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THE TOWNSEND PLAN IN RETROSPECT

John C. Cuneo

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

John Charles Cuneo, the son of Carlo S. and Rose Thresa (Cuneo) Cuneo, was born March 14, 1888 at Jackson, California. His father had come from Genoa, Italy to California, by way of New York, at fourteen years of age. After a short stay in San Francisco, he settled near Jackson. John C. Cuneo attended the New York Ranch Grammar School, a one-teacher, one-room school. One of his fellow students was Mary Esther Andrews, whom he later married on December 23, 1908.

After graduation from Heald's Business College at Stockton, California in 1908, Mr. Cuneo worked for a short time in the office of the Wagner Leather Company in San Francisco. His next position was with the West Side Lumber Company in Tuolumne, and then in 1910 he and his wife moved to Modesto, where he became general manager of the Tuolumne Lumber Company, then operating twelve building supply yards in the area. During the next thirty years Cuneo held a variety of managerial positions in and around Modesto.

In 1934 Mr. Cuneo first became acquainted with Dr. Francis E. Townsend and his Townsend Plan. This meeting was to have a marked influence on the remainder of Cuneo's career. In 1938 he was appointed State Director of the Townsend Plan, Incorporated for the State of California, with headquarters in Modesto. He also organized and

helped to carry on the Townsend Party in California, acting as secretary and treasurer during the years that party was officially on the State's election ballots.

Governor Culbert Olson appointed Cuneo to the California State Social Welfare Board in 1940 to fill a vacancy created by the death of J. Stitt Wilson, Mayor of Berkeley. He remained as a member of the board for sixteen years, serving three four-year terms under Governor Earl Warren. Until the time of his retirement in 1960, he was also active in city and county affairs. He served on the Modesto City Council and as president of its Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations and was also president of the Stanislaus County Board of Trade.

In 1953 Mr. Cuneo obtained permission from the national headquarters of the Townsend Plan to deposit the records relating to the Movement's activities in California, at the UCLA Library's Department of Special Collections. The deposit included in addition to official records, Cuneo's personal papers relevant to his activities in behalf of the organization. Seven years after his retirement, he contacted the Library in regard to depositing additional official and personal records remaining in his possession. At that time he agreed to participate in a series of tape-recorded interviews to supplement the materials on deposit.

In the following narrative, which is a transcript of tape-recorded interviews made by John C. Cuneo with the UCLA Oral History Program, he chiefly describes his role in the Townsend Movement and as a member of the California State Social Welfare Board. Records relating to the interview, including supplemental biographical information, are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Donald J. Schippers, Interviewer-Editor,
Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., UCLA; M.A., American
History, Occidental College; M.L.S., Library Service,
UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: In Mr. Cuneo's home at 517 Semple Street,
Modesto, California.

Dates: Interview sessions took place on: May 25, 1967;
May 26, 1967.

Time of day and length of sessions, and total number of
recording hours: The interviews were conducted on two
consecutive days, with a session in the early afternoon
and another session in the evening. This manuscript
represents a total of four hours of recording time.

Persons present during interview: Cuneo and Schippers.
Mrs. Cuneo was present during all but one of the sessions.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW: After providing basic biographical
and background information, the interviewee was encouraged
to respond to questions of a topical nature. These
questions for the most part related to his role in the
Townsend Movement and as a member of the State Social
Welfare Board.

EDITING:

Editor: Ronald F. Barr, Editor, UCLA Oral History Program.

A verbatim transcription of the tape recordings was
completed January 1969. The editor did an audit-edit
of the manuscript. The editing was minor in nature;
punctuation was introduced, spelling corrected, names
verified, syntax slightly emended. The chronology of
the interviews was retained, with no rearrangement of
the material. The editing was completed July 1969.

Cuneo reviewed and approved the edited manuscript,
from which this final form was typed. Proper names were
verified and occasional words and phrases were changed
or deleted.

The index and supporting documents were prepared by
Bernard Galm, Editor-Interviewer, Oral History Program, UCLA.

DISPOSITION OF TAPE RECORDINGS, EDITED TRANSCRIPT AND
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: The tape recordings of the interviews
and the edited transcript are in the University Archives,
Department of Special Collections, UCLA Library and
are available under the regulations governing the use of
noncurrent University Records. The official records of
the Townsend Movement in California and the personal papers
of John C. Cuneo, relating there to, are in the Depart-
ment of Special Collections.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

May 25, 1967

CUNEO: I was born on March 14, 1888, in a ranch home six miles east of Jackson, Amador County, California, in the New York Ranch School District. My father was Carlo S. Cuneo, who came to California in 1878 at age fourteen years. He was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1864. He came to California by boat through New York City with an uncle. He came here on advice from doctors after suffering a serious attack of diphtheria, at which time several members of his family died.

SCHIPPERS: You were telling about his father.

CUNEO: My father's father had come to California and worked at gold mining for a few years, after which he returned to Italy. My father located in San Francisco, working there a few years, then moving to Jackson where he worked in a large garden near Jackson. It was there he met my mother. Her name was Rose T. Cuneo. They were married in Jackson in 1885. My mother did not need to change her name. The relationship between the two Cuneo families was distant, but they came from an area near Genoa, Italy. My mother was born near Jackson in 1867. There were three sons in our family, I the eldest, Joseph L. Cuneo born in 1891, and Ernest Lee born in 1895. Joseph still lives on the old home place, and Ernest Lee was killed at six years of age in an accident while I was driving a team hauling a load of wood. I had my left ankle crushed by the wagon wheel in the same accident. My father worked for several years for the Chicazola General Store at Jackson Gate and for the Kennedy Mining Company at Jackson. He died in 1916

from pneumonia. My mother continued to live on the old homestead until her death in 1954. She was active in the Preservation of the Catholic Church at Clinton, California.

Her parents were John and Julia. Julia was Julia Oneto. Both came to California from Italy. Julia came by sailboat from New York to San Francisco by way of the southern tip of South America. It took seventy-five days for this journey. They located near Jackson and operated extensive gardens to supply vegetables to the many miners. They had several children, two of which are still living, Lorenzo Cuneo of Sutter Creek and Mrs. Ida Galli of Pine Grove. Lorenzo is now ninety-five years old and Ida is ninety-two.

Our first home was a small two-room house with dirt floors. Later, a larger house was built, and it is still in use. My brother Joseph married Linda Trabucco. They have lived on the farm all these years. They have three children: Carl S., who now lives in Modesto, Ernest J., now working in the lumber mill at Martell near Jackson, Marie, a daughter, died at age fifteen. While my father worked in Jackson, mother and the boys in our family (with the help of a few elderly men) cleared part of the 160 acres of land and developed a good fruit orchard and vegetable garden.

SCHIPPERS: What kind of fruit was it?

CUNEO: Mostly grapes but also peaches, apples, cherries, prunes. When fifteen I began delivering the produce with a small wagon.

We attended the New York Ranch School. It was a one-teacher, one-room school. The ages of the pupils were from five to twenty. One of the pupils was Mary Esther Andrews, whom I married on December 23, 1908, in Stockton. We both attended Heald's Business

College in Stockton. Our wedding was on her nineteenth birthday.

SCHIPPERS: Before you go further there, where did the produce go to, for the main part?

CUNEO: Delivered it to the boarding houses, restaurants, and families. We had regular routes that we would go around to every week, twice a week.

SCHIPPERS: You told me that originally some of these farms were developed to serve the miners in the area.

CUNEO: Well, they were developed for the purpose of providing this foodstuff to people who had gardens and wagons to deliver in their particular areas.

SCHIPPERS: Was there quite a strong tie in the community?

CUNEO: Oh, yes. In those times.

SCHIPPERS: And also you were saying that they tended to be rather clannish?

CUNEO: Oh, yes. Naturally they spoke Italian. In fact they taught me how to speak it. I could speak it; I can still speak it. Not fluently but I haven't had much contact with it in recent years; if I get real hungry I can make myself understood very fast [laughter].

SCHIPPERS: And you of course have since not kept up the Catholic faith or practice.

CUNEO: No.

SCHIPPERS: Okay. You can...

CUNEO: Mary, my wife, was born at the old family ranch five miles east of Jackson on December 23, 1891. She lived with her widowed mother and brother, Edmond Ward Andrews. After graduating from Heald's Business College in 1907, I worked for a short period for

the Wagner Leather Company Office in San Francisco. This was during the Russo-Japanese War. We sold large shipments of leather to both countries. The afternoon of our wedding we left by train for Tuolumne, California, where I had been employed in the offices of the West Side Lumber Company for the previous six months. We set up our first home immediately and lived there until February 10, 1910, when we came to Modesto to manage the Tuolumne Lumber Company, a string of retail yards owned by the West Side Lumber Company in this area, which I continued to manage until 1920 when the business was sold to the Ward Lumber Company. Our son Vernon was born in Modesto, May 21, 1910. Our daughter Lorene Esther was born on October 31, 1913, in Modesto. They both attended Modesto elementary schools, high school, Modesto Junior College, and the University of California at Berkeley. Both achieved very fine scholastic records, while making most of their own way at college. Vernon is living in New York with his wife, Dorothy, and their daughter Jean and sons Donald and John. Our son is with International Telephone Company. Lorene lives with her husband, Philip P. Greuner, at South Lake Tahoe, California. They have two daughters, both married. Barbara Dallenback and her husband and two daughters live in Sunnyvale, California. Patricia Tilley and husband live at San Andreas, California. The Dallenback daughters are our great grandchildren. Jean Z. Cuneo of New Jersey is a graduate from Cornell University, but she is attending New York University in New York and will graduate as a nursing teacher the first of June. And Donald L. Cuneo is entered in Columbia University in New York, and he will be in Washington, D.C., during the summer in the U.S. foreign service.

Some civic and political activities in which I participated: First, I was elected to the Modesto City Council about 1915 and served seven years, when the whole council of five members was recalled because Mayor George J. Ulrich antagonized a few of the people when the council voted to maintain a policy of not permitting streets to be paved unless sewers were installed. When elected I was the youngest member ever elected and received the highest vote at the election. During the time I served on the city council we established the first Modesto airport on the site of the present Modesto golf course. I was Commissioner of Public Works. I served as president of the Modesto Advertising Club. And I might add here that I had the privilege of having as one of my speakers none other than William Jennings Bryan, as he appeared before our public meeting of the Modesto Advertising Club.

SCHIPPERS: Did you make the contact with him?

CUNEO: No, it was through a friend of mine that knew him. Mr. Bryan was coming through the county, and he contacted him. We had a nice meeting. Third, I served as president of the Central California Lumbermen's Association for several years. I served as a member of the local Advisory Board of the Bank of America (Bank of Italy at that time). When they first came to Modesto they took over the Farmers and Merchants Bank. Mr. Harter was the manager. I was president of the Stanislaus County Board of Trade, George McCabe was the secretary. I was president of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce. I was chairman of the Poultry Division of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. In 1942, Governor Culbert Olson appointed me to the State Social Welfare Board to fill the

vacancy due to the death of J. Stitt Wilson, the then mayor of Berkeley. I was three times reappointed by Governor Earl Warren for four-year terms.

SCHIPPERS: And where did you conduct your activities in that capacity?

CUNEO: Well, I was a member of the California State Social Welfare Board. I had my own office here in Modesto and I attended the meetings wherever they were held, all over the state to hear all the appeals and hearings of all kinds [tape off].

SCHIPPERS: Was this appointment to the Welfare Board made because of your activities in the Townsend Plan?

CUNEO: It undoubtedly had an influence, yes.

SCHIPPERS: Do you know positively that it did?

CUNEO: I have no way of judging Mr. Warren's or Mr. Olson's first opinion, but I was recommended by some of our people. Wilford Howard was a member of the federal agency that was trying to prevent the foreclosure of homes and properties at that time. He was a representative here in California for quite awhile doing that. And it was he that made the recommendation to Governor Olson.

SCHIPPERS: Had you campaigned for Olson?

CUNEO: No. Mayor J. Stitt Wilson of Berkeley was a very capable man, and I felt rather pleased to be able to follow in his footsteps.

SCHIPPERS: What was your relationship with Mr. Wilson?

CUNEO: Well, I just met him through the political campaigns when he'd come through here at different times. He always took part in state activities and was a very prominent speaker.

SCHIPPERS: And you think that the Townsend activities are what gave you the acquaintances and the opportunities to serve?

CUNEO: Yes, I think there was no other reason for his recommending me.

SCHIPPERS: And it was certainly through that that you got your knowledge of the welfare problems.

CUNEO: Yes, and knowing that I was representing all these people and knowing their problems, it was logical for him to recommend someone that he thought had more experience.

SCHIPPERS: But it was not because of political [favoritism] in any way?

CUNEO: No. Not to my knowledge.

SCHIPPERS: I see.

CUNEO: I was reappointed by Governor Earl Warren for three four-year terms. I served longer than any other member up until that time, a total of about sixteen years on the State Social Welfare Board. I am indeed glad to have had a part in the development of our state social welfare program. I had been a member of a lumbermen's organization known as the Hoo-Hoos, which is a social organization like the Moose Lodge, the Elks Lodge, and the Masonic Lodge, and is still active.

SCHIPPERS: Incidentally, where is your correspondence relating to the years that you were with the Social Welfare Department?

CUNEO: Where is my correspondence?

SCHIPPERS: Yes, your materials with that.

CUNEO: Well, I have some in my private file. But there isn't too much involved in that. That is rather routine.

SCHIPPERS: Perfunctory?

CUNEO: Yes. The Social Welfare Board was at that time rather an important institution. It has been watered down considerably now

with other agencies. We had not only the responsibility of making the regulations for all these expanding programs, but we had to administer them; and we had to provide the mechanism for the opportunity of dissatisfied people to make claims, to file petitions for hearings of their individual cases. These appeals would come up to us at board meetings. We'd have them as much as possible heard by hearing officers. But the hearing officers were not always available, and as a result we had many, many of those appeals coming up every month that were very, very important.

SCHIPPERS: What would you say your primary responsibility was?

CUNEO: As a board...?

SCHIPPERS: Yes.

