

Joseph D. Keenan Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/03/1968
Administrative Information

Creator: Joseph D. Keenan
Interviewer: Larry J. Hackman
Date of Interview: January 3, 1968
Place of Interview: Washington D.C.
Length: 28 pages

Biographical Note

Joseph Keenan (1896 - 1984) was the director of Labor's League for Political Education (1948-1951); secretary of Chicago Federation of Labor (1937-1949); and the international secretary of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (1954-1976). This interview focuses on the labor movement's relationship with the John F. Kennedy [JFK] administration and the Labor-Management Advisory Committee, among other topics.

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Suggested Citation

Joseph D. Keenan, recorded interview by Larry J. Hackman, January 3, 1968, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Joseph D. Keenan– JFK #1

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THE INTERVIEWEE WISHED TO MAKE.

Oral History Interview

with

JOSEPH D. KEENAN

January 3, 1968
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Keenan, can you remember when you first met John Kennedy?

KEENAN: Well, the first time I met him was shortly after he was elected Congressman in, I think, 1947 or '48.

HACKMAN: '46, I believe he was elected and then came down in '47.

KEENAN: Yes. And I met him a few times before, met him before the election in 1948. He was reelected, I believe, in 1948, and I had my first year with Labor's League for Political Education. And I had visited him at his office, and he had visited me a couple of times, and we discussed many things. There was not much discussion as far as his district was concerned. We considered it a safe district, and in those days we concentrated on trying to help those in the marginal districts. We pretty much got consent from Representatives in safe districts that they would follow our policy of helping those who needed help.

HACKMAN: What, in general, was the extent of his knowledge of labor problems in that earlier period? Did he know anything about it?

KEENAN: Very little, very little. I think that he was just beginning. I don't think he had ever had a chance in his lifetime to brush with us, and I guess that all that he knew -- I'm just supposing this -- was what he read in the newspapers and what he could pick up. He had no reason to be associated or close to labor people.

HACKMAN: What about during the rest of the period, then, when he was Congressman? Were there similar types of contacts or anything in

KEENAN: No I didn't do any legislative work; I just worked on the political side of it. But I know some of his votes sometimes caused concern on issues that labor, American labor, was interested in, but as time went on, he supported us almost 100 per cent.

HACKMAN: Can you recall what some of these issues were? Was this still while he was in the House or after he came to the Senate?

KEENAN: Well, I think there was one important vote on a farm issue.

HACKMAN: Right. That was probably in '56 when he gave a speech on

KEENAN: No, I believe it was before that, in the House, he had four or five votes that, well, were contrary to what the legislative group of the AF of L (American Federation of Labor) were interested in.

HACKMAN: What about after he went to the Senate? Did you have more frequent contacts with him

KEENAN: Well, in the Senate we had a great deal of contact with him, especially when he started with the Kennedy bills, you see, a couple of insurance bills. Then he came up with the amendments and brought about Griffin-Landrum. We were pretty upset about that because -- I was in particular, anyway -- it was bringing up a bill and not being able to control it that caused us a lot of trouble. Griffin-Landrum has really caused us great troubles today. You see, we've tried to get relief ever since. Last year, or two years ago, they filibustered when we had the votes. We also had the votes in '58, and for some unknown reason there was a slip between the lip and the cup, and they were able to pass the McClellan amendments. There'll always be a feeling that when you have no right to lose, and lose, it's pretty rough. On that night of the vote it should have been delayed -- you had (Hubert H.) Humphrey away; you had (Paul H.) Douglas away -- and then the irony of it was they sent (James E.) Murray home. And that was the vote that would have recommitted it, and we would have had a better whack at it. Anyhow, that's all behind us.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any specific meetings with him or his staff on

KEENAN: Oh, I met with him four or five times. I met him one day for lunch and I gave him my views when he asked my opinion on some things. But he felt strongly that some of these issues had to

be considered, and part of it just went through. Pardon me just a minute. (Interruption) And, there was hot cargo he felt that it had to be in the bill, and then he felt that there should be some other things in there, and consequently it led us into the lions' den and we got clobbered.

HACKMAN: Was this in the period when he was beginning to introduce the bill, when he was trying to decide

KEENAN: No, you see, he had a bill in '57, '57, '58, that they had pretty much agreement on, but it was set aside.

HACKMAN: That was the Kennedy-Ives Bill, right?

