are trying to do it again. Well! Thank you very much.

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