CUNEO: Interpreting the laws and developing adequate administrative regulations. That's the basic thing. Secondary was administering the laws through the counties. The County Welfare Departments had to operate through the welfare director of our board. He saw that they carried out the regulations and provided the opportunity for recipients who felt they were injured by the actions of the counties to have redress. We were courts, in other words. Sometimes we would have a board meeting; we would have a hundred appeals. Such as I say, some of them were heard by hearing officers, and they would not be too lengthy. But it was a terrific job to always have all of the facts and be able to decide justly.

SCHIPPERS: Yes. What policies do you recall that might have been innovated during that period?

CUNEO: Well, I can't say. There were many specific policies, because the three things I just said to you are responsibilities that are so broad. But in the meantime there was so much legislation

passed that it was a terrific job to keep up with, and to carry out, the regulations that would make the laws operate. And when I had all my manuals -- I measured them one time -- they were about three feet high. We had the aged, the blind, the disabled, and all the other different programs, each one different. They were so cumbersome, so much red tape.

SCHIPPERS: Well, we may get at that again in another context. But I would like to ask you some questions in regard to the Townsend Movement and also the State Relief Administration and some of the ways these things worked together and worked against each other. But you can continue.

CUNEO: The following is my association with the Townsend Plan activities. In 1934 I was attracted to this program and have been active in it to date. I became a state director in 1938 and resigned January 1, 1962. It has been a most active program of political action and much good has come from this broad national effort. We enjoy some of the degree of social security because of the sacrifices made by Dr. Townsend and his followers. Further gains toward the full Townsend Plan are in the making in the years ahead. The state of California always led other states in all of our activities. We have held three national conventions in California. We also operated a Townsend party in California for several years. We also conducted two initiative statewide campaigns. The Townsend Plan always provided a gross income tax to pay the benefits. It is sound, simple, and equitable, geared to the living costs and on a pay-as-we-go basis, equal to all.

I was engaged in the following business activities. First, in 1908, I worked in the office of the Wagner Leather Company in

San Francisco for six months, a wholesale leather company with a factory in Stockton. From 1908 to 1909, I worked in the sales office of the West Side Lumber Company at Tuolumne, George W. Palmer, sales manager, John R. Prince, general manager. From 1910 to 1920, I managed the retail lumber yards of Tuolumne Lumber Company, twelve yards in Stanislaus County and San Joaquin County. John R. Prince was general manager. Yards were sold in 1920 to Ward Lumber Company. During the time I managed the Tuolumne Lumber Company I participated as a silent partner in the following activities: First, the Cleveland Poster Advertising Company; second, Otherback Hog Raising Company; third, the Shope Brick Manufacturing Company; fourth, the Baunonk Tractor Sales Company; fifth, the Woodtight Laboratories; sixth, the Universal Concrete Products Company (manufactures coolers at Selma, California). From 1921 to 1922 I served as business manager of the Modesto Herald, Leslie Ferris, editor, T.K. Beard, owner. The Modesto Herald was sold to the Modesto News. Seventh, from 1922 to 1923, I served as manager of the Real Estate Department of A.B. Shoemaker Company, with Charles Caylor as my assistant. Eighth, while employed by Tuolumne Lumber Company I developed the Modesto Hatchery and Poultry Farm in association with J.R. Prince, George W. Johnson, William R. Thorsen, and Jack Calder. We built a large poultry plant and hatchery on 107 acres on the river adjoining the city of Modesto. The project was not profitable. Mr. Calder was released, and I was able to interest Professor James J. Dryden to join us and manage the project. He provided his pedigreed White Leghorn and Bard Rock birds. I might comment here that Professor Dryden

is a famous man in poultry circles. He started in at Logan, Utah, and developed a breed of White Leghorns and Bard Rocks that were very profitable for people that used them. Then he went to Corvallis, Oregon, to the University and operated their poultry plant there. During the 1915 San Francisco Fair he entered three pens at the Leghorn contest and they won first, second and third places in the contest. Then he moved to Concord, California, and developed a plant of his own there. During my association as the Farm Bureau Advisor the Poultry Department knew that I eliminated this man Calder that was associated with us, and they put me in touch with Professor Dryden. It took me two years to get him to move here and take over this plant. We got him, and he developed a very marvelous poultry breeding plant -- shipping breeding stock, hatching eggs and baby chicks all over the world from here. And I certainly enjoyed my acquaintance with him. He made a success of the breeding plant. He was killed in an auto accident near Livermore, California. After his death his son Horace managed and enlarged the business successfully. We sold the business to Horace Dryden and some other man. He has since become incapacitated and died. The business was taken over by some bankers. They did not operate long. The city of Modesto has a municipal golf course on most of the land. The balance of the land is being subdivided, and the Stanislaus Sportsmen's Club is located on part of the property. When I took over that area of property I did make some inquiry about having a golf course on the property. And the city has it now, as a municipal golf course, and a very good one, too.

About 1925 -- this is a real story here -- about 1925 C.L. Flack

hired me to help him operate his varied interests in banks, land development, creameries, canneries, and so forth. I was made president of the Riverbank First National Bank. Mr. Flack was chairman of the board, and Mr. C.M. Gullick cashier. Mr. Flack became involved financially with several large loans from banks and individuals. I acted as trustee on several loans made to him. Business conditions became worse and Mr. Flack disappeared and has never been located. In his desperation he even took the deposit we had at the Federal Reserve Bank before he left. This forced the bank to be closed with me as president. It would take a big book to record what followed in handling Flack's widespread operation. I was made receiver along with the federal bank receiver. It was truly a nightmare for many years. But I am happy to say that I am able to live with every one of the people that were involved in the bank at Riverbank, California. Together with Ed W. Andrews and H. Zion and R.B. McPherson we applied for and we received a franchise for a toll road to be built from La Grange, California, to Briceburg, California. This would shorten the distance from Modesto to Yosemite Valley thirty miles. The franchise was granted to us by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors in 1930. We had arranged with Bradford Kimball Company of San Francisco to raise two million dollars for the construction through a bond issue, but they could not deliver since the Depression had arrived, so another deal collapsed. And, by the way, that was the last franchise that was ever issued in California for a toll road where you pay for the privilege of using it. A new law had gone into effect, at a certain date, and we got in under the wire when everybody

said it couldn't be done. We did that part of it but we did not stop the Depression.

Ninth, about 1918 I became interested in drilling an oil well in Long Beach, California. Henry Noonan of Santa Rosa and others owned a lease on a tract where there were already three wells producing on the other three corner lots of the street intersection. When we swabbed the well after drilling 4,608 feet we got saltwater instead of oil. What a disappointment! Millionaires, then failures [laughter]. We lost the lease and years later two wells were completed to 6,000 feet. They have been producing large amounts of oil daily ever since. Several years prior to the above I owned several part-owner interests, lease royalties in east Texas with flush production, but oil sold at ten cents per barrel with little market facilities at that time. The cost of maintaining the leases was prohibitive. Then, following the collapse of the Flack Empire I entered into a contract to sign up farmers to grow tomatoes for the Riverbank Cannery Company. I was to get one-third interest in the cannery for my effort. That year the tomatoes were all blighted, a total loss. So I lost out on another good prospect. The cannery now is one of the larger canneries in the country. Eleventh, when Mr. Flack left he owed me considerable money. I held \$60,000 worth of Riverbank Water Company stock as security for what was due me, and for the balance due the First National Bank at Sonora, California, on a loan they had made to Flack. The bank foreclosed on the stock, so I lost that.

Twelfth, now, Mr. E.R. Hawke, I might say, was a very successful businessman, one of the very first to organize the J.C. Penney Company. He had a lot of stores around in which he had interest,

and in a very few years he became a millionaire double. He was a very capable, fine man who stood well in our community. About 1928 Mr. Hawke asked me to join him to help direct his far-flung operation. He had been a very successful J.C. Penney manager and stockholder and became very wealthy in a short period. As a result he was interested in many businesses new to him. They included several J.C. Penney stores, canneries, building and loans associations, bakeries, ranches, airplane factories, airports, society magazines, airplane crop-dusting, and so forth. As the 1932 Depression developed he became deeply involved, and many businesses had to be liquidated at great loss. In 1940 he was broke and died leaving nothing for his widow. About 1932 he opened a store of his own in Modesto but sold it to Montgomery Ward Company in 1935. I had an arrangement to participate in the ownership of the department store had it been a success.

Following Mr. Hawke's passing I directed liquidation and operation of the businesses. The airplane crop-dusting operations were carried on as Hawke Dusters. The owners were E.R. Hawke, Bob Streif and Al Polk, pilots, and myself. After the passing of Mr. Hawke both pilots were killed, so business was liquidated. It is still being operated as Hawke Dusters. Mr. Hawke's business relationships were indeed broad, but he was a victim of the 1929 collapse, and this experience was so very disappointing. Since that collapsed, I devoted most of my time with Townsend Plan, Incorporated, and State Social Welfare Board activities. It has all been truly a broad, varied experience in one lifetime. Now I can elaborate on the details on each one of those.

SCHIPPERS: All right, fine. One of the things, of course, I am

interested in is how you did get involved in the Townsend Plan, specifically.

CUNEO: Well, I went to Los Angeles on some business, I don't remember just which. I didn't go on account of the Townsend organization, because I didn't know anything about it.

SCHIPPERS: What year was this? You gave 1938 as the beginning, and you have written down here that you started out in 1934.

CUNEO: Well, that would be about the time that I went down to...

SCHIPPERS: To Los Angeles, in 1934?

CUNEO: Yes. I heard a little something about it down there, and there was another outfit that was very popular at that time, which helped to meet the needs of the people that were in distress. I forget what they call it now.

SCHIPPERS: Was this during the Epic campaign?

CUNEO: Well, yes.

SCHIPPERS: So, was this technocracy, then?

CUNEO: Yes, that's the word. I couldn't think of it. I had heard about the Epic movement. I had come in contact with so much of the distress that I was naturally concerned, and when things came up, why, I listened to them. I came back. I had heard of a meeting here and that they had organized a club, Modesto Club Number One. And a couple of businessmen (in this sense, that one was an appraiser and another was a salesman for a clothing house) were members. They contacted me and asked me if I would join in the second club. I did, and paid twenty-five cents for membership. I attended a few meetings and finally got interested enough to participate in the meetings and became an officer. As

soon as other clubs were organized they began wanting some of the people to come and speak to them, I began doing it. I remember that my first meeting was at Manteca High School. I had about three-hundred people and I was hardly prepared. But I made my humble effort and it went over very good. From that time on I began speaking with regularity at evenings and holidays when I could.

SCHIPPERS: Did you start your speaking activities in about 1935 or 1936?

CUNEO: 1934, 1935. [tape off]

SCHIPPERS: What were the contents of these speeches, in the main?

CUNEO: Well, I have out there in the shed a map and chart with the five or six sheets. One of the men that interested me to come into the organization prepared some material for me and put it up there. I analyzed it and used it quite effectively at that time. It is rather crudely done, but it served the purpose.

SCHIPPERS: I see now. You mean this material then was sort of "suggested" from the main office?

CUNEO: This was original material that this man, Joe Sparks, assembled for me. But it was in line with the Townsend fundamentals and their material that they sent out.

SCHIPPERS: Did you simply go on invitation and did you get a fee for this?

CUNEO: Very seldom. Once in awhile I got a dollar or two for gasoline. [I received] no fees of any kind, at no time during all of the years. I was offered money many times but I never took any.

SCHIPPERS: So these were just other clubs in other areas that would call to ask for your speaking?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: When did you first meet Dr. Townsend?

CUNEO: I don't think I can tell you just now. I think I probably met him -- no, I didn't meet him -- when I went to Los Angeles that time. Their office was upstairs in the Arcade Building. They had their office up on the third floor, but there was so much going on I couldn't get near the place, and I didn't have much time to spend so I don't think I met him then. I can't say exactly when I first met him. It must have been out of some of those gatherings. I might have been when they held a big meeting in Oakland, when several other national individuals were there. We took a large delegation from here down by train, and I know I led the delegation up to a park. We had to walk a mile or so from the railroad station. And he [Dr. Townsend] and these other people were there. I think that's the first time that I saw him. Of course, after that I met him and got well-acquainted.

SCHIPPERS: Now, of course, you took these first positions through a democratic election in the clubs?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: What led to your being taken on in the capacity of an official member of the organization?

CUNEO: As State Director?

SCHIPPERS: Yes.

CUNEO: Well, the organization was at that time growing so fast there were changes being made everywhere, a lot of confusion and controversy. There was a man named Margett from San Francisco that was supposedly charged with trying to take over. The Doctor had quite a lot of confidence in him, but it seems like he didn't develop as was hoped for. He had a peculiar way of operating. He had a

furniture business of some kind. He would give a piece of furniture where he was going to speak and put it up for sale at auction. He gave the proceeds to the local clubs to help finance their activities.

But I can't give you the inside as to what caused the separation, but it was not a satisfactory arrangement, so Dr. Townsend contacted this fellow Glen S. Wilson, or Glen Wilson contacted him. He was up in Washington somewhere. He came down here and took a leading part. He took over the San Francisco headquarters. And he operated that for six months -- or a year or so -- in between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The State Council that he had to build up met, and I was a member of that. That's where I got acquainted with him. I think the Doctor and he had some plans to take him back to Chicago, to take over a visual education program that they had in mind. The Doctor asked him for a recommendation for somebody to take over here. He saw what little I had done. He thought I was capable of doing it and he recommended me.

SCHIPPERS: What little had you done?

CUNEO: Well, [laughter] what little I had done? As a member of the clubs and a member of the District Council and a member of the State Council, I helped carry on the expansion and activities of the Townsend clubs.

SCHIPPERS: Besides bringing people together in the pressure of the times in the Depression, was there something about the Plan that appealed to your economic philosophy?

CUNEO: Yes, very much. As I have indicated I was raised in conditions that were backward, poverty conditions, where we had to work

for what we got. And I knew what it was to be poor. I knew a lot of poor people, knew what they had to contend with. I went out to [Heald's] Business College. I went to San Francisco and then I went to Tuolumne; and I came into close contact with the effects of poverty. When I was at West Side Lumber Company in Tuolumne at one period prices were bad. The mill owners were very fine people, good business people. All they had to do was to shut the plant down, to let the lumber stand in the piles until prices went up. But the people that were there all the time were not getting their paychecks each week and so could not pay the company store for what they bought. They had a very tough time. Each month or each week they were hoping to hear the whistle blow again, but it did not blow for a long, long time. Those people scattered out and went here, there, and yon to try to get something to do. Some did, some didn't. It was a very touching experience close up. At that time I met a very fine gentleman, one of the workmen up there, and he was Charles A. Brown. He provided me with the opportunity of reading Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy. I must say that, on account of those conditions, it caused me to look with a great deal of interest in that particular story. And I think that since that time I have probably had more contact with the liberal side of activities of all kinds than conservative.