KEENAN: The Kennedy-Ives Bill. Then came '58 and then they came up with the Kennedy, the Kennedy bill alone, wasn't it?

HACKMAN: Kennedy-Ervin. I think he got (Sam J., Jr.) Ervin, who was on it as a first termmer from North Carolina, and then Ervin backed off.

KEENAN: Well, the Kennedy-Ervin Bill. And on the Kennedy-Ervin Bill we had talked to him, I talked to him a couple of times, and Lou Sherman and I went over and talked to him a few times. And then in the late days I talked to a number of people to get to him to try and get off the bill and get away from it because it was wrong, but anyhow I suppose that he knew what he wanted better than I. But out of it, it's created a mess today that discourages me very much. We've lost control; I'm talking about the labor officials. You're reading about the effects of that now, but that's the intention of the McClellan amendments -- they wanted to give people absolute liberty and

they've got it -- we have lost control -- not entirely lost control, but we certainly don't have the influence that we formerly had.

HACKMAN: Who do you think he was paying particular attention to at this time? Strictly

KEENAN: Well, I think what he was doing then, he was trying to win. I feel he felt that he had to have something in that area in order to use it in the campaign of '60. I think, at that time, he'd pretty much made up his mind that he was a candidate for President.

HACKMAN: Was he hard to see in that period?

KEENAN: No, never.

HACKMAN: Never.

KEENAN: He was as easy to see as anyone.

HACKMAN: Was his knowledge much more detailed than it had been in the early period, since he had become acquainted with some of these things?

KEENAN: Well, I couldn't He certainly had knowledge on the issues that he was talking about or that we were talking about. How broad it was, I couldn't tell you, but certainly on the issues that we were discussing he was pretty knowledgeable and he certainly had a chance to get our views as well as the people who were giving him information on the other side.

HACKMAN: Did you deal much with any of his staff members? Dungan, for instance, who was working on

KEENAN: I never knew any of his staff until after he became President. I got to know them in the campaign in 1960. I traveled with

them for about two months, and I got to know them. I was working with George Harrison in the National Committee.

HACKMAN: Some people have said that despite all his experience on the Labor Committee he never really understood how important these issues were until they were he could just never Because he had never been a working person, he could never understand.

KEENAN: I don't think that he ever had any feeling until he made this trip into West Virginia. I think West Virginia opened him up. I don't think he ever realized that there were conditions in this country that existed in West Virginia. And that was what opened him up, that possibly, more than anything else, when he saw the squalor, the poverty in West Virginia.

HACKMAN: What was your attitude as 1960 approached toward the various people who were possible candidates for the Democratic nomination? Can you recall?

KEENAN: Well, I remember, there was (Stuart) Symington, I think. Of course, I went into the Convention with Kennedy. I was opposed to (Lyndon Baines) Johnson. I felt at that time that the (John L.) McClellan amendments and all the rest could have been avoided if Johnson had taken a stand. I think Johnson maneuvered it; it was deliberate at that time. Anyway, it happened. I don't think there was a fight. I never felt there was the right kind of a fight made. If action could have been postponed 'til the next morning, I think that under the rules of the Senate - - if we could have got it recommitted we could have done something about it later.

HACKMAN: Yes. There's always been speculation about -- well, not only that, but then also the vote of the Texas delegation in the House when they substituted Landrum-Griffin -- as to whether (Sam) Rayburn really could control the votes or if Johnson had control of them.

KEENAN: No, I think that what happened there had to be carefully planned because the afternoon of the McClellan amendments -- I'm talking now about our legislative people -- they said they had plenty of votes. Thus, it took a lot of maneuvering to pass. You take guys like (Dennis) Chavez who was committed to us; he got drunk that night and voted against us. I'll always feel that way, that the arm was put on him. Chavez, who had a tough election that year, and I personally went out and raised quite a considerable amount of money for him. Afterwards, he came in here with his son, looking for me, telling us how indebted he was to us, but that night the heat was on and

HACKMAN: Do you remember having any contacts with Senator Kennedy during the conference over Landrum-Griffin? Do you think he was very successful in getting any of the worst parts out of that in the House-Senate conference?

KEENAN: No, there were some changes, but the things that amounted to something, the real restrictive sections were kept. Whatever we got was just, you know, a little, some little concessions here or there. The big issues, the things that really are now proving to cripple us and damage the -- well, I think it goes beyond us, the way the thing is working out -- were passed.

