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22

Interview with Dr. Hans Conzett*
Chairman of the Swiss National Committee,
Former Chairman of UNICEF Board
Conducted by Mr. Tarzie Vittachi
In Zurich, on 29 November 1982

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* Dr. Conzett has headed the Swiss National Committee of UNICEF since he helped found it in 1959. He has also headed the Swiss Delegation to the UNICEF Executive Board since 1964. He served as Chairman of the Programme Committee of the Board from 1970 to 1974 and as Board Chairman in 1975 and 1976. A lawyer by background, Dr. Conzett was manager of a Swiss printing and publishing company. He was a member of the Swiss Parliament for twenty years and served as its President in 1967-1968.

Interview with Dr. Hans Conzett
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Former Chairman of UNICEF Board
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Association with UNICEF

Vittachi: Dr. Conzett, I should say at the very beginning that this is only a preliminary interview. You have so much experience in UNICEF that there is an enormous amount of information inside your memory which we will try to get out onto tape and onto paper in the foreseeable future. So it is necessary that another journalist will come and interview you on the basis of what we have done today, because this will lead to many other pieces of information.

Dr. Conzett, you have been Swiss representative on the UNICEF Board from 1964 to the present, and you helped to found the Swiss National Committee in 1959.

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: You have also been Chairman of the Programme Committee of UNICEF from 1970 to 1974, and then you were Chairman of the Board from 1974 to 1976.

Conzett: That's right.

Evolution of UNICEF

Vittachi: Now, I would like to ask you about some particular aspects of UNICEF to begin with. For instance, I would like to ask you about how you see the evolution of UNICEF...It began, as you know, as a response to the emergency situation in Europe, following the last war when children were in a very bad condition. And then, by about 1950-1951, it began to develop into something else, and you were a witness to the evolution of UNICEF from about that time. What is your own sense of the direction of that evolution?

Conzett: I think I was an observer only at the end of the 50's, not at the beginning. And, I would say we...the big development we made afterwards was that UNICEF had been looking and had the image of a nutrition organization. You'll remember we had the emblem with the milk, and UNICEF was just a question of milk. And...

Vittachi: The milk-feeding organization.

Conzett: Yes, that's right. And when we have changed it to the emblem we have now, that took about five, six years until people realized that UNICEF was becoming something else. And this development was at work at the Board, but the development afterwards was very difficult to fulfill.

In the meantime, development had been going on. We had several problems on nutrition, we had health, we had education and things like that. And for each one there was a special team.

And then, I think that it was in the 70's, we changed again in making a package and then we saw that it was necessary that one man cannot make education, another man health, and so on...

Vittachi: Too compartmentalized?

Conzett: Yes. So that we had a whole thing and that was an evolution in UNICEF that was very, very important and we always had support of that.

Board/Administration relations

Vittachi: You must have observed, apart from the Administration and the evolution of the administration, the particular evolution of the views of the Board members, the changing attitudes, and the perceptions, in the Board, of UNICEF's evolution.

Conzett: I would say that the evolution had been brought to the Board much more from the administration, and I would say that sometimes the Board had difficulties to follow the evolution the Administration has introduced. It was also interesting, when the Board had realized the step forward we were doing...sometimes they go faster than the Administration. There was always a discussion about the different situation about what we shall do.

Focus on child

You may know that in the beginning we went sometimes too far in taking care also of young men and young women, teenagers, in our European opinion, and we had to fight with the Administration that we should stay with the Child. And here we sometimes had extremes. I remember that we had, especially from the Canadian team and the Canadian Delegation, the strong wish that we should take care of children only up to the age of six years, and then forget it.

Vittachi: So only infants, and early childhood?

Conzett: And then we also had to fight and say, 'No, that is not possible'. We had to at least take of them in the primary school. Then education for health, education for nutrition you can give in school, and we need the time of primary school. But then we said, 'Here we have to stop'. With the limited resources of UNICEF we could go until a child is twenty or twenty-five. That's impossible. We really had to limit it. But just to see that, when the Board has accepted certain principles of the Administration we had sometimes gone farther than the Administration had wished.

Vittachi: So then was it decided that we should attend to children until the age of fourteen or fifteen?

Conzett: It was, I would say, not a special decision. That was in the beginning of the 60's that the Administration had the will to make also a certain education for professional learning and so on.

Learning from experience: Vocational training

Vittachi: Do you mean vocational training?