SCHIPPERS: I noticed that there were some copies of the Grange out in the garage. You were telling me that you have subscribed to the newspaper, and you have been interested in it as an organization. Do you think there is anything about the, shall we say, "philosophy" of the Grange and/or of the latter-day Populist Movement that was

so pronounced at the time you were growing up -- was there any of that carry-over into your thinking?

CUNEO: Well, there probably was. The Populists? I guess you mean the Socialists.

SCHIPPERS: Well, of course, the Populists came a little bit before the Progressives.

CUNEO: Well, I don't think I had too much contact with that. But I did have some with the Socialists. I heard Eugene V. Debs speak and J. Stitt Wilson was a Socialist. He was mayor of Berkeley and a very fine man. I knew some others.

SCHIPPERS: Just about the time you were starting to work, about the time you got out of business college, the California Progressives were all...

CUNEO: [Hiram] Johnson.

SCHIPPERS: That's right. And how did you feel about all that?

CUNEO: Well, I supported Johnson, but not actively.

SCHIPPERS: Were you politically alert to...

CUNEO: No, not extremely so. No. I was interested in it. I read about it and heard some of the speeches and all that, but I was not a party man myself.

SCHIPPERS: Were you very aware of the Southern Pacific domination of the...

CUNEO: Yes, yes.

SCHIPPERS: And was this something you resented?

CUNEO: Well, I was not for it.

SCHIPPERS: What I am doing is trying to ask you really to put out your economic philosophy. Is there some way you can say it?

CUNEO: Well, my economic philosophy is wrapped up basically in the fundamentals of the Townsend Plan. That's why I took an interest in

it. I saw, under the conditions that existed at that time, the bad economic conditions following 1929, the same things that Dr. Townsend saw. I saw out of my office window down in the alley -- I saw all those women and kids and old men and everybody going up and down there in streams to whittle something out of those garbage cans. Naturally I was against that kind of a thing. And what can we do to fix it? The best thing that I saw that came along was the fundamental principles involved in the Townsend Plan. And that was purely from a humanitarian standpoint. But from a practical standpoint, the reason the Townsend Plan appealed to me as it did was that it seemed to be a very equitable plan and a sound plan and a simple plan on a pay-as-you-go basis and with the grants geared to the cost of living, something that we needed, and very simple compared to all other welfare programs that we had. I had had about twelve or fifteen years experience with the Welfare Department before I became affiliated with them.

An aunt of Mrs. Cuneo was a widow living up in Sonora. She had to be maintained, and she applied for a state old-age pension. She had to be over seventy-five years of age. She got the big sum of \$15 a month. If she lived in the county for a year, if relatives were not able to do anything, and if she got a cake or a chicken or some vegetables, those had to be figured out and deducted. A welfare worker would come and check all of those things. And then we applied to the state Department of Social Welfare for her pension and found out that they had to live in the county a year, so we had to move her down from Sonora down to Modesto and set her up in a little house. Her brother maintained

her there, that year, while she was waiting to get on the \$15-a-month pension.

SCHIPPERS: You mentioned that the Townsend Plan was very simple. And, of course, that very simplicity was often the thing about which it was criticized the most. What do you feel about the major criticisms that have been leveled against it?

CUNEO: Well, they have not changed my mind any.

SCHIPPERS: You still think the fundamentals are sound?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: How would you explain, then, that first bout of trouble it had in being criticized as far as the effectiveness of it as a financial practicality to begin with?

CUNEO: Well, you are asking what caused it to retrogress. There were so many things in themselves that it would be a very broad subject to try to cover. But if you want to get a few of the basic ones, I would be happy to give them to you. The first thing, we have had nothing but war since that time. It has stimulated artificially the economy. Second thing, we have not solved our economic problems of the masses, of the elderly people, despite the fact that we have got some pretty good gains in social security, for which I am grateful for every one of them. Another thing is the unions have organized pensions into pension funds that are very desirable things to control, and they have pushed that to a successful point from their point of view. But it took more people that would normally go into the category of recipients of old-age assistance out of that category. Another thing is the people who think about this don't realize that about three out of four of the people that are sixty-five years of age and over do not

do not apply or are not participants in the old-age assistance program. So we three that don't participate against the fourth one that has been doing the work to push this program for the benefit of all the people -- why, they are not very friendly to anything that is going to be for him. They have got their own, or somebody has got it for them. There is a big percentage of that three-quarters, and I am here to tell you from my experience in dealing with the welfare program from the beginning (my beginning until now hasn't changed much) that such a large percentage of the people have given up in despair. They just simply do not want to go through that red tape to get the little they get. I am saying that with a great deal of conviction, because there are so many of these people who couldn't take the red tape involved. It used to be very difficult. It is much better now, but then it is red tape. We used to have a case worker handling as many as three hundred cases. Well, now they have got it down to about sixty or sixty-five, something like that. It makes it easier for the case worker to do a better job and to do it more humanely. But people are sensitive when they get old and helpless and are oppressed and depressed. They just cannot buck up to it and finally say, "Well, why should I go through all that?" And particularly the uneducated, less educated people -- the Negroes, Mexicans, and other minority groups. It is difficult for them to meet the strain of all the regulation.

Dr. Townsend was inexperienced as a businessman. He was a good doctor and a good, honest man. When his organization began to grow, as the people out of necessity followed behind him and gave him

support, why, the politicians moved in. And they were a bad, hard influence against the organization's forward progress. But in spite of it, the demand for action was so great it kept moving ahead. I mentioned the name Margett here, you know, and other states had some similar people that were politically-minded and acted accordingly. That had a bad effect. And of course you know about what the press had to say about it, how crazy and cockeyed it really was. But nevertheless the people supported it actively, and it kept going until the time came when we had to get action in Congress to maintain the interest. That story was an uphill battle. The bill was first, as you know, was first introduced by McGroarty, John McGroarty. I think there were about twenty-five cosignatores on that bill that was introduced. And later other bills were introduced at different sessions. We got legislation held up in the Ways and Means Committee, and a big effort was made to get the bill out of committee. At that time you had to get 235 members of Congress to sign the petition to get it out. At one time we had over 235, but a number of names were withdrawn. Well, that kind of a disappointment, of course, was difficult to overcome -- one of the things that made some people lose heart, so to speak.

SCHIPPERS: Do you think there was any validity in the criticisms of the financial feasibility of the Plan? Do you think there was a need for modifying the way it was structured?

CUNEO: Well, experience shows it had to be, in order to make progress. That is why we got social security with its changed forms and amendments ever since. But basically, in my opinion,

it is still a sound method of financing. In fact I personally go beyond the Townsend Plan, in regard to that kind of a tax. The state of Indiana and the state of Hawaii have been using a gross income tax successfully for some time. Mr. Silva, the tax commissioner of Hawaii, was over here and visited Dr. Townsend, when he proposed a gross income tax. He went back and sold the idea to the governor of the state at that time. The legislature thought it was so ridiculous that they wanted to get even with him for something. They put the gross income tax into the Hawaiian law and it is still there, for a good part of their revenues. So my feelings about the gross income tax [are this]: I would even go beyond what Dr. Townsend would do if I could do it. That is, I would have a gross income tax levied by the federal government on all transactions; I'd have ten percent, twenty percent even, whatever percentage is needed, and then prorate it back down for the states, counties, and cities according to the amount of revenue that comes in. But think of the simplicity of that kind of a tax, how far and equitable it is, and how practical it is.

We are doing that in our gas-tax business here. You've got a Cadillac and can get five miles to the gallon. I've got a Ford and can get ten miles. We pay the same amount of tax per gallon, so that the degree to which we use the travel highway we pay [equally], don't we? And we are on a pay-as-you go basis, aren't we? Our highways are paid for. So I see a very simple method of taxing. Instead, we are wrestling around up at Sacramento and Washington every session of Congress how to do it, when all we would have to do is change the rate to meet the demands of the

various public agencies. But then that is beside the point. I am giving you my personal, basic reason why the gross income tax appealed to me at that time, and it still does.

SCHIPPERS: When you were speaking at various places did you find that your audiences were very alert to these problems and quizzed you, and so forth?

CUNEO: Oh, we had a lot of questions, yes. But then they were not as alert as you would like to have them, because they had never taken part. But they knew what they wanted. They knew what the need was. They knew that they had a need for this. But as to the mechanics of going through all of the legalistic and political activities, naturally those elderly people did not have a background to do the kind of job that would be necessary. But they did all they could.

SCHIPPERS: Would you say, in general, that in the earlier years they may have been sharper than they are nowadays?

CUNEO: No.

SCHIPPERS: Were they more sophisticated than they are now?

CUNEO: No. Their need is less now. They are getting a hundred and some odd dollars a month in California now, instead of twelve dollars, or fifteen dollars a month.

MRS. CUNEO: That's pension.

CUNEO: Yes. And they have removed all of the innumerable red-tape things -- deductions, and so forth. Every time we made a gain, we could count on a reduction in the number of members that we had. People lost interest after they get what [they want].

SCHIPPERS: What about the socializing aspects?

CUNEO: That was a very strong factor in getting people together and having a common interest, then branching out into the social activities. In the later years it had to be expanded, in order to keep the interest up to the point where people would come there for that kind of a thing.

SCHIPPERS: When you say "later years," how much later? Was this during the 1950's that this started to happen? Or even earlier?

CUNEO: I would say, in some areas, earlier. If you had an area where there was some controversy, some political angle that came up, the first thing you'd know, your club became divided. You didn't have anything, and you had a big job of rebuilding. I can't say when it started, if you ask me, but the peak condition was probably in 1940 -- well, 1942, 1943, or 1945, along in there -- after we had put on the Townsend party and put on the state initiative here. I remember when we began to run some candidates, how our California delegation began to swing over and instead of having ten, fifteen, or eighteen we got up to thirty-odd members that were signing our discharge petition or backing the efforts that were being made. Well, that got the attention of people that understood what the problem was all over the nation. They began to develop interest, as this book says here in the last chapter.

SCHIPPERS: You are quoting out of [Abraham] Holtzman's The Townsend Movement?

CUNEO: Yes. The influence of the Townsend Movement exists. It says:

The old-age provisions of the Social Security Act, that keystone of the welfare state, memorialize the impact of the Townsend Movement upon national public policy. Agitation for the Townsend Plan greatly accelerated the time schedule for the appearance of a national old-age security program. In crystalizing an overwhelming public clamor for action, the Townsend Movement afforded that program tremendous popular support, the political overtones of which neither the President nor the Congress could ignore [p. 207].

And they didn't ignore it since that time, but they got the program started off in the social security direction which, since that time, they have had to move back over towards the fundamentals that we had in the beginning. We hope they will move it still further.

SCHIPPERS: I notice, too, that your wife has commented that it is a pension. Actually, one of the basic attitudes about the Townsend Plan is that you would not consider this a pension.

MRS. CUNEO: Oh, maybe I should have said "old-age assistance."

SCHIPPERS: Right. But it is more. Is the idea of it being a dole "demeaning"?

CUNEO: Yes. Even though it has been mitigated, that's the word for it.

SCHIPPERS: What in your mind has brought about the increased thinning out of the ranks in the last decade, in the last seven years or so?

CUNEO: Death!

SCHIPPERS: You think it was because...

CUNEO: Well, primarily moving -- you know how many people move in the country. When they go to another place they don't line up right away, and, another thing, their need is less. Pensions are meeting it; unions have got their pensions for their membership.

The school teachers have got theirs. Here's their organization:

They've got two million people now, a very fine organization.

SCHIPPERS: This is Modern Maturity?

CUNEO: Yes. Here's the President's political group now. You remember Aime J. Forand when they were back of Kennedy in his time? Well, I hear they are out now, but they're organizing.

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SCHIPPERS: You touched on another thing about recruitment and the role of the minority groups, like the Mexican-American and the Negro. Were there very many of these people involved at the beginning?

CUNEO: No.

SCHIPPERS: What do you attribute that to?

CUNEO: Lack of interest, backwardness that they have had, conditions of living for generation after generation. They had no opportunity of education, just like it is now, when we are doing all these things for colored people particularly, trying to bring them up, but there is just a large percentage of them that can't be lifted out of their environment and their background. I recall how many times I talked before a colored club, and their lackadaisical attitude towards things in general is very evident. It is bred into them; it's a part of them. They just haven't the know-how and the ability to help themselves.

SCHIPPERS: Was there an attitude of prejudice in the organization that might have been directed against any of these groups?

CUNEO: I never noticed it much. No, not anywhere where I was. We had clubs in Oakland and had them in Long Beach and Los Angeles. We had one in Stockton once. I remember a dear old lady there that did a good job.

SCHIPPERS: How about the tenant farm worker?

CUNEO: Well, we did not have them then, in those days, like we

have them now.

SCHIPPERS: I see. But weren't they starting to build up during that period?

CUNEO: Well, the I.W.W. [International Workers of the World], of course, but then they were mostly migratory men. There weren't any of their families running along, dragging along, with them like we have nowadays. I don't think that we got very much interest out of them. I had no part in catering to any of their groups, as a group.

SCHIPPERS: Where did your membership come from, then, in the main, in the way of a social economic group?

CUNEO: Working people who had to work for a living. Here and there you would get a professional person, a religious person, but people who made this country.

SCHIPPERS: In that manner, did you exclude professional people?

CUNEO: Yes, somewhat.

SCHIPPERS: By this, you mean the doctors and the lawyers?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS? Those who obviously could not look forward to a pot of gold on retirement.