McClellan and Goldwater were riding them, and had taken over and they weren't going to give up. Then you had the people in the House.

HACKMAN: Do you think your feeling at that point was typical of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations) leadership or were there others who were more favorably inclined to the bill and to Kennedy?

KEENAN: General. I think it was general. I think many of us thought we'd been had. We didn't blame it on Kennedy, but I think in the urge to get a bill with his name on it, he probably pushed it too fast. You know how legislation is; they make all kinds of concessions to get it through. They never deliver. Now in this particular case, there was a chance for a holdup on the final day of the committee's report, the conferees' report, and we tried to get it stopped; we tried to get some votes against it. Ten or eleven of the Congressmen and Senators called, and I went over to meet them. They told me it was a bad bill. And I said to them, "Well, how the hell can you vote for a bad bill?" And that was it. They voted for it. But we tried the day before, to get something done on Situs Picketing. And there was a promise by Johnson, by the whole group, that that will be the first bill on the agenda. They went through the motions and still did nothing. Half of them are there yet, and none of them have come through with their commitments.

HACKMAN: I think that's the issue that Senator (Wayne) Morse at that time was very concerned with and then accused Senator Kennedy of deserting labor on this issue.

KEENAN: That's right. That's right. This was a promise. Johnson gave his word, and did nothing. They went through the motions. These people make deals, and I think that they always had (Howard W.) Smith as a buffer in the House that they could save their face in the Senate, and I think Smith went along with them and proceeded with the thing. It was killed in the Rules Committee.

HACKMAN: Right. Right. When this was still in the House, the House committee bill was the Elliott bill, if you recall.

KEENAN: That's right.

HACKMAN: And then the Landrum-Griffin was substituted for that.

KEENAN: In the meeting of the whole.

HACKMAN: Right. Do you remember the effort Were you supporting the Shelley bill at that time? Or were there any efforts made

KEENAN: No. We were mixed up, you see. That was shortly after the Teamster incident at the Convention. We tried to get the Teamsters to go along with us on some of these issues that we thought we could get a compromise on. I think that they were dealing with Kennedy then and so were we. I talked to Kennedy about it, but neither of us could get any satisfaction. Consequently, we knew that Kennedy had made up his mind and that the only way we could do anything was with the Teamsters' help. Well, the Teamsters wouldn't compromise; they stood their position all along. There was also the liberal group in Congress that supported the most liberal bill. If you remember, we had three bills that time. We had the Elliott bill, and then you

had another bill, and then you had the Shelley bill, which was an all-out repeal. Well, anyhow, we got divided among ourselves, and then the opposition was able to firm themselves up.

(Interruption)

HACKMAN: You were talking about labor being mixed up over the three bills.

KEENAN: Well, there were three. I think we got beat on the one bill by, oh, I think twelve or fifteen votes. And, I think that killed it; I don't think we got a vote on the other bill. And then the first bill that was presented was the Griffin-Landrum substitution.

(Interruption)

HACKMAN: All right. You said that when the Convention came up you were clearly for Kennedy at that point. At what point did you decide that you were for Kennedy?

KEENAN: Well, when I saw the candidates, I thought that he possibly was a candidate, I was really mad; I had complained; I wasn't for him until the final line-up. The fact of the matter, I had some discussions with people, and I was against him. But finally, when it got down to cases and seeing who was being considered, well, I decided he'd be the best. I didn't blame him so much for passing the Griffin-Landrum bill; I blamed him in pushing the bill where it put us in the lions' den and we couldn't get out. I think there was, you know, a little brush between him and Johnson because Johnson had control of the Senate. I felt that we should have been protected and assured there wasn't any chance for slip-ups. It's things like this . . . If every base wasn't covered, then they shouldn't have brought the bill up.

HACKMAN: Right. Right. What about Humphrey? Did you take his candidacy at all seriously back at the time of the primaries?

KEENAN: No.

HACKMAN: What was your attitude toward union participation in the states where there were primaries? Did you try to keep your people neutral, or was there any activity, or what?