Conzett: Yes. And that was in the '60s. Then we had also, naturally, very bad examples. It was very interesting. When we had been in Tunisia where there had been such training for youngsters, and the Minister of Education in Tunisia said that was very interesting. The first free project was absolutely zero. We had no chance.

Vittachi: In the result?

Conzett: In the result, yes. But from that bad development we had learned and have now built courses and education which are now successful. We have often started something...

Vittachi: ...And learned...

Conzett: And learned from the bad experience how to make it afterwards into a good experience.

National Committees

Vittachi: That is very interesting. Now you, as a founding member of the Swiss National Committee, have authentic experience of this particular, peculiar, and very interesting evolution of the UNICEF system as a partner, working with a partner called the National Committee. Now the National Committees in most countries are private institutions, they're not official government institutions. How did that happen? How did we become interested in national committees? How did the Administration begin to work through national committees?

Pate views

Was it something that happened by itself? Was it something that Maurice Pate, as the first Executive Director, developed as a deliberate and thoughtful idea of having non-official partners?

Conzett: I think that's right. It was especially Maurice Pate who pushed to build national committees, and probably that started first with the Greeting Card Operation and, as far as I remember it, the greeting cards started in '49 or '50, or something like that. And to make an organization in a country, he pushed to build things. I know that he had spoken, if I may relate the experience of Switzerland, to our Foreign Minister of Switzerland, that we should do something of this kind. Otherwise, although there was William Meyer, who was the responsible person in these years with different National Committees which existed before the Swiss Committee existed. But it was the Swiss Foreign Minister, Monsieur Petit Pierre. I was at this time a Member of Parliament and he asked me if I would be ready to build a committee.

Vittachi: Now that committee, was it specifically for the dissemination of greeting cards.?

Conzett: Yes that was our first job we started. It was a very hard start, but we had to do that and that was all the advice I got from Maurice Pate, probably he had from other countries. He said to me, 'Listen, start this Committee and start it as a private organization, and don't take money from the state.' All the same our Foreign Minister said, 'If you have difficulty with money, you can ask me I will give it you.' But Maurice Pate said, 'Don't do that, for in this moment the government will have a say in your committee. If you don't take money from the government you are free to go on.'

Swiss Committee evolution

So that was the question we started. The first two years were very difficult. Our results, you can imagine - we started quite new with nothing, our results were always in the red figures. In the first two years we had about 60,000 Swiss Francs in the red... and you may ask me how we managed that. But that was in that time and also today we finish our year at the end of March. We can keep the money from UNICEF until the end of December. So we've always had money from UNICEF so this deficit was also in the accountability, but we did not have to declare...that we are finished...

Vittachi: Bankruptcy?

Conzett: Bankruptcy, that's right. Then, I think that was '61, that was still the period when UNICEF was a milk organization...these milk people in Switzerland said, 'Listen, we will help you to give milk to these countries,' and with all the magazine, quite a lot of magazine cooperation and so on, we always sold a ticket for one franc for milk for UNICEF and Mr Wallen was at this moment Foreign Minister. At the press conference when we introduced that, he said to this journalist, he said, 'Listen, if a child rings at your door and says he is hungry, give him first a glass of milk. Now these children in Africa and Asia and so on - they cannot ring at your door. But let UNICEF now ring your door. And so you can buy a ticket for one franc and that will bring the milk from UNICEF to these children.' At that time we were quite successful. We had sold enough for two million Swiss Francs. And about rules we had, we could keep 10% back for the committee. And I was against that.

Vittachi: I find it interesting how far you have moved from greeting cards to milk.

Conzett: That's a development. And then I said to the Regional Director in Paris, it was Charles Egger at this moment, I told him, 'Listen, I could keep from this two million ten percent, that makes 200 Swiss Francs, then I am out of the worst and and I have no more difficulties. I don't wish that, I will give you the whole two million Swiss Francs, also all the milk, but you have to see to it that my 60,000 Franc deficit disappears. And he did it. It was always good business for UNICEF all the same.

Greeting Cards

Vittachi: Let me go back to the greeting cards. You have been always one of the most interesting people in the greeting card subject and I have heard that you have had much criticism of how the Greeting Cards Operation was run from the beginning. Let us talk about the early years of the greeting cards. You must have wanted to improve the quality of the greeting cards, the marketing of the greeting cards, because you are, yourself, a printer and publisher. So you must have been interested in the quantity as well as the quality of the greeting card operation.