CUNEO: Well, I wouldn't say that. I think that group of people were those who had a sympathetic understanding of the problem. There are people in the Movement today, right now, who are still supporting this activity. They don't have any need for it at all. They did it because they believed in the simplicity of the program and because it was needed to meet the economic problems of the poor and the unemployed, the destitute. It is

a much bigger problem in this country than the average individual realizes, even today. I don't have to go far to find the effects on the lives of people. It is just as bad as in the ghettos right in Modesto, or any other community. Some of the people that I have met in my time are still there. Go out to the rest homes and see the people in there. They were active in their time. Our group is practically all gone because they died. But still, the rest homes are filled with people that were facing the same problems that we were facing at that time in those dark days, the Depression days.

SCHIPPERS: You have already said that you can't give the exact date when you first met Dr. Townsend.

CUNEO: No, I can't. The first day I saw him -- I didn't get to meet him officially -- was at Hindenburg Park in Oakland. A big trainload of people went down there, and there was a big meeting. He had a lot of other nationally-known people with him. I don't even remember who they were. But I did see him at that time, but I did not have an occasion to say any more than, "How do you do" when I shook his hand. But after I did meet him, I have had a very, very close relationship with him.

SCHIPPERS: How frequently did you see Dr. Townsend?

CUNEO: Oh, I saw him a hundred times, I guess, at least. I have been in his home many times, and he has been here in my home. He was here -- right out there where we sat today on the front porch -- just a few months before he died. I have pictures here, I can show you that. I have a lot of nice letters that I cherish.

SCHIPPERS: How long were these visits? Were they for hours at a time?

CUNEO: Sometimes, sometimes days. I went to several conventions across the country and went with him sometimes. I drove from Chicago , Illinois, down to Fairbury, Illinois, where he was born, with Senator Pepper and Congressman Kirwan and two or three other congressmen and senators. I enjoyed being in his home, with him and his wife, in that humble home up on Massachusetts Avenue in Los Angeles. Yet the opposition would tell you how many millions he had invested in big apartment houses around the country and down in Los Angeles. But then that is the price leadership has to pay when you are going out to try to change things. But I found him a very interesting man, a good man, an honest man and very active. He would be riding along in the country and would say, "Stop here, John. We want to get out here and see what this is over the fence." He would climb over and take a look at it. I remember we were up in Chico for a big meeting there. He went out to the park in the morning, and he came back. I was at the hotel. He had his two coat pockets hanging down here and bulging out. I said, "What have you got there?" "Why," he says, "Look here. I've got these big acorns off of the largest oak tree in California." He brought them in, so I brought them home. He was riding in my car then, and he took them down to his little home in Massachusetts Avenue in Los Angeles and planted them in the backyard. I saw them the second year. They were growing about five feet high, and I had a beautiful idea as a memorial. I was going to have it so that we would send one of those trees to each congressional district and have them plant a tree in memory of Dr. Townsend, that he gathered the acorn from the tree in

Chico, California. I think they call it the "Hooker Oak." And have them plant it. But his wife got sick, and we lost the trees. I never converted that dream into reality.

SCHIPPERS: As you said, he was an honest man. Yet apparently there were some idiosyncrasies in some of his approaches to things.

CUNEO: That may be.

SCHIPPERS: One of the things that most writers comment on was his strong dislike of Roosevelt.

CUNEO: Well, he did have a dislike, and he felt that when he was called before that congressional committee, the Bell Committee, he was sincere and honest. He couldn't imagine being treated like he was, and he walked out as you know. The President thought enough of it to try to mitigate the thing with a pardon, but he probably did not like it.

SCHIPPERS: Did he ever discuss any of that with you?

CUNEO: Oh, I won't say specifically that, no. There were many other things to discuss all the time. He had plenty to do. He was very active all the time, and when one avenue didn't work he'd back up and do something else. Of course, he had a lot of advice all along the line, different members, you know, who thought they had a solution to this or that problem. He was a very active man, and he had to make decisions and, of course, that didn't always please everybody. But he tried to do what was right, and he did a lot of good.

SCHIPPERS: You remember, of course, that he started out with [Robert E.] Clements. Did he ever explain why they parted?

CUNEO: No, not in detail. I just knew that it came about. He

had to make a decision, and he dissolved the arrangement that they had. And, by the way, I saw a year or so ago that Clements had gotten into trouble over some deal in Texas.

SCHIPPERS: Oh, really?

CUNEO: It was last year sometime, I remember, but I don't know what it was for. They referred to him as having been associated with the Doctor. I saw a news release. Well, a lot of people tried to take advantage of him, and he had a hard, hard road. He was a good man, and he did good work. As far as I'm concerned, he was honest to the nth degree.

SCHIPPERS: Who tried to take advantage of him?

CUNEO: Oh, many people. I won't name people, because I can't prove the specific charges. But like I said, the politicians in Ohio, and this Mr. Margett. I could go down the line and name a lot of others. You saw the minutes I showed you there of the first council meeting and the second council meeting. They had a national council and they had quite a controversy.

SCHIPPERS: Some politicians were very helpful to him.

CUNEO: Yes, sometimes they were.

SCHIPPERS: Someone like Senator Sheridan Downey, for example.

CUNEO: Yes. And [Senator Claude] Pepper was for him, and several other very fine people helped him.

SCHIPPERS: Did he ever make any comments to you about Sheridan Downey?

CUNEO: Yes, lots of times. He thought he did a lot for the organization.

SCHIPPERS: What about the final falling out?

CUNEO: Well, I never got in on that at all.

SCHIPPERS: You never heard?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: What were your connections with Downey?

CUNEO: Well, he was very active. We naturally had the information coming through the regular channels, the Weekly, the bulletins, and everything -- what he was doing, his speaking engagements, and where he spoke. He was contributing a great deal, I thought.

SCHIPPERS: And the same seems to have been true of John McGroarty. There was a parting of the ways there too.

CUNEO: Well, I'm not familiar with the details of that, but they -- oh, I can't recall the man's name that took McGroarty as the next congressman. At the present time, as you know, we have Congressman John J. McFall, that is steering a bill before the committees in Congress. In order to meet much of the criticism of practicability of the Plan, they secured the services of Mr. Donaldson who was one of the leading financial experts of the country at that time. He made a business of analyzing bills. Did you see that report that came out?

SCHIPPERS: No, I haven't.

CUNEO: That was quite a commendable report. But it took so much red tape to dig up all of the relationships. You get lost, when you go into these, just like my manuals for the Welfare Department. That's why I like the simplicity of the tax and the administration of the proposed Townsend Plan, as I do now. I always did. Still do.

SCHIPPERS: After you became responsible as a state organizer, what were your primary duties?

CUNEO: To expand the organization any way I could; to build clubs and solve the problems of clubs; to hold meetings and take whatever political action was necessary; and everything to keep the organization going. The national office issued information. We'd try to carry it out, try to reach the basic objectives that we had.

SCHIPPERS: Could you innovate specific objectives yourself, or were they pretty carefully controlled from the national office?

CUNEO: I would say that the national office had basic control. I constantly made recommendations here and there, and, in fact, one time I made a trip to Cleveland when we were there and made a proposal to approach the new bill differently. It was not accepted, and they had their reasons why they thought it wasn't practical. I thought it was. But that made no difference. I was working for the Plan -- it was my duty to co-operate. I felt it my duty to make the recommendations I did. And I must say I had a lot of good cooperation. The Plan itself is so simple and so basic that it doesn't need much changing. It is just the operation of keeping it before the people and expanding the interest. But with the conditions of wars, when you couldn't have meetings for such a long period of time, and increased age of the people and passing on and...

MRS. CUNEO: During the war, travel was cut down, and that had a great deal to do with it.

CUNEO: You couldn't have any gasoline. No conventions. Those were the things that set us back, but they were unavoidable. We kept our eye on the objective and did all we could with what we had to do it with -- and glad we did, every bit of it.

SCHIPPERS: Again, some writers say that the way the organization was structured, at times, was not democratic, in fact, that it was autocratic.

CUNEO: Well, those minutes you saw there were an attempt to overcome that weakness, and we did go to the national council.

SCHIPPERS: Could you tell me the date?

CUNEO: About 1951, 1952, 1953 -- somewhere along in there. And I had a part in that. I sent a very good man from our district here at that time, a man by the name of Jim Ryan, to serve on our national council. But they had internal differences of opinion that made it ineffective to some degree. Every time they had one of those differences among the elderly people it was more difficult. They are not as reconcilable to change. You know, when you get up to my age your ideas are pretty fixed. Younger people can adjust and change better. A person that has had a lifetime, a mature life, has come to maturity in life, gets pretty strong convictions about things. He thinks he knows a lot more than he sometimes does.

SCHIPPERS: You said that politicians sort of hopped on the bandwagon. Now, on the other hand, the organization deliberately went out and endorsed and solicited support. Now, how do you make the distinction?

CUNEO: We solicited the support of everybody that was in politics, and naturally some of them would turn you down without any consideration, and others gave you encouragement. You'd naturally try to expand that interest.

SCHIPPERS: Well, my point is this: Do you think that the organization

was damaged by undue political intrigue?

CUNEO: On certain occasions and in certain conditions, yes. But where you had a division, for instance -- without naming a particular place or time -- we would have a candidate who was a Democrat that supported us. Then some of the people in our organization would be approached by the other party and get some lip service or active service or support from the other side. Why, then you would begin to have a division between members in that club, or that district. The more you went into it on a partisan basis the more trouble you had.

SCHIPPERS: Wasn't that one of the basic problems? Even though there was a divisive element, it was necessary in order to get legislation through.

CUNEO: Well, you had to work -- like when you're mining -- you have to work the veins or the channels in which the ore is in. If we had support from a certain element we would try to maintain it and not go off onto something else where there was no prospect of doing it. It's political action, but that can do you good the other way.

SCHIPPERS: Since the clubs were really in essence not one-party oriented...

CUNEO: No. We tried to stay away from it.

SCHIPPERS: How did you manage to hold the people together in a non-partisan frame of mind? Of course, the Plan was the cohesive element. But when it came time to endorse, let's say, a Democrat as opposed to a Republican?

CUNEO: Well, we tried to use the same method as any other organization

of that kind has. You've got an organization set up. We had a club, district and state councils, and we tried to get them to follow the instructions in all of the manuals that you saw out there -- that have gone for years -- in trying to guide them with as little resistance and division as we possibly could. Sometimes they [decisions] were very difficult and hard to make. They cost us members, of course. But in addition to that, in the political angle, you have the human element. A hundred, or fifty, elderly people with minds of their own can get divided on issues awfully fast, whether it is religious or political or what issue it is. This has been exceptionally hard in that respect, in that they were Republicans or Democrats. You lost members, but you gain members by trying to support somebody that shows some interest and support for you.

SCHIPPERS: Would you speculate at all about, first of all, the political biases or composition of most of the clubs? Does it tend to be more liberal or...

CUNEO: I would say the people that are still in the organization, yes.

SCHIPPERS: Are more liberal?

CUNEO: Yes, I think so.

SCHIPPERS: Predominantly Protestant?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: Again, I was asking you earlier today about the concentration of the clubs. You claimed that they have no particular economic explanation. There are probably more clubs in the cities simply because more people are there.

CUNEO: Well, in their present stage, it would be difficult to say. I think that in the earlier periods that the percentage would be in favor of a larger percentage of the people in town, rather than in the rural country, for two reasons. One, rural people are more individualistic, supporting themselves. Transportation, renting halls, and having local headquarters were all problems. So during that period, the earlier periods, I think that there were more in the cities.

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May 26, 1967

SCHIPPERS: Continuing from last evening, you had a chance to look up a date, your first speaking date there.

CUNEO: In Manteca, California, on November 8, 1935, in the grammar school in the city of Manteca. The message was given to over 300 people, and several questions were answered. I made my presentation with a pedestal on which I had six charts with figures and statistics to back my information that I tried to give. I was well pleased with the reception that I received.

SCHIPPERS: You also said last night that you wanted to make it very clear that you still feel that the Plan was very sound in the beginning, and you said it was even more needed now.

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: You quoted the two things the editor of the Cleveland Press said.

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: And one was "Townsend gave people hope when it was needed," and the other was...

CUNEO: "When the full history of social security is finally written, Dr. Francis E. Townsend will have his place." And that I certainly believe and hope for.

SCHIPPERS: Now in general when we were talking last night we were on the subject of how the clubs themselves developed problems internally, and your wife was calling attention to some of the things that often cause trouble, to sometimes very petty things. What was her comment about ridicule hurting the Plan?

CUNEO: That was more in the general press. Information was given about the organization and all of its activities by writers at that time. The fact was, in other words, the idea was released all over the country that this was a crackpot idea, and, of course, a lot of people that read those kind of things were naturally influenced.

SCHIPPERS: What about the effect of statements that the Doctor was living off other people's contributions?

CUNEO: Undoubtedly it had its influence with a lot of people. Like any source of information that is given to the public, certain people accept it on face value. Others accept it with reservations and form their own opinions, with other sources of information. But I think the people that really carried the ball through the years had enough information that they knew that that was not correct.

SCHIPPERS: What did he do with the revenues, to your knowledge?

CUNEO: Well, my information is limited. It probably went through the corporate organizations that were set up and that were accounted for with proper audits on reports through the various agencies that require it. And I knew of many instances where he put money out of his pocket to do various things, to promote different thoughts he had, like trying a radio program here, or putting a new leaflet out, or anything that he thought would stimulate or create a better attitude towards this program and advance it -- why, he would put money out personally. I never felt that he had been compensated adequately at all. But of course I had no direct access to that information, except what has been released in normal channels.

I saw the financial statements at different times, read the reports, and heard the reports at various conventions. There was nothing to indicate to me that he was profiting by it. To illustrate how in general it was not true, I heard many times, in many places, individuals that had that question in their minds, about how he had acquired so much property and particularly a lot of fine apartments and was living high on them. I finally became acquainted with the facts and saw his home, the way he lived, and got really acquainted with the man. I knew that in my judgement there was no foundation for it.

SCHIPPERS: During your employment as an organization official, what was your salary?

CUNEO: On the whole, it was on the basis of about \$60 a week and traveling expenses. However, there was a short period of time, I think probably a year and a half or two years, when the policy of national headquarters changed. Instead of putting the state directors on a salary basis, they entered into agreements to pay them twenty-five percent of certain revenues that came in, for them to operate all of the state office expenses. I came under that rule. My records show what that was. As I recall it would average, what I had net, out of the twenty-five percent after I paid the secretaries and office rent and other things -- why, it was equivalent to about the same as I had been getting. So it was no material change in the amount of financial compensation that I had under the new arrangement that was set up. And then it was later terminated and went back on the basis of salaries, which was continued.