KEENAN: No, no, we've never done that. We let the local people make their own selections. I think that when we start to interfere from Washington, it drives these people to inactivity. They say, "Well, the hell with them. If that's what they want, let them come out here and do it." And for COPE (Committee on Political Education) or LLPE (Labor's League for Political Education) or anything else to succeed, you've got to have the support of the local people. You can't do it here, and you can't organize. You can't force these people. You might get somebody you know personally to go in and carry your banner for you, but this political business is a very, very complicated business because, you see, it's all in the guy's mind. He may come out and go along with you, but all the time never intend to support you. What you're dying to do is try to bring them in. In the states local labor groups pretty much went up and set up their own machine. Besides, Kennedy had a real organization; there was no doubt about it.

HACKMAN: Were you out in any of the states at that time?

KEENAN: No. I didn't take any action until after the Convention and after an AF of L meeting in Chicago sometime in August where George Meany and other labor people asked me if I would go with

the President and help him in all the states with the labor people. And I did that. I'd be with him for a week and then come back. Wherever I thought I could do the most good is where I went.

HACKMAN: During the primary period, were the Kennedy people making any efforts in relation to you in trying to get you to

KEENAN: Yes, yes. Well, my direct relations were with the Senator. I didn't know Bobby (Robert F. Kennedy) too well. I don't believe I ever met Bobby until a few days before the Convention. The first time I met Bob, I think, possibly was out in San Francisco. I maybe stopped and met him once or twice, just to say hello at cocktail parties. The only one I knew and knew intimately was Jack.

HACKMAN: Did you go to the Convention in '60?

KEENAN: Yes, I was a delegate.

HACKMAN: Yes, from what state?

KEENAN: Illinois.

HACKMAN: I had checked that in That's funny because there's a slip-up in the index somewhere.

KEENAN: Yes.

HACKMAN: Can you remember what exactly you were doing, if anything in particular, at the Convention?

KEENAN: Well, I was one of the group. Whenever there was any labor difficulties either Bobby or (Ralph A.) Dungan was after me, and I'd go and talk to them. We knew we had to pick up about twenty-five or thirty votes. I had some people in California that were able to split off a few, and a few in Montana, a few

in Missouri. I think Missouri was probably the job I think that helped as much as any. I was able to get quite a sizable group out of that Missouri delegation. -- Anybody that I knew that I thought I could convince to go with Kennedy, I talked to. And then, they would get in touch with me and tell me about some votes here and there that they could persuade.

HACKMAN: I'm not quite sure I understand you on Missouri, because Missouri went for Symington.

KEENAN: On the first vote.

HACKMAN: Right.

KEENAN: No, didn't we get some votes out of Missouri?

HACKMAN: No, no.

KEENAN: They went all the way for Symington? Well, then I'm mistaken. Well, I talked to them.

HACKMAN: There was some strong Kennedy sentiment there, but they were held in line.

KEENAN: Well, see, we only had the first vote.

HACKMAN: Right.

KEENAN: On the second

HACKMAN: It would have been split.

KEENAN: Of course, we'd have lost in other places. We'd have lost in New Jersey, and we'd have lost in Indiana. And they had to win it on the first go.

HACKMAN: Can you remember anything in relation to the Illinois delegation? Any of the problems there?

KEENAN: No, the Illinois delegation, he had a great supporter in (Richard J.) Daley. There had always been a little mix-up between Chicago, Cook County, and down-state. John Stelle I think was

alive at that time, and John and that group from Southern Illinois were all tied to Symington.

HACKMAN: (Scott W.) Lucas, was he still around?

KEENAN: Yes. But I don't think he had the influence then.

HACKMAN: How about Powell, Paul Powell?

KEENAN: Paul Powell and them were all tied to Symington. I'm sure of that. The fact of the matter, we had a caucus the night before, and we caucused to go with Symington for Vice President. It was wide open the night before.

HACKMAN: Right. What about (Jacob M.) Jake Arvey? Did he have any influence at all at that point?

KEENAN: Oh, Jake was, well, he was our leader at that time, and he was supporting Kennedy. But Jake would, I suppose, be close to the old timers, you see, and they could have some influence for him to support an older candidate.

HACKMAN: What about the issue of the Vice Presidency? Did you feel like you had any commitments out of any of the Kennedy people that it wouldn't be Johnson? A lot of labor people felt they did.

KEENAN: No, we never considered him at all. We didn't consider him at all. That was really out of the blue. Walter Reuther, Dave Dubinsky, Arthur Goldberg and myself had worked three or four days on Humphrey to get him to consider being a candidate. Well, there was four or five in contention at that time. There was Humphrey; there was (Orville L.) Freeman I'm talking about the Vice Presidency.

HACKMAN: Right. (Henry M.) Jackson was one.

KEENAN: Jackson's one, and who else? Symington was one. Oh, there were

half a dozen. I forget right now.

HACKMAN: Did you have any success at all with Humphrey? What was his response to that effort?

KEENAN: Well, Humphrey, we never got a yes or no answer out of him, let me put it that way. I think that certainly myself and Dubinsky felt that there was no use making any further effort after Sunday night. I think Reuther never gave up. He always felt that he could bring him in.

HACKMAN: Was there any strong reaction against the selection of Johnson within the Illinois delegation?

KEENAN: No. You see, they're political organizations, and they follow along. The only opposition you got for Johnson was from the labor fellows; labor had about eight or ten delegates there. There is quite a contrast between your Democratic National Convention and your Republican National Convention because of the type of politician. The Democrats have the party politician and the labor politician. They pretty much follow the leader, you see. Some places we -- I'm talking about the labor movement -- have some influence, but in most cases the old guards followed the Committee.

HACKMAN: Well, what about the reaction of the labor leaders who were at the Convention? I think Mr. Meany called a meeting over at the Ambassador Hotel where all this was discussed.

KEENAN: It turned out all right, but we were really upset. We thought we got a dirty deal, but three or four months healed it.

HACKMAN: Can you remember the debate at that time, in that meeting? Was there a possibility of a floor fight in resistance to Johnson for

the Vice Presidency? Or how many people were considering that?

KEENAN: Well, there again, we didn't have much influence. An effective protest would have to come from the Party; we didn't control enough delegates. We could have called a floor fight, but all we'd have got is a roll call vote out of it, which wouldn't have made much difference.

HACKMAN: Right.

KEENAN: All of us knew that Now, of course, if there was a bitter protest inside the Party it could be harmful. But at that period Kennedy was riding high, he was at his peak then.

HACKMAN: Can you recall any efforts that the Kennedy people made at the Convention to try to smooth the situation over with labor?

KEENAN: Well, they called a few of us out to the house and told us not to worry. We took his word for it. Well, it worked out all right in the long run.

HACKMAN: What were you involved in then immediately after the Convention? I think you said you didn't get really involved until August, right?

KEENAN: Of course, we waited for the Convention, and then the AF of L had to endorse him. After they endorsed him at the summer meeting, I was called in. I don't know, they must have talked to Mr. Meany and some of the other people about having someone accompany him on the plane and tours, and my name was suggested, I guess. Mr. Meany talked to me about it and I said, "Well, if that's what they want, I'll go at it."

HACKMAN: I had heard that the endorsement came later that year than usual.. Can you remember that being so, or was his selection of Johnson a factor?

KEENAN: Well, it certainly did; it certainly had its effect for the first maybe thirty days, thirty. Of course, then you had to sit down and survey the field and see what was best for the labor movement. You had Nixon. He had a record, a very bad record, and there was no choice. Kennedy had given us his word, and we felt his word was good, and that was enough.

HACKMAN: I had heard that, well, let's see, I think Bobby Kennedy had a meeting in that period, one in which Roy Reuther was selected to head the registration drive. Do you remember that?

KEENAN: I wasn't at that meeting. I wasn't at that meeting.

HACKMAN: Was there a problem as far as you were concerned in getting your own union interested in backing Kennedy and getting support?

KEENAN: No, no. You see, what you've got here in this country, you've got to recognize it, that politics generally, as far as individuals are concerned, is pretty much like their religion. People follow their party pretty much from the time they become affiliated until they go to their grave. And traditionally in the American labor movement there was a pretty even division between the Democrats and the Republicans. You had fellows like (William L.) Bill Hutcheson and John Lewis and, oh, a number of others that were Republicans, and their unions reflected it. Then as we got into politics and we got into these areas where we had to have votes for legislation that we thought would give us some help. We then had to convert some of these fellows. As long as they could see that supporting the Democratic candidates was to the benefit of their unions, it was okay; but once you got to a point where there was not much area between the two, then they went back to their first love, or their first affiliation.

HACKMAN: Well, could you talk then about traveling with him in this period? You said you were working with the National Committee, with

KEENAN: Well, that year it was, see, Jackson was the National Chairman.