SCHIPPERS: You did not work at this full time?

CUNEO: Oh, no. I had several other operations of liquidating Mr. Hawke's affairs. Of course, that was only part time, but it involved a lot of legal activities to liquidate the businesses, and they were scattered around, so it did take some time. And the development of this airplane business simultaneously. I was also serving on the State Social Welfare Board during that time. That required meetings once or twice a month at least, in different parts of the state. The State of California, when I first went on board, paid no salaries to the state board members, just their traveling expenses when they held these meetings. And for probably ten years of the sixteen years that I served. At the end of the tenth year or thereabouts, they put a policy of paying us \$50 a month, for incidentals that would not normally be covered by ordinary expense accounts. So that was a tremendous salary that I received from the State of California.

SCHIPPERS: Do you have any idea what some of the other officers made in their varying capacities?

CUNEO: You mean national organization?

SCHIPPERS: Yes.

CUNEO: Oh, I don't think I have any that I could specifically say I have seen. I don't think I could say definitely. Well, in this respect, I have seen the financial statements, and it said so much for salaries and so much for this and that, and so on. But I don't recall any of the figures. They seemed logical at the time, and there was no question about them.

SCHIPPERS: Question: How did people in the organizations that

you worked with respond to the installation of Robert C. Townsend?

CUNEO: Very good, as far as I know.

SCHIPPERS: Was there any criticism of nepotism?

CUNEO: Never heard it.

SCHIPPERS: Resentment?

CUNEO: I never heard it. You mean in the matter of the people that were in the administrative side of it? I am speaking about the rank and file, those I feel that I know. Of people that I came in contact with and served, I would say it was not noticeable.

SCHIPPERS: In the administrative aspects, do you recall any frictions or any troubles that grew up?

CUNEO: There were probably several, but I was like I have always been in my relationships with everything I did. I accepted my assignments and tried to carry them out and did not interest myself in trying to find out everything about how everything was done and who did what. Dr. Townsend was our leader, and he had a Plan. I believed in the Plan, and I felt confidently that he was doing all that he could to achieve that Plan and was doing it honestly.

There was a difference of opinions at different times as to matter of policy. I called your attention to the fact that they tried to build a national council as well as state councils, and so on down. We had a part, quite a part, in laying that out. Mr. Glen S. Wilson that I referred to initiated that with the help of a man by the name of Carlson. Dick Carlson was in the government service at that time. He helped map out the council form of organization, to set up the bylaws and the minutes and the manuals, all of that. This council effort was made and has been carried on,

had been carried on, since that time. In the process of making that change there had been considerable friction and differences of opinion, as naturally develops in organizations of that kind where there is room for difference of opinion. But I cannot recall just which one might be reported on. I did not have direct contact with it as a party to it. That is speaking of the national office. Now there were local issues that came up between the clubs and members. I naturally had a great deal of contact with the problems involved there. That was one of my responsibilities, to try to avoid as much of that as possible.

SCHIPPERS: What were some of the problems?

CUNEO: Some of the problems were in the early history of the organization. Clubs would spring up, and, in their enthusiasm, they'd begin to devise ways and means of how to get a hall somewhere and start to build a Townsend Hall. Without proper planning, some of those did not develop quite satisfactorily because of lack of experience and proper legal consultations before they proceeded, or about the financial things. And then there would be a difference of opinion as to how to build it, where to build it, how to finance it, and how to operate it. Those things among the elderly people are sometimes difficult to amicably solve and develop splits. I found wherever property was involved it was a bad investment, because of the fact it did so often create those things. I had to help liquidate some of those things that were unnecessary, but yet were natural outgrowths of human beings with honest differences of opinion. But it did affect our organization's prestige, strength, and everything of that kind. But I don't think it was any different

from any other organization that would have started to achieve as broad changes as we were proposing.

SCHIPPERS: So then you did, in your capacity as organizer, really serve as sort of a peacemaker?

CUNEO: Well, that's certainly number one. When an issue more than anything like that came up, I naturally tried to pour oil on troubled waters and direct them to solutions, but not always a hundred percent satisfactorily.

SCHIPPERS: You mentioned that property sometimes complicates things. You have mentioned that the political stance of a group sometimes brought forth problems. What other things occur to you?

CUNEO: There are many of them, but they are all just the natural course of administering to large numbers of people. Several organizations required conformity, and following rules and regulations, that are prescribed from actions of the organization's membership in their national conventions. When you often have to make changes, broad changes, it is difficult to move elderly people to accept them quickly and clearly and happily. There was a continual educational effort on my part. That is why you will find those bulletins are so numerous in the files.

SCHIPPERS: And you were author of all of them, in the sense that they were tailored to the particular needs of your region, right?

CUNEO: My state.

SCHIPPERS: Yes, your state. You said you had some names that we were going to discuss.

CUNEO: I have made a list here of a few names, after I understood you were trying to visit me to discuss this. I felt it might be

well in order that I might not overlook some of the people that I have had the privilege of being associated with or contacted in this work, since it has been very gratifying to me to have had the privilege of meeting people that I never would have met if I had not been in this field. I will just go down the list of names, and then if you want to ask any questions about the individuals, I shall be happy to try to answer, and give you what information I have about them. All of them had different associations and relationships.

Of course, number one on the list is Dr. Townsend. What a privilege it has been for me to know him as well as I have known him. I gleaned a lot of good from him, as I have from many other men that were older than I was. It has been my privilege always to be associated with men who were twenty-five to thirty years older than I am, and they all have been helpful in trying to preserve and nurture progressive and active persons. But sometimes my enthusiasm needed tempering and some of these people all contributed something.

And then, of course, next is Robert Townsend. It has been wonderful to know him. John D. Elliott, who is now a manager and legislative representative...

SCHIPPERS: How much contact have you had with Robert Townsend?

CUNEO: Oh, just through the years, through the conventions, when he would come out to California, and meetings and correspondence. Just a general relationship with the national headquarters, on things that did not come from lower, subordinate people. I think I have had quite a lot, but to the degree or in what direction,

I don't know just how to answer that. But I feel I had good general acquaintanceship and association with him.

SCHIPPERS: How would you appraise his leadership of the organization?

CUNEO: I think he had a lot of ability. I think he has been sincere in it. But he has had a problem that restricted his efforts, which was a personal family problem. He has two fine boys and a fine wife. She has her roots down in Texas with a lot of people there and her family. He had to choose considerably about doing a lot of the things, in my judgement, that he would have done more and better if he didn't have that kind of a restriction. But I don't think it affected his ability or his confidence in the program.

SCHIPPERS: How thoroughly is he implementing the idea of the Townsend Plan?

CUNEO: I think that under the conditions that exist he is doing all that could be done, under the conditions during the recent years, since the organization has been on the downgrade in its activity. It brought into play a lot of requirements that had to be met that were unusual in that process. I might add, there is something here that illustrates that. Some people used to ask me, "What kind of a business are you in?" when I would go out on these speaking dates and meet all of these different people. They would be different people who would guess more or less from a minister to an attorney, and so on down the line, identifying me with a different thing. [tape off]

SCHIPPERS: Specifically, what kind of things have been problems?

CUNEO: To meet the changing conditions of operations, you had to adjust to new situations. You still have to [adjust], as you

know. The organization was set up in a kind of three-cornered set of organizations. The Townsend Plan, Incorporated, the Townsend Foundation, and the Townsend Weekly, all different corporations, all functioning differently to meet the changing conditions. And in the meantime if all kinds of legislation is passed that has some direct or indirect bearing to all corporations (it is just like the Welfare Department has a new change in laws, rules, and regulations), it is a tremendous task to keep that all up current to meeting all the regulations. As you go on down the hill that way, the effort to comply with all of that multiplies. It doesn't diminish. It multiplies, and you have less to do with taking on what you call defensive action. I think that he did all that he could in that direction, under the circumstances. And I know that he has participated in all of our conventions right along. He assumed the leadership in the office as provided by the delegates of every national convention. They voted and reaffirmed that in the event of Dr. Townsend's passing that Bob should accept the responsibility of carrying on. When I attended the Doctor's funeral in Los Angeles, I had the privilege of personally having assurance and hearing Bob tell others what he would try to do. I think he has done well, under the circumstances.

I mentioned Glen S. Wilson and Dick Carlson as having been responsible, with the little help that I gave, in setting up the council form of organization. Wilson later moved to Chicago to take over their national education program, which was a rather elaborate program that was planned at that time. He in turn recommended that I be appointed the state director.

SCHIPPERS: Was Wilson with the organization since its inception?

CUNEO: Pretty much. I don't know just what year he came in, but he was interested in it up in the state of Washington, I think. He came into California just at the time when they were having some Margett problems. They had somebody else as a director, I can't recall his name now. And then Wilson came in and Doctor gave him authority and responsibility to rehabilitate functions here in California. One of the very first things that he did, that I thought was very helpful, was to stage a big meeting at the Sacramento State Fairgrounds. He had a lot of good results from that. I helped a little, and from that and my other association meetings with him and what he had as a state council director (at that time I was chairman of a district council here), why, he thought I could be of help to him and suggested that I proceed to take that responsibility, which I did.

Now I met Sheridan Downey and had considerable contacts with him -- not too personal, but on many occasions I attended several of his meetings. Bud Gearhart [Rep. Bertrand W. Gearhart] was a big help to me.

SCHIPPERS: On Senator Downey, he was considered Dr. Townsend's closest adviser for a long while.

CUNEO: Well, his legal adviser. I think he handled the matters when they were having that Bell investigating committee. He was representing the Doctor at that time, I think.

SCHIPPERS: Yes. They did come to a parting of the ways.

CUNEO: Well, you mentioned that last night. In the back of my mind it seems to me that I did hear, but I was wondering in the

night what it was. I couldn't recall. Can you tell me what?

SCHIPPERS: Yes, references are made to it in Holtzman's book.

CUNEO: In that? Oh, well, I'll certainly be happy to pick it up.

SCHIPPERS: But you have no personal knowledge of it at all?

CUNEO: No. Except that they did evidently have some kind of a difference, because it did not continue on like it was. I did not know what the basis was for it.

And Bud Gearhart I want to comment about. He was our congressman from this district, from Fresno, and I knew him real well. He did a lot for us in Congress through the years.

SCHIPPERS: In what? In the way of backing legislation?

CUNEO: Yes, and in giving us opportunities to expand our philosophy wherever it was logical. He attended a lot of our meetings, mass meetings, and what not. We in turn gave him support, and he was elected several times.

Baxter Rankine, I want to mention, was a top man at one time, and a very capable administrator, I think. Later, after health conditions or family conditions, he wanted to come back to California and he did come. At that time he set up a regional office in Los Angeles to take care of three or four states. Well, he was not able to continue, I think, largely for physical reasons. I did what little I could to finish out what few things he had started. I liked him very much.

SCHIPPERS: What things did he start?

CUNEO: Well, I won't go into them because I don't recall the details of them. They were minor. They weren't anything of major importance: Trying to bring into reality the area idea of

consolidating them into the Twelfth Federal Reserve District area here -- Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, I think it was.

SCHIPPERS: You mean the idea of regional districts started with him?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: Not from the national organization?

CUNEO: He was part of the national organization at the time at the national headquarters. Those minutes you referred to are his property. He has since passed on in Long Beach, but he was a likable man and I enjoyed him.

Next, I want to mention Wilford Howard, who I have referred to before. He was with the federal government here, operating an agency to prevent the foreclosure of small ranches and homes by the loaning agencies at that time. He became interested in this program and was active up around Santa Rosa. Then he and other leaders from that part of the state paid me several visits here, and I got pretty well acquainted with him. And as I reported to you previously, I think that it was his efforts primarily that got Governor Olson to appoint me to the State Social Welfare Board. He has been active through the years since, and at one time I had him on a small payroll of I think \$50 a week to act as my deputy up and down the state, to relieve me of some of the things that I could not cover. He has now retired and is looking after his crippled wife living in San Francisco. But I still have a very fine feeling and miss my earlier frequent visits with him. I felt he was a man of considerable conception of the problems that we face in this country.

Ralph Brown was our assemblyman from this area and was later appointed to the district court of appeals here in California, with his office in Fresno. He was a young legislator, but all through the years he was sympathetic to our program and helpful in many ways.

SCHIPPERS: In what ways was he helpful?

CUNEO: Well, when we had legislative problems at Sacramento, which were many through the years, he was our main source in the assembly to approach the problem through the legislators. He took part in our meetings. He spoke at different area meetings and district meetings.

SCHIPPERS: You said he was sympathetic. Really he was a very active supporter.

CUNEO: Actively sympathetic, yes.

SCHIPPERS: You mean that he endorsed the fundamentals without reservation?

CUNEO: Yes. And likewise our senator, Hugh Donnelly, from this area, from Turlock. He was most helpful to me as well as Mr. Brown in my legislative work in Sacramento. He likewise was fully sympathetic to our efforts and was responsible and helpful in getting the resolutions through the governor's office at different times to the Congress of the United States, to recommending the study and endorsement of the Townsend philosophy.

I mentioned yesterday about J. Stitt Wilson. He was mayor of Berkeley, a very forceful, capable speaker. I think he would be classed as a Socialist at that time. The papers gave him a lot of publicity as being a Socialist mayor of the city of Berkeley.

I met him on several speaking occasions that he had. He addressed some of our meetings. And he died in office. He was a member of the State Social Welfare Board when he died. Governor Olson appointed me to fill his vacancy. I felt honored to step in behind a man that had done that kind of work. I was interested in, for social welfare. And Governor Olson, I served under him during his term, which was a very trying time for social welfare programs. People were hungry everywhere, and we were handing out food to keep them alive.

SCHIPPERS: In that area, the State Relief Administration was also in operation at that time, correct?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: How did that work out with the social welfare program?

CUNEO: It was just an added part to what they were trying to do before, but there wasn't very much before. All we had was a state pension plan. As I explained to you last night, the maximum grant was \$15 a month, so restrictive that it meant practically nothing, but at least it was a start. And from that base here in California, through our efforts and others, labor and others, pension groups even, we have pressured the legislature at every session to improve the welfare program. As you know, we have what is considered the most liberal program in the United States and abroad [tape off].