HACKMAN: Right, right, during the campaign.

KEENAN: In that campaign and in every other since, oh, since '44. I was active in the Democratic National Committee in '44 and '48 and '50 -- or '52, '56, and I did just what I normally do. There isn't much you can do. You've got to stay in your own field and work with your own people. The only job I could do with him was make him acquainted to our people and give him a personal contact and try to build up their enthusiasm, but you can't do anything just traveling with him. What you've got to do, the work that's to be done, is contacting your own people. But many times when you're traveling with him, you get into these big cities, where you've got an organization going. In this case, spending five or ten minutes with the candidate does as much good as working for a hundred hours. If they look at the guy and they like him, they say, "Geez, I can go for that fellow," then you're off and running. And just a few minutes, five or ten or fifteen minutes, and you well understand that everybody's for him. He really got an awful pulling around, but he was always gracious, you know, and it helped.

HACKMAN: What other labor people were working over there at the same time with you? Anyone that you Had you mentioned Harrison before, George Harrison?

KEENAN: George Harrison was the chairman of the committee, and he set up his own organization.

HACKMAN: He had originally been a Symington man, if I remember correctly.

KEENAN: That's right, that's right. There were some differences, but I had never committed myself. You see, Symington supporters were out trying to get commitments the day of the Convention, but I never committed myself to anyone but Kennedy. And Harrison and I always saw eye to eye, and we worked closely together. Somehow a misunderstanding developed between George and me. He got the impression I was committed to Symington, but I had never committed myself to anyone but Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Were there labor people who were attempting to get some of you people more excited? For instance, was Mr. Meany or Reuther trying to

KEENAN: No, no. Mr. Meany generally keeps a hand off that until the AFL acts. If they act, then that's another story; but if there's no action on the part of the AFL, he generally sits on the sidelines. He may have his own opinions, but he doesn't try to force them on others.

HACKMAN: Can you think of any of the labor leaders who really had a serious problem in supporting Kennedy for President at all? For instance, I'd heard that (Albert J.) Al Hayes was always very reluctant to

KEENAN: Well, Al Hayes wouldn't come out. You know, he never -- if you remember he was very bitter on the bill. Oh, he came along late in the year.

HACKMAN: How effective a campaign do you think Kennedy ran in relation to the labor vote?

KEENAN: Well, I couldn't tell you that. I couldn't answer that. I think that, as you know, anybody that was for him was enthusiastically for him and the people that were against him were equally

enthusiastically opposed to him. He appealed to the labor people, but also you have people who were against him, which is natural. You won't get the labor movement to go 100 per cent for anybody. I come back to my feeling that politics are everybody's business. I know I used to get vicious letters in here against him; vicious letters against Johnson. Any position we take you get people that oppose it. We've got the same makeup in our unions as you've got in the general public. We get the same reactions, and both pro and con, as far as these letters are concerned, that you read in all of the daily newspapers.

HACKMAN: Was there much of a problem in coordinating the labor effort during the campaign? For instance, I'd heard that he was listening a lot to Goldberg, maybe to the exclusion of some other people. Was this a problem at all?

KEENAN: No, we never knew anything. See, we had a job to do, and we went out and did it, and we paid no attention to that. Each of us went out and did our job.

HACKMAN: That's all I have on the campaign. Do you remember any contacts you had with him after the election, before the Inauguration, in this period?

KEENAN: Well, I don't want to go into that.

HACKMAN: You don't want to talk about that? Can you recall what your reactions were to any of the major appointments that he made during that period? Goldberg as Secretary of Labor and

KEENAN: I wouldn't discuss it on that basis. I'll discuss it in general. I thought that his selections were out of line as far as politics are concerned. I felt that, and do still feel, that the Democratic Party elected him -- I think he got 60 million or ~~40 million~~ votes

that year. There were plenty of dyed in the wool everyday Democrats with a long history, with the public experience, that would have done just as good a job or better than many of his selections. There are great men in the Democratic Party, and I think too many people who just became Democrats in 1960 were given these key jobs. That's my opinion on his selections.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections of who the AFL-CIO leadership would have preferred that he appoint Secretary of Labor? Or do you want to talk about that?

KEENAN: I don't want to get into that, either, because I'm a party to it and I'd just as soon let it die and leave it go. You know, that old story about stirring it up.

HACKMAN: Well, as I mentioned in my letter, you could close this for as long as you want to, there's no problem with anyone getting into it except someone who is eventually writing about the period.

KEENAN: No. Well, I don't want to go into it. There were people around him that know more about that than I.

HACKMAN: All right. We can discuss the Labor-Management Advisory Committee (President's Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy) then.

KEENAN: Well, on the Labor-Management Advisory Committee there's minutes, and you can probably get as much out of the minutes as you can get from me.

HACKMAN: Did you feel in general that it was an effective group? Did it function fairly smoothly, or were there problems?

KEENAN: Well, I think it was an experience, a great experience. I think it had some great advantages. It's my understanding that down

through the years different Presidents had tried to bring together a group of people with the make-up that was in the committee, they met once or twice, and when there was no chance for understanding, they just broke up. But in this case, the first two or three meetings were kind of stiff, but after a few meetings we got closer together. We discussed these different issues thoroughly and we completed some reports. There may have been one or two unanimous reports, but generally the committee got closer and closer together, and I think it performed a great service. It's unfortunate that he passed on. We had started to tackle some real important issues. About the time he was assassinated, we were talking about taking investigating tours and attending week-long seminars. In short, I think it was responsible for developing an understanding that was of great service to the country.

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HACKMAN: In the early period in that committee, before things did settle down, did labor and management tend to stick more together as groups, do you think? Were they

KEENAN: No. I think that the first three or four issues were general and they had national implication. It wasn't just something you could argue back and forth; it had a relationship to the good and welfare of the country, and we faced it with that approach.

HACKMAN: Right. You're talking about the way the subcommittees were set up?

KEENAN: That's right. In each one, that's right.

HACKMAN: automation and technology.

KEENAN: That's right.

HACKMAN: Was there any significant difference in the way that committee operated under Goldberg and then (Luther H.) Hodges and, I guess, (W. Willard) Wirtz the third time around?

KEENAN: No. I wouldn't say there was. I think in the early days there was a tendency to push things and to get something in the reports, but this was a pretty stiff committee and couldn't move them along too fast. It took a little longer, but I think the results were far better.

HACKMAN: Was there much of a problem in keeping members enthusiastic toward what was going on? Problem with people just not coming to the meetings and taking an interest in and part in?

KEENAN: Well, no. However, I think that in the last year or so it started to drift, no one holding meetings very regular and I don't know, maybe they were trying to find a way to let it die. I think if you got into these issues there may have been backlashes and bolting, because of this I don't think it did as much as it could have.

HACKMAN: Did the President at the times that you presented the reports to him, did he show much evidence of interest or knowledge of what you people had been working on and doing?

KEENAN: Well, he always gave us quite a compliment. Of course, we made the report. Now what happened after that, was You'd be able to find that out. I couldn't give you the answer.

HACKMAN: Was there anything in particular that you were personally interested in trying to get the committee to take action on?

KEENAN: Well, I think that there were two or three things at that time that bothered us. I think, first of all, automation was quite a factor; unemployment was quite high at that time, I think up

around five million, I'm not sure. And then the economy was a little off. But I'm not an economist; that's not my field. I could give you the practical application, but when you get down into the figures, well, then it kind of leaves me. Then there was some great comparisons of how some countries operate. I think one of the most interesting reports we got was when we brought the Swedish people over and they gave us their outline of how they operate their country. Of course, there was always the comparison of a country with 180 million people against 7 million or 8 million. But in the areas of automation and unemployment I thought it was very interesting, and we got some of these businessmen to go in and support us. And fellows like (Thomas J., Jr.) Tom Watson and John Harrison -- not John Harrison, but John Franklin; I don't know, the fellow with the railroads -- seemed to be more enlightened than some of the business people I met in other committees.

HACKMAN: The thirty-five hour week was one of the things I think you were interested in at that time.

KEENAN: A shorter work week, yes.

HACKMAN: Did you ever approach the President personally on this? Do you remember what his response was? Was he in favor of it at the time?

KEENAN: No. We always made our reports, and we expected the two Secretaries to carry it on from there. None of us went in on our own. After we had made a decision in the committee, it wouldn't be kosher to go in and try to work around the committee. You wouldn't get anywhere, anyhow.