SCHIPPERS: About that time the State Relief Administration was under severe attack because of so-called Communist infiltration. Did you in any way get involved in that?

CUNEO: No, none whatsoever. But I recall that there was a lot of criticism of the administration of it -- not from that point of view. It was just like any new program, and presently it will

carry on and expand new programs. The facilities were not there to move fast enough and intelligently enough to do the job efficiently. As a result there were losses here and there of spoiled food, or some charge of that nature, that were embarrassing and not happily received. But as a whole I think they met the emergency quite well.

The next man I want to refer to is Governor Warren. It was a fine privilege to meet and become associated in welfare activities with him. He reappointed me three times to the welfare board. And after he left I served part of Mr. Knight's term of office, which made my total period of service, from Olson to Warren to Knight, a period of sixteen years.

SCHIPPERS: Did you ever have any contact with Mr. Warren?

CUNEO: Yes. I met with him on several occasions to discuss all of the activity we had up there with the improvements in the welfare legislation and, in addition, to discuss the welfare board problems. He also appointed me on the Governor's Pension Investigation Committee in 1942, with nineteen people from all over the state of California. We went through all of the investigation that we could under the authority of that committee's creation and made our reports, a minority report and a general report. We had a lot of meetings with the governor. Then in 1951 he called a statewide conference on the problems of the aging, and we participated in that. Then we staged a big rally in the state capital, with Townsend people from all over the state. Governor Warren received everyone of us, personally, in his office. He had the people all pass through and he addressed us.

SCHIPPERS: Do you remember specifically what his attitudes were on some of these problems?

CUNEO: Well, I found him a reasonable man. I found him a careful man, a sympathetic man, understanding, and a good executive. Specifically? The problems have been many in the social welfare field. They have been terrific, and each session of the legislature involved more and more changes that had to be brought about politically. When those were brought about, then they moved over into the welfare board for implementation of rules and regulations and enforcement. So it brought a need of frequent conferences. I appreciate having known him.

SCHIPPERS: Yes. Can you recall any of the conferences specifically?

CUNEO: Well, I don't think I can at this moment, no. There were just innumerable, routine things that naturally came up over a long period of time that had to do with social welfare.

SCHIPPERS: Yes. Did he tend to take your suggestions or the board's suggestions?

CUNEO: I found him very cooperative. Of course he had good advice. He had the attorney-general's office to keep us straight on the legal side of that, which is important, as you know. We had constitutional amendments coming up constantly and we had two of them ourselves and had two in different groups all the time, a constant milling around of activity because of problems with social welfare. They were all interesting, and some of them difficult, but I think overall through the cooperation between the governor's office, the board, the county administrators, and the political influence, that overall he did a pretty good job. I am grateful

for the progress that was made.

I won't go into the names of our state councils. Mr. Howard that I mentioned to you was one member of the Townsend State Council, but we had definite individuals. It changed through the years when we would elect a new representative from each congressional district. They would change as the time went along, but I met a very, very fine high-class group of American citizens that I appreciate.

The district councils likewise were wonderful. Our Ninth Congressional District Council -- I think back on how many meetings we had, how many mass meetings we staged, the radio programs we put on, the speaking engagements, distribution of literature, and going to other groups. I appeared before several of the Grange councils and some of the service clubs. Those were the people, the state council and the district council people, that I had to depend upon to carry the ball. It was a good form of organization and as a whole here in California it really works successfully.

I want to mention in addition the privilege I had in the formation of the Townsend party. I realize that the public generally thinks that that's kind of a "screwy" idea, but it was a very helpful idea. The people that took leadership in helping organize that were high-class people. Among them was an attorney who had represented the Interstate Commerce Commission, who was an attorney for the people that gave us legal advice and guided us through the maze of qualifying a party.

SCHIPPERS: What is his name?

CUNEO: Seth Tracey, from Berkeley. And he was a most helpful man in that respect. It is quite a laborious and intricate thing to organize a party, I can assure you of that. I was secretary of the organization during all of that period.

SCHIPPERS: Did the idea of that originate here?

CUNEO: Yes. This was strictly California.

SCHIPPERS: Who thought up the idea at the time?

CUNEO: I think it came from Dr. Townsend and other leaders, but because of the lack of action in Washington we thought we should begin on a state level and try to expand the interest where we could expand it the most logically. California was doing the best in the nation, and naturally this was a good place to try it. I think it had a very helpful effect in that it got more attention, nationally speaking, particularly and surely here, where we were active (as is very much in evidence). As a result we had candidates, and the number of people that would get out and sign our discharge petition almost doubled. It had a good effect in attracting a lot of favorable attention, and while we did not elect any major state offices, we did elect people who had been imported as our candidates. We had a lady run for lieutenant-governor, and she polled quite a vote. We had several congressmen that were running strictly on the Townsend party.

SCHIPPERS: How did the member clubs or the rank and file itself respond to that idea?

CUNEO: I think as a whole it was quite generally approved at the time. A majority of them were largely enthusiastic over the idea. Of course, as time went on, and there wasn't immediate expected

results, a lot of them probably felt it was a cockeyed idea. But as a whole I felt it was a constructive piece of work. It was a lot of work, a lot of effort, but it was a means of rallying our people to something specific, and it did give us a lot of publicity that we could not get otherwise. It did result in more effort being put forth in Washington where we were trying to get more.

SCHIPPERS: Do you recall the reaction of the other organized political parties to the Townsend Movement?

CUNEO: They were naturally in opposition to any new thing of that kind, because it would take votes from somebody. And the opposition was widespread, of course. That's the point where my wife made the remark last night about ridicule coming in. That was an enormous force, that kind of propaganda, but it was an experience and we learned something. I think we accomplished something, but it was not able to go on and continue, so it is looked upon as a loss. But I did not feel that way. I felt that gains had been made that could not have been made.

I said it was not easy to qualify as a party. You can qualify with two different procedures that you are probably familiar with. One is a certain percentage of people have to go in and have their registration changed, or you have to get a percentage of names on the petition. We did get the people to go and make the change and sufficiently qualified. For several years they were still qualified after we were active. Of course, John McGroarty introduced the first bill, which the record shows, and 102 congressmen voted for the program.

SCHIPPERS: Did you have much contact with Mr. McGroarty?

CUNEO: I had none.

SCHIPPERS: None at all.

CUNEO: And the Jasper Bell incident -- you have a record of that -- and President Roosevelt's action. Claude Pepper I met on several occasions. He was out here and visited a couple of times, but as I mentioned last night, Congressman M. J. Kirwan joined me with Senator Pepper. We went to Fairbury, Illinois, to a homecoming celebration where I certainly appreciated the privilege of visiting the birthplace of Dr. Townsend and participating in the meeting.

We had a lady in our organization by the name of Mrs. Alma Taylor, from our own city here, that took charge of the major activity that they put on to try to raise funds. It was called the "Triple T" program, which was a good deal similar to the present stamp programs. Merchants were to sign up and buy the tickets and give them out to the customers. She had charge of that program and was taken to the national office. She directed it for quite a while until they decided to abandon it.

At this stage I want to mention Jim Ryan, who was also one of our local citizens, a very capable, fine American citizen who we elected from here to represent us on the national council from California. He attended the first meeting which you referred to and participated and carried on for many years, and later passed on to his reward. I have already mentioned at your request Mr. Seth Tracy, who was attorney for the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington, D.C., for several years.

Another man in the organization that did a lot for us (when Mr. Wilson had the visual education campaign under his direction

at national headquarters in Chicago, he had visual education out on the road with the trailers) was a man by the name of Charles Kinnear from Los Angeles, who I thought was a very helpful individual and did a good job when he was out with this educational material. It was regrettable when they could not continue it. Lack of funds, I presume. These individuals were largely people that impressed me as being the type of people I was glad to know and proud to be associated with.

Dr. Norman W. Pendleton was a minister in California. He was quite a friend of Sheridan Downey, and he became affiliated with the organization about midway, somewhere along there. He went back to the national office and did considerable special work for Dr. Townsend. If Dr. Townsend had a project out here or some other place and needed a special individual to go in and do it, why, he often sent Dr. Pendleton on those missions. He did a very good job. He came back here to California to iron out or dispose of the unsuccessful effort that was made to establish a senior citizens headquarters in Los Angeles. It was operating at the Embassy Theater, and they organized the people down there. This comes under the heading of property. I told you before where Doctor had a plan of getting a lot of membership together and they put up \$100 apiece to buy property, and build a real institution for senior citizens. They became involved in differences of opinion, and Mr. Pendleton was called out to help assist the legal people in closing out that organization, set up as a social center that they had planned. As I recall they owned a lot up at Sixth and Gray, I think it is. The court finally allocated the lot to the State of California because of the lack of a uniform

decision among the membership.

SCHIPPERS: You mean out by Westlake Park?

CUNEO: Yes. Right on Sixth Street there, the next street north, beautiful lot and a nice idea and all. There was a lot of hope attached to it.

SCHIPPERS: What were the main problems in the falling out?

CUNEO: I would say some ambitious people that wanted to lead it in a certain way, I guess, and others that wanted to go another way. But anyway, I personally took no part in that because I had all I could do without it. Dr. Pendleton was brought out here, and Doctor was down there. They handled all of the litigation and final disposition on it. But it gave me a lot of contact with Dr. Pendleton that made me recognize him as a man of considerable ability. I enjoyed him. He later wound that up and moved back up to Vallejo, where he passed on.

B.M. Bainbridge was the editor of the Townsend at one time, and I had a lot of contacts with him, during that period. He was a Progressive, and I thought he did pretty well in putting out information that was helpful. I learned much from material that he released through the paper.

John Blatnik, from Michigan, was a good congressman that assisted us. I had the privilege of meeting him. His help in Washington was commendable. The other man that went with me to Fairbury along with Claude Pepper, was M.J. Kirwan, a representative from Illinois.* He is still there now and has certainly been a big help to the efforts of people in California and the West as a whole in the development of a broad education and irrigation projects.
*[Kirwan is representative from Ohio]

I have followed his work on that. Mrs. J.A. Ford was a lady that had charge of the Legislative Bureau in Washington. She did a good job of leadership and a good job of lobbying, if you want to call it that, contacting the people in the Congress and other leaders. Unfortunately she became ill and has passed on. Well, I think that would cover most of the people that impressed me so exceptionally in the activities with the Townsend program.

I have several other memorandums that might implement what has been said of the Townsend activities, but probably you have some questions you would rather ask and have those covered. If you don't cover them I might go over some of these.

SCHIPPERS: Okay. One is that you keep speaking of the national organization and the regional activities. How could you characterize the relationship between the national offices and the local ones? Were they good or was there difficulty encountered there?

CUNEO: Oh, there was the usual amount of differences of opinion between state directors and national officers, but I cannot recall, in fact, I have had probably no way of knowing, too much of the specific relationship between the Florida director and the national office, only in our conventions and things of that kind. I wouldn't probably know those little irritations or differences of opinion.

SCHDPPERS: Did it make a difference?

CUNEO: Our relationship with the national office was always good. But it was good because I recognized that the national office had jurisdiction, and we had an objective and rules and regulations. I tried to follow the rules and regulations that were promulgated by the delegates and by the national council and the national officers.

I tried to be logical, and they treated me likewise, and as a result we got along good.

SCHIPPERS: Did Dr. Townsend's presence here and the fact that California was the seed pot for the idea make a difference in that relationship?

CUNEO: Yes. As I stated before, he constantly had new ideas to promulgate in the hopes of improving this or that or the other. It might come up before he had it worked out with the national office, and he would ask us to proceed to make the experiment and we cooperated. There was never any major difference that caused any basic difference between us and the national office.

SCHIPPERS: I see. In other words, he used you as a kind of guinea pig in some ways.

CUNEO: Yes, we were. Sure we were. And we would have to backtrack a little and change. That made it bad; it made more work to keep the organization functioning harmoniously. But, it was an attempt on his part to further the objectives that we were all working for.

SCHIPPERS: Do you remember specifically any of the ideas that he launched?

CUNEO: Well, let's start with the party idea and then we have the initiatives that we had. You see, they were not part of our national efforts, and of course undoubtedly things of that magnitude had been discussed back and forth and had been approved, or we would not have gone ahead with them. But it involved a lot of negotiating and discussions.

SCHIPPERS: You mean, then, he brought the party idea up to you first before he cleared it with the national organization?

CUNEO: Well, I think so, as I recall. Not only to me but to the state council -- I only as the representative from the national office and his representative. But innumerable little things. Well, I mentioned the "Triple T" ticket deal and the giving of stamps. The sale of vitamins was a revenue producing thing. And, of course, in those two cases they were probably discussed; he probably would have them discuss things of that magnitude. But if he thought it would be a good idea to put on a series of broadcasts down at Long Beach, to do this or do that, why, he would probably proceed and say to the boys down there, "Well, go ahead and make arrangements to do this. I'll prepare the material, or I'll be there." They were innumerable. He had a very fertile mind, and he had plenty of suggestions come to him from all of these elderly people as to what might be helpful. But I always felt that even if they were not always in my judgement completely desirable, they were desirable from this standpoint: They were an honest effort to an objective that we had and deserved our consideration.

SCHIPPERS: You keep referring to this objective. Now that could be broken down into gaining more membership and seeing always with the idea in mind of getting the legislation across?

CUNEO: Yes, sure. It would give us publicity, and then it would give us information that would be educational and build goodwill. But basically it was an effort, a simple effort, to end poverty through this method.

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May 26, 1967

SCHIPPERS: This is prompted by my question of what were the major reasons for the loss of interest in the Townsend Movement.

CUNEO: There are many, of course, but some of the prime ones were that we have experienced two major wars during that period -- World War II and the Korean conflict -- which very definitely slowed down all kinds of activities in this field. And recently we have had added to that some activity in Vietnam, which is kind of late in influencing but it does still have some influence. Secondly, the 1929-1933 period of the Depression, while it was a thing which brought on the need for the plan to be recognized, had the effect of making poverty in its extreme states accepted as a regular thing, instead of being an abnormal thing, by a lot of people. They have been through it so long that they say there is no way out. Then of course the people that developed and promoted other similar organizations, such as McLain's organization, the "Ham and Eggs" people, and the Allen brothers. They put on two initiatives that certainly did attract a lot of people that had been or were at the time interested in the program. Well, I would say those three things would be about the major reasons for the decline of interest in the Townsend philosophy.