HACKMAN: What about the wage-price guidelines? Now, did this ever come up in relation to wage agreements that your own union was involved in? Anyone from the White House

KEENAN: No, no. That was discussed. That was one we didn't get very far on, wage guidelines. We talked about it a lot, and that was one that possibly would have been a topic of one of these week seminars. You see, that's such a knotty problem that everybody, you know, kind of shies away on it, but probably that would have been one that, somewhere along the line, should have been considered.

HACKMAN: What was the AFL-CIO's general feeling toward Goldberg, and then Wirtz after him, as Secretaries of Labor, particularly their role in wage disputes and contract disputes? Is there any great difference between the two, do you think?

KEENAN: No. Most of us that weren't directly involved pretty much took it as a matter of, well, as part of the business. We have our problems in our Internationals and with our employers. Labor has one way of negotiating; business has another. So when you, if you happen to get out of your line, well, you can expect anything. As for the public, each one of those is a special case. Each of us go along and take our own problems and try to work them out. The only time we'd get involved is in response to a request for help, some support where we could give them help, keeping our people informed or something like that; that's the only time we'd get involved.

HACKMAN: Can you recall anything about when Goldberg went to the Supreme Court, about what your feelings were about a replacement for him? Was labor upset about the Wirtz appointment at all?

KEENAN: Well, I don't know. It didn't make much difference to me. I always felt that the labor movement should be represented in other parts of the government, it's important, but it's not the most important thing. I feel definitely that we should have a top labor official as a labor advisor to the Defense Department. I think any area where you spend 60 billion dollars a year, a topflight labor man in Defense could save them millions and millions of dollars plus save hours and hours of grief as far as labor relations are concerned. It seems to me that there's a tendency today to keep topflight labor people out of government. They are making a hell of a mistake because, when the chips were down in England in 1940 and '41, when (Winston S.) Churchill came to power, they brought in (Ernest) Mr. Bevin to do the dirty job. In any of the crises, labor is called upon. In the second World War, I'm not blowing any horns, but I can say that the American labor movement made as great a contribution as any other group in getting the plants built and getting the equipment manufactured. Because they were given an assignment where they could make themselves felt and where they could be used to correct misunderstandings. So the Labor Department is important, but there's two or three other departments that to me are far more important than the Labor Department as far as the contribution labor can make toward better government. Today there's not a topflight labor man in the government out of three million employees.

HACKMAN: Did you have many contacts with any of Kennedy's White House staff in this period?

KEENAN: Oh, yes. I got to know (Kenneth P.) Ken O'Donnell, (Lawrence F.) O'Brien. Well, it was only natural when you travel with them to

know them and become better acquainted. And, oh, I had a perfect relationship with all of them that I was acquainted with. There was a lot of them I didn't know, but the ones that I knew, we got along perfectly. They were very helpful, too.

HACKMAN: What types of things would come up that you would be in contact with these people on?

KEENAN: Oh, problems in the government, problems with the Army and the Navy, the GAO and any area where there was a possibility of labor differences. All we'd ask them to do is make it possible for us to see Administrators and talk to them.

HACKMAN: How much of a problem was it to keep labor's dissatisfaction with certain policies of the Kennedy Administration out of the public eye, because there was a lot of talk at the time, and has been since, that labor was dissatisfied for some tax cut or no response to the shorter work week or wage-price guidelines?

KEENAN: I don't think there was any effort made. I think that generally the thing found its level. I don't think you can plan these things or program them in any way. I think they find their level, if they're newsworthy, the papers would keep it going, and if they're not, if there isn't enough fire in the issue, they just burn out.

HACKMAN: Was there any great amount of disagreement within the AFL-CIO leadership on how critical to be of the Administration?

KEENAN: See, you pretty much support a guy, unless he gets completely off base, you don't tear him apart. We all felt that somewhere along the line, if anything got really bad, we could straighten it out. We pretty much depend upon the AFL-CIO to handle most of these things. The rest of us have all got individual things

to handle. In regard to the overall policy, you look to the Executive Council to lead in a particular thing.

HACKMAN: Can you remember any of the specific meetings that Kennedy had with AFL-CIO leadership, and what was brought up?

KEENAN: Just get together. You can't very well

HACKMAN: Do anything.

KEENAN: do anything when you've got thirty-five or forty people there, the leaks, and things. It isn't fair to the President, and it doesn't do anybody any good.

HACKMAN: That's about all I have, unless you've anything you want to put in.

KEENAN: Okay. No, that's all.