Now I would like to again call attention to some of the favorable things that have happened that I think were achievements. Several state legislatures including California had at different times taken actions to recommend study and consideration of the basic principles of the Townsend Plan. We have had many labor and

other group endorsements, at least in our state. And then our California conventions were a big help to us here. We had the first Los Angeles Convention in 1935 and another one in Long Beach -- I don't have the year just at the moment -- and the Santa Cruz Convention in 1955. There was a long period, during the war, when the conventions could not be held, for any groups, and that was a very retarding effect.

We think that Proposition Number Eleven on the ballot in 1943 was a good effort in again bringing to the attention of the public the fundamentals of the Townsend Plan. It was an effort on the Pacific Coast here. I think Oregon, Arizona, and California simultaneously had propositions on the ballot. Here in California we polled over a million votes but the proposition did not qualify because it was not a majority. I think that covers that phase of the proposition for the moment.

I would like to call attention to a few of the conventions which I had the privilege to attend: the one in Los Angeles; St. Louis, Missouri; Indianapolis; two at Washington, D.C.; Portland, Oregon; Des Moines, Iowa; Santa Cruz; two at Cleveland; Detroit, Michigan; and several meetings of the national office groups in different parts of the country when we had regional meetings. In addition we had one at Buffalo, New York. That was the first one following World War II. There were two in Denver, Colorado. It was quite a privilege to be able to attend that many large gatherings of people from all over the United States that had a real common interest in doing something constructive for the country.

[tape off]

Another privilege and helpful experience to me was a visit to a celebration held at Fairbury, Illinois, Dr. Townsend's birthplace. I made this trip in company with Dr. Townsend from Chicago in a car with Senator Pepper and two or three other congressmen. Another good experience that I had was with Dr. Townsend. I visited Herbert Hoover in his home in Palo Alto, California. We spent a good part of an afternoon there and enjoyed it very much. Mr. Hoover, of course, was not President at that time, having retired, but he showed considerable understanding of the problem and had heard considerable about the program, but did not commit himself one way or the other.

SCHIPPERS: Was the content of the discussion related to a possible endorsement of the Townsend?

CUNEO: Naturally we hoped to achieve some statement from him about the fundamental principles of it, but he was not in office at the time and was no longer the President. We had hope that we could get some expression from him that might be helpful. But we did not achieve that objective. He was very courteous and gave us his time.

SCHIPPERS: Do you recall any of those remarks, what his major sentiment was?

CUNEO: Primarily it was centered around the certain need. Certainly there was a need to alleviate this thing that was harassing the country, the circumstances of poverty. That was the principal thing. Of course, we were trying to present to him the objectives of the elimination of poverty and the practical means of financing it -- the gross income tax, which we talked a good deal about, the

Hawaiians and the people in Indiana having proved its value. Nevertheless, it was a stimulating, enjoyable visit which I recall with great satisfaction.

Dr. Townsend and I also had the privilege of attending the national convention of the Republican party in San Francisco, in the Cow Palace, and our congressman, Mr. Johnson from Stockton, made arrangements for us to appear before the committee that was set up by the convention for matters of that kind. We did appear and made our presentation, along with others. It was an experience which I personally never had before and learned something.

SCHIPPERS: Was that one of the few times that you actively engaged in a political caucus?

CUNEO: In a national party, yes. Dr. Townsend, however, had many of them, and in fact Mr. Wilford Howard went with him to the one in Chicago. I think it was on the theme of sponsoring Wallace as a candidate for President. I think they attended that meeting. I did not go.

I would like to put into the record the names of the welfare directors who served during those sixteen years while I was serving on the State Welfare Board. They were a very high-class, capable group of people, I believe. I enjoyed my acquaintance and association with them very much. The first one was Martha Chickering. She was the first director. However, she did not serve long, probably a year. Then there was Charles Wallenburg of San Francisco, who was made the director when Warren was elected to office. He served about six years. Then there was Charles I. Shotland, a very capable man, who served two years and went East to take over a principalship of a college dealing with social

welfare. I don't recall the name. After him came Judge Ben Koenig of Los Angeles, who is now a judge in one of the courts in Los Angeles. I thought he was an exceptional man as a director of activity of that kind. He did a marvelous job. George Wyman served two years. George Wyman likewise was efficient and capable. He had been a county welfare director, however, and he had that experience, but he did a good job. And last was Dr. Jacobus Tennbrook of Berkeley. I must say that in my acquaintance with him I gained a great respect for man's ability to overcome [obstacles]. He's a blind man, and yet he is a teacher of law in the University of California at Berkeley, and still is, as far as I know. He had a wife and three fine children. They had a beautiful home up on the high Berkeley campus mountains up there, and it would take a man with a lot of breathing to climb around there in the surroundings where he had it built. He built part of it himself. But what amazed me was how he could take the full responsibility of leadership as chairman of the board and deal with all the intricate hard problems that you had to deal with -- with legislators and county welfare directors and attorneys that appeared in behalf of clients. It was just marvelous to see what he was able to do and how well he did it. In fact, I doubt that some people knew he was blind. I enjoyed him very much.

SCHIPPERS: About these people you just mentioned. Were any of them decisive in making policy?

CUNEO: Definitely.

SCHIPPERS: What about Chickering?

CUNEO: Well, less so because there was less to make. We were in

the throes of feeding hungry people. That was the big problem at that time, you see. We did not have much on the books. That's why we got Mr. Wallenburg. He was a positive sort of a guy.

SCHIPPERS: Could you say something more about Mr. Wallenburg?

CUNEO: He was Worshipful Master for the state of California Masonic Lodge. He had a lot of influence. His son is now a superior court judge in San Francisco County. He is another old-timer, but had taken part in a lot of civic activities in both city, county, and state. Mr. Wallenburg was more outgoing and was what I call a smooth, clever, capable administrator. And I would say the same thing about Judge Koenig. He is a gentleman in every respect. I enjoyed his techniques. Mr. Wyman probably never had quite as much experience as any of the others at that top level. However, he knew more than some of the others about the details and the effect on the administrative processes, having been a county welfare director for several years. And Dr. Tennbrook, because of his lack of vision and the other handicaps that came along with it -- getting around and all that -- why, his ability to be an administrator was more noticeable. His was exceptional. Yet he was sometimes more abrupt than the others because of his lack of vision to see the reactions of people. But he was very thorough and demanding in following the law. He was a lawyer, of course. I enjoyed every one of those people. They were good administrators.

SCHIPPERS: You said at first there was not as much in the way of policy formation. When did this start to change?

CUNEO: When Mr. Wallenburg came in, and Governor Warren came on. They had the governor's pension committee that I referred to, that

I served on with seventeen other people. From that time on, the governor and others were sponsoring new legislation to try to meet some of the recommendations. And then of course economic conditions became less serious. There were less hungry people. But the demand had been developed for better pension conditions. Action had to be taken and that was the governor's way of doing it, appointing this committee. Mr. Wallenburg was given the job of being director during that stage when all of this new legislation came into being to make the welfare program much broader in its application.

SCHIPPERS: You mentioned the McLain movement. What is your opinion of that?

CUNEO: I believe it has done a lot of good to help focus attention on the problems of the people, with us and other groups working in the same field. Their methods have been different in some respects. I think the fact that he was as aggressive as he was with the members of the legislature brought on more publicity than was justified for what was done by his tactics. I had known him quite awhile. I watched him through the legislature. He served on the same committee with me. Also, the "Ham and Eggs" people were represented on the committee. He joined all of the liberal groups in sponsoring legislation with us in a minority report, adding to the general committee's report. I had a lot of occasion to see McLain in action before various committees in the legislature when welfare bills came up for hearing. Some of the methods he used were not of the kind that I would have used to approach the particular situation.

SCHIPPERS: What methods?

CUNEO: Well, attacking the various members of the legislature and

the different people that are involved in the Welfare Department -- county welfare, directors. They were pretty broad accusations sometimes. I think they were unwarranted for the good of the objective that he had and that we had.

SCHIPPERS: Was there resentment against the McLain group for "stealing thunder," so to speak?

CUNEO: There was some. I personally accepted it as other similar things that came along. I had to deal with it, live with it, and do what I could to do those things that were best for the objective I had, and not spend all of my time calling names or criticizing the other fellow. I tried to present a constructive effort in behalf of the objectives that we had, which might have been similar, but the method of achieving it for permanency was different, we thought.

SCHIPPERS: Do you think that he was sincere?

CUNEO: Well, you have to be sincere in most of your activities, but sometimes circumstances under which they develop and other things that you don't know about enter into it. I am always prone to do what a judge said one time in a very serious situation, when an individual that I personally knew quite well was involved. It was a hairline case of whether or not he did right or wrong. I recall a judge hearing all of the testimony, and when he got through he said, "Well, this is no doubt a case where there is evidence to indicate that he might be classified as having done something wrong, but I am compelled in this case to take into consideration the conditions under which it occurred." The tactics that he used might have been questionable, but I do not know all

the facts of his organization, his efforts, or what he was up against. So I am pretty prone to try to realize there are two sides to the coin. I did not like his style. I enjoyed some of the things, but nevertheless it was there, and I had to deal with it. I dealt with it as best I could.

SCHIPPERS: Now the "Ham and Eggs" Movement had a tendency also to draw attention away from the Townsend efforts.

CUNEO: Yes. Certainly it did.

SCHIPPERS: Do you feel that it may have been a more opportunistic movement in inspiration?

CUNEO: I would not be able to say. I felt that they were probably able to distract some of our members. It was largely due to the fact that probably when they came along there had been a letdown in our activities. For instance, when we put on our initiative -- which was after their time, but it illustrates the point -- our immediate goal or present goal had not been achieved. Interest begins to lag on the part of a lot of people that are lukewarm, or not deeply interested. When something like that comes up new -- Thirty Dollars Every Thursday or whatever happened to be the case -- some people were attracted out of our organization into that organization. Likewise with Mr. McLain's. It was a matter of when they happened to come onto the scene and what the status was of our organization then. But they were all appealing to the public for support of a general objective, namely, ending poverty, and largely through the means of meeting the needs of the aged, blind, and unemployable people.

SCHIPPERS: I notice that you use the word "poverty" in a broad sense.

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: When do you feel that the change in emphasis to poverty really started taking hold in the Movement?

CUNEO: It is hard to say just when. As far as I am concerned, it seems to me that from the beginning we were talking of this as a means of paying pensions to aged, blind, and unemployable people. We had the same basic objective in the beginning as we still have. But since that time, as legislation came along, we had to orient our efforts to the changed conditions and the changed laws that have come into effect. For instance, Medicare. When Medicare came along we were naturally for it, and there were other changes in the Social Security Act that we supported. But we are still thinking in terms of -- if we had the full fundamentals of the Townsend Plan -- operating how much money would be paid into the hands of all these unemployable people, aged, blind, children and what not. It would still be able to meet the needs that existed basically at that time.

SCHIPPERS: So the idea of combating poverty, then, is very comprehensive?

CUNEO: Yes. It was anticipated it would be a natural result.

SCHIPPERS: What are your thoughts on President Johnson's War on Poverty?

CUNEO: I think it is a step in the right direction. But I don't think it is quite as good a method as we had. I think all of these things he has done have helped, and will probably help more, if we are able to finance them. But the conditions that we are in now, where we have got to finance all of the things that

we do have and without a program such as we have proposed, you cannot get the kind of results they have hoped for. The greatest handicap that we see to that whole program -- there are different phases and degrees of it -- but the greatest one that I see is the many programs, so much regulation and red tape that it has become hopeless. What I mean is at least an average individual, trying to figure out where, what to do, and how to do all the phases of this Medicare program. I just got today some more copies of proposals from my insurance carrier, that carries my excess needs over Medicare. And I have paid two or three visits over to the office here to try to clarify in my own mind how to do what under which circumstance with the doctor and the druggist and all the other agencies that I have got to work through. Now it is being manifested that all over the country they slowed down payments to the point of where it is becoming another problem. Of course, that is one of the arguments that a lot of people use against any federal participation. I am not saying this. This is just the result of the kind of program which contains too many problems. We had a simple sound program, in our humble judgement, that would have made that all unnecessary, besides taking care of the needs of the poverty angle of the people.

Red tape, in my judgement, is one of the greatest problems that is facing this country today. Confusion that results from the lack of speedy considerations, so we have constant irritations here, there, and yonder in the various programs. In our county here there is nothing but chaos among the poverty programs. When you go out and try to get the poor people to participate and

help develop programs, and when they come into those meetings, they have an entirely different viewpoint than the people administering. The first thing you know animosities develop. Only last night in one of these programs they had a meeting over here in Westley, a little town near here. They wanted to fire the director of the project. I don't even remember the name of the program, but they wanted the lady fired because she had sold out to the officials, and so on, and so forth. I think I tried to express that yesterday. Someone said that so many of the people do not get full benefits because they have not got the wherewithal of experience to lead them to know what to do without humiliation, animosity, and unhappy experience. And it is red tape that does that, in my judgement.

SCHIPPERS: You have mentioned the labor groups. Did you work actively with any of the labor groups in this area?

CUNEO: Yes. In the early history of our activities we had considerable help. I -- the legislative conferences that were held in Los Angeles of different groups, and we had one at Fresno, some in Oakland -- did quite a lot to build those conferences. We got resolutions through the different clubs and locals. And we had their speakers at our conventions, both national and local. The national office had a great deal of contacts with them. I had no personal part in that. But after we got to the point where labor was able to get its program of pensions into operation successfully, I felt that their interest had probably waned, at the top at least. That is just an impression of my own.

SCHIPPERS: Did you have any chance to talk to Dr. Townsend about his relations with the Rev. Gerald L.K. Smith or Father Charles

Coughlin?

CUNEO: No. I never raised the point and he did not with me. That was held on the national level, and largely before I was very active as a state director. I was participating but I think -- since you mentioned it -- that you asked me where I met Dr. Townsend first. I told you that I thought the first time I saw him was in Los Angeles, or in Oakland, at a big picnic that was staged there. I cannot say for sure the names of the individuals that were there, but I think as you say Father Coughlin -- and who was the other?

SCHIPPERS: Smith.

CUNEO: Gerald K. Smith. Well, I won't say for sure that they were there, but I think they were, at least one of them. But I had no discussion with him about their programs.

SCHIPPERS: I have let you browse through a book by Mr. Holtzman and I wondered if you have, through looking at it, come to any conclusion or opinion about it.

CUNEO: No. I have not had time to read enough of it, but I feel that in all of these analyses that are being made and have been made through the years when anybody came to discuss out phases of activity in those problems -- I always felt free to give them any information that I had. I thought that men of that kind who had the know-how and the facilities available to document actual facts about it was a very good thing. And it seems to me that as I recall my conversation with Mr. Holtzman -- I don't remember the specifics of it -- but it was a very encouraging thing to have that happening. I had hoped to read the book and get a more thorough

understanding of the many things he is presenting in it, but I think it will probably result in a much better understanding from people that are truly interested in wanting to find a solution to this problem. I am grateful that you have brought to my attention that the book is available and I shall get a copy. I think what he said in the last chapter there is fundamental and important to us who have given so much towards this objective. He admits that in his opinion the Townsend organization had hastened the active consideration of the social security development, and because of its efforts further consideration would be made of the Townsend activities. At least that is the way I interpreted that part of the chapter. I am grateful that it is out and thank you for giving me the opportunity to see it.

SCHIPPERS: You said you would like to add for the record that you have had so much contact with red tape that you even see red.

CUNEO: I would like to say that through these long varied experiences I have had occasion to meet with a lot of different activities that develop problems, and in our modern society today I see those problems pyramiding constantly in every direction. When I got involved in the Townsend work and the State Social Welfare Board, where you had to deal directly with legislation plus all the rules and regulations that had to be implemented to make the laws workable by the administering agency -- and watching other organizations to some extent -- I feel that the red tape is adding so much confusion to the lives of the average American that it is taking their time and destroying their feeling of liberty and confidence in each other. I think it is a real enemy, and anything that can

be done to simplify it should be done, I believe, and the simplification of our taxing laws to me is a good sound way to approach it. I believe the gross income tax proposal we have made all these years, plus the fact that people took to it over in Hawaii and put it into operation and made a success of it in Indiana, indicates that a gross income tax is simple, practical, and the people like it. I am for doing anything we can to stimulate interest in, and eventual, I hope, adoption of a sound gross income tax -- even so far as to hope for a national gross income tax to be collected for the benefit of all of the political subdivisions that do tax. They would collect it in one act from the person that used the business highway, made sales, or sold his services or goods and then pro-rate it back down to the political subdivision to meet the local needs. I realize that that is a far fetched concept that probably very few people have, but that is my personal one after all of these long years of direct contact with what I call red tape, a real enemy.

In that connection I want to add to the record here what the Cleveland Press had to say about Dr. Townsend on two different occasions when we had national conventions there. The first said that "Dr. Townsend and his associates gave the American people hope when they needed it so bad." The second was that "when the full history of social security is finally written, Dr. Francis E. Townsend will have his place." And that I believe. I am grateful to have had a small part in helping achieve what progress has been made. Thank you.

SCHIPPERS: We are going to add to the end of this a little

discussion about the papers that are at UCLA which you have collected. In the main they are the records that you accumulated while being the State Director of California. Now in this new material that we are adding to the collection there is some material that you got from the Los Angeles office when it closed.

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: Can you tell me how that came about?

CUNEO: Well, through the years my office was here in Modesto because I was here, and my secretary, Mrs. Mildred Atwood, and others that we hired to help her at different times. But she was my permanent secretary all the time through those years. In addition to that we maintained what was set up originally in Los Angeles as an area office by Mr. B.J. Rankine. We continued to keep that office open and as a subsidiary of my office here. During all of those years Dr. Townsend and other special assignment people, including Dr. Norman W. Pendleton, used that office as a base for their operations. Dr. Townsend having lived in the Los Angeles area all the time was in and out of the office most every day when he was in here, and that was the biggest part of the time. So he had access to it and he used that office. And we had a Mrs. Margaret Cole, a lady in that office, practically all of the years that I had anything to do with it. She was an elderly woman but she was a marvelous person, a very good helper, a good administrator, and dealer with people who were sensitive.

One specific assignment that was dealt with by that office, and under the direction of the national office and Dr. Townsend, was the disposition of some lots then acquired by an association

that was set up. I believe it was called the Senior Citizens Social Center. Different members gave \$100 as a contribution to purchase the lots up on Sixth and, I think, Gray. But I am not sure of the cross street. What is the name of the park?

SCHIPPERS: Is it Westlake Park?

CUNEO: Yes, Westlake Park. It's up there on Sixth. It was a pretty large lot. I don't know how much money was involved in it, but it was bought by that method, with the idea of eventually building a large social center to contain all of the Townsend activities, especially in California. But they may have had plans at that time even for a national office -- I don't know. I only participated in that in the sense that I was one of those that added my \$100. My investment of \$100 is what it was supposed to be. The lot was purchased, and they attempted to proceed to get plans for the development. Some controversy developed among the controlling board and other members. They could not work it out, and Dr. Townsend was dragged into it and tried to help lead them out. But he was unable to do it either; it was so confused. So Dr. Pendleton was assigned to the job of straightening that out, or disposing of it. And he worked with the legal people for quite awhile. All during this time whatever records there were about it went through that office, through Mrs. Cole, acting not as my representative, but as Mr. Pendleton's or Dr. Townsend's, whichever was the case. I guess in some cases Bob Townsend might have been involved or the officers of the corporation.

Well, that was rather a long drawn-out thing, but it was finally adjudicated in some way. I have had the impression that

because they could not agree under the law, the court assigned the value there to a public agency. I cannot tell you whether that was the University of California or whether it was some other agency. I don't know. I never took the trouble to go and run it down because I had plenty of other things to do. I did not know the facts of what developed all through that time because it was out of my jurisdiction. Some records of different things the Doctor might have initiated were also in that office.

After Dr. Pendleton left and the matter was closed, he took his own records and went up north. I don't know how much of those transactions that were involved were his or what, but anyway he took his records with him. I do not know where they went. But there were some of the records in that material. When it became necessary to close the office because of lack of ability to carry on, as we had before, I was authorized to go down and take what was there and dispose of the disposable values. I did not know what else to do, so I had them shipped up here. And this is the residue from that.

SCHIPPERS: I see. Now you have no idea where the personal papers of Dr. Townsend might be, if he had such?

CUNEO: Well, I do not think I do. Anything that he might have participated in down there with Mrs. Margaret Cole's help, she would have probably put it in some of those files that are up there. There may be some. I have not had the opportunity to go through all of that.

SCHIPPERS: Can you comment about the papers from national headquarters?

CUNEO: I understand that the national headquarters papers have

gone to the University of Eugene, Oregon. At least that is what I was told.

SCHIPPERS: Now this is relating to the categories within the papers themselves. Most of them are self-explanatory, I believe. One of the largest amounts of the papers are correspondence with individuals from all over the state.

CUNEO: Yes. And that is what you have down there already.

SCHIPPERS: Yes, quite a great deal of that.

CUNEO: A good part of it, yes. They have all of the weekly papers I had up to that time.

SCHIPPERS: This correspondence with individuals -- what was its primary subject, why were they writing to you?

CUNEO: The biggest part of it, I think, was my writing to them. We had national conventions. New policies and new programs were developed, and we had lots of them. The national office would tell me as state director, "Now, you get this across to the membership and try to cooperate the best you can." And that I tried to do. I naturally worked through my state council, congressional district councils, and club councils, of which we had all of the different records of the different groups. I would have a bulletin that would have to go to the club, district and state council members, and each one would be different because of their responsibilities. Of course, when any kind of a change or a new development came along, why, a lot of those people did not always understand its proper application. They would write in for clarification or they would do something, and I would have it corrected. It's purely an administrative thing. We tried to carry out the instructions

of the national office towards our objective. We were the central place for the people of California.

SCHIPPERS: How about personal welfare problems and that sort of thing?

CUNEO: We had considerable of that. But we did not go into that as extensively as Mr. McLain did, that is, to maintain a department exclusively for that particular phase of the work. However, whenever a welfare problem came up we took care of it.

SCHIPPERS: And this you did primarily through correspondence?

CUNEO: Largely. And interpretations that they would want of actions of welfare workers in their case. We helped present several appeals as time went along. But we did not have that as our major activity, as Mr. McLain did.

SCHIPPERS: Of course, you were right in the spot to give them answers too, weren't you?

CUNEO: Yes. That was it.

SCHIPPERS: Did people take advantage of that?

CUNEO: Yes. A lot of people did.

SCHIPPERS: And are there a number of letters in the collection that are related to that kind of question?

CUNEO: I do not know how many, but there are many, yes.

SCHIPPERS: Now did you have to act as a kind of official arbiter in any of these club situations?

CUNEO: Oh, certainly. This was one of the difficult problems, to try to placate both sides, to keep as much harmony as you could. I was not always successful, but it was my duty to carry it as far as I could. I think I have a record among the membership that are still alive, that I got along pretty well with the membership.

SCHIPPERS: Were there other bulletins that were put out to inform about policy?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: And change.

CUNEO: When I would receive a bulletin or a letter from the national office, I would begin to put the same thing out. I had the various levels to reach, you see. I had the state council level, the district council level, and the club council level. They are each different except for the same objective.

SCHIPPERS: Why didn't they get the Townsend Flash?

CUNEO: They did. Some of them. But that was not compulsory. They paid for that. The club would buy it and read it and that helped a lot. Sure, but you know when you are dealing with people with the ages that those were, most of them, they don't respond so quickly. You have to say it over and over. Just one-shot deals don't always go.

SCHIPPERS: There are the club officers' directories, and I suppose those are self-explanatory.

CUNEO: Those are the best records we have. I mean, they are more complete: names of the officers, of course, and the different committee chairmen, the names, addresses, telephones, right across the board. We kept those right up to the minute as well as it was possible to do, and Mrs. Mildred Atwood was certainly particular at seeing that they were.

SCHIPPERS: The importance of keeping this record was to keep good contact, right?

CUNEO: Yes.

SCHIPPERS: Was there a big turnover?

CUNEO: Not too much. No. A good officer was appreciated and he continued as a rule.

SCHIPPERS: Now the speaker's permit file, what was its purpose?

CUNEO: The national office tried to have speakers appointed around the country, so they would be able to go before groups, our own groups and others, to explain the program. They had speaker's manuals they had to be informed on. We in turn appointed some, but many of the national speakers were issued permits out of the national office and state-wide. I issued several, from time to time. Of course, the officers of the districts and state council and club council members were all more or less qualified to do speaking if necessary.

SCHIPPERS: The purpose of the permit was to guarantee what?

CUNEO: Well, to try to have them qualified as much as possible, urge them to keep in contact, and furnish them with up-to-date material. It was a school by correspondence, we would call it, I guess. At least I thought it was for them.

SCHIPPERS: Now there are some minutes involved in this material.

CUNEO: Yes. Those are the minutes of various district club and council meetings. Those were mostly congressional district and state council meetings, of which I was the chairman of the state council meetings. I often attended the district council meetings and spoke to them. I did what I could to help. [tape off]

SCHIPPERS: You said you would like to add a little postscript on what has occurred since the Lincoln, Nebraska convention.

CUNEO: Yes, last July 2-3, I think it was. This was a conference of national Townsend club members and leaders, similar to our regular

annual national conventions. It was not as large a meeting and there wasn't as much effort put behind it, but there was certain business that had to be transacted. They called a conference of all of the leaders and the meeting was so billed, to consider recommendations that were being made by the legal departments to meet the law changes. I did not attend, because I have not been a member of the official family in any way and could not spare the time. I would have been glad to have gone. There was no reason why I should not go, other than that. But I get the reports through the Townsend Courier, newsletters, and bulletins that have been put out. Because of the restricted activities and continued depreciation in numbers and income, they had to meet all of the legal requirements of keeping the records and making their reports to legislative council (and every other department that was involved) for the three organizations: the Townsend Weekly, Townsend Foundation, and Townsend Plan, Incorporated, which issued the charters and directed the club activity. They were acted upon by the delegates and the directors and officers of those three corporations, and, briefly, I understand that what was ordered was the liquidation of the Townsend Plan, Incorporated, as such and the paper, the Townsend Weekly, and the continuation of the Townsend Foundation which received the gifts. We were to instruct the clubs around the country, and individuals that wanted to continue their contributions, to send them to the Townsend Foundation Lobby Fund. And Mr. John Doyle Elliott was authorized to take all legal steps to achieve that objective. And the clubs' charters were automatically cancelled by the delegates having taken that action. And continuing the existence of the Townsend Foundation.

In turn they adopted resolutions and so forth by the directors and by the conference to carry out the recommendations that the council's legal department recommended. Mr. Elliott was authorized and instructed to proceed to do that as rapidly as possible. In the meantime that involved asking the state directors to take and issue charters to the clubs, as if they were existing, or form new groups if they wanted to, known as the Townsend chapters instead of clubs. Some of the states would automatically just shift over the clubs, and that is what we did here locally in our club, in this county where we operated two clubs. We consolidated them into the Stanislaus Chapter of the California Townsend Organization. Mr. Earl Tift from Pasadena was at the conference as one of the delegates. He was authorized to proceed as the state director to achieve this changeover. And that was started, and I think has been quite generally observed as far as California is concerned. Now they are scheduling, I understand, another conference to further analyze the situation and pick up the loose ends and do whatever else is necessary to put it on the basis to function under a new plan. In the meantime the chapters out here in the country send our funds to the state office, and they in turn mail it to the Townsend Foundation Lobby Fund. Mr. John Doyle Elliott has been authorized to act as the lobbyist. He has closed the original office that they were operating under, and he has his own office as an official lobbyist, as the Townsend National Council's representative in the lobby work at Washington. He has issued the bulletins and newsletters regularly and some in between, depending on what was at stake. Included in his activity, besides

what was authorized in the matter of legal changes of the organization, was to make a presentation of our new bill, and he and Mr. John J. McFall drafted the new bill, H.R. 5930. He presented this. Then it was filed with the Ways and Means Committee and a hearing was held on March 16, I think, along with other similar legislation that the committee was hearing at that time. [tape ends]

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