Conzett: Yes, that is right. I would say that they always tried to produce good quality and naturally here it made some difficulties, frankly, with the system of the UN who always asks for free offers and you advocate the cheapest, how do you say, bidding system. And that's not good for the greeting cards, so we had to change that. It performs right for the U.N. system but not always exactly. It's not the cheapest, it's the best. So we started. In this time, the '60s, we must speak quite frankly, the biggest sales of greeting cards was in the United States and Canada.

Europe was a very small part. Our goal was to come up to the same level as the United States and Canada, and now we are much farther. Then there was the fight. In this time all the cards were printed in the United States and brought here by ship, by air, and so on. At the moment we came to the same level we started to find that it was much better and cheaper if they were produced here. And then, since, I think that's about '65 or '66, we produced all the cards in Europe. I think here now, for the quantity we need...

Vittachi: What about quality?

Conzett: I would say quality in general is very good and very high. We have to do that. We are in competition with professional greeting cards all over the world, here in Switzerland and Europe, and we can only be successful if we have the same standard and quality. Then people are saying, 'Okay, we take greeting cards from UNICEF'. We are generally a little less expensive than the commercial greeting cards. That's necessary. I have always said to our Committee, 'For a little bit cheaper', and at the same time we're doing something good. So we have a reason to exist, and I think that the reason for our success here in Switzerland is just due to good quality, a good price, and a good public image that UNICEF is a good organization.

Vittachi: I would like to probe a little further into that, Dr. Conzett. How was it possible, again, uniquely in the UN system, for the greeting card operation to be allowed to develop as a commercial business-like organization with its own budget, with its own system of management, with its own freedom from too many bureaucratic regulations. Did it come from the Board or was it pressure again from the Administration?

Conzett: I cannot say because I was not in at the beginning when greeting cards started. But I believe that the idea that Maurice Pate had taken up to produce greeting cards was probably, in the beginning, an idea, but not a very attractive idea.

Vittachi: A grand idea.

Conzett: A grand idea...not very attractive. And so they had let it outside the original budget and said, 'we have to do it.' They felt it must be self-supporting. In the meantime it had started to be a big business, but the status was still the same.

Vittachi: What is your opinion now about the quality of the greeting cards now? Let me make my question a bit more sharp. You know that we have a system of trying to balance what is artistically attractive, or acceptable, and also what is acceptable in the market. There was a popularity between the greeting card and the artistic quality. We have to balance this. We have an art committee that selects these greeting cards, an art committee consisting of art experts as well as the National Committee people who have sold greeting cards. Now is this, in your opinion, satisfactory as compared to what used to be before where people, as I understand it, were only concerned with the artistic quality?

Conzett: Let me go back to when we started...we had only the artistic group and that was a fight we had because we had asked members of National Committees who really sell cards should also be in this group because the artistic meaning is not always saleable. On the other hand we must also speak quite frankly that, for example, for Switzerland we have another opinion for greeting cards for the end of the year. We like snow, we like Christmas. We like things like that. But when we expanded greeting cards to all over the world and to all the religions we needed quite a lot of other cards too. I think here that we must always reach a certain compromise. I think in the last years these regions and for all religions, and I think that's necessary. That's now about eight, nine years and we have also started all-year cards.

Vittachi: Not just for Christmas?

Conzett: Not just for Christmas. Because we have said we have need for the whole year card. That was not accepted at once but now I think that we are quite successful. Earlier we called it "Spring" campaign and now we call it a "Whole Year" campaign. That's a success and we can see it also in Switzerland. It started very slowly but it came up and up and although we chose a better system for the whole year cards.

National Committees

Vittachi: That is fascinating to me, Dr. Conzett. We have talked about the evolution of the committees, and the evolution of the Greeting Card Operations. Now, what interests me further is how the committees...That is to say, the Swiss Committee. Maybe you would like to comment on your knowledge of other committees as well,

particularly of the Swiss Committee. How did people who originally came as a group to celebrating cards as volunteers? When and how did the evolution in their own minds take place? Were the Committees interested in undertaking the job of educating the public about the realities of poverty, especially poor children? In other words, development education and that kind of evolution in the new dimension.

Conzett: That was also a very slow development. I remember that in the beginning we made publication mostly with children who were sick, malnourished, and things like that. I would say that our publication for the Swiss people had been always with children and photographs which made pity to the people. So we start...

Vittachi: ...To raise compassion among the people?

Conzett: Yes. Then we started and said, 'No, we have to stop that.' People have enough of this picture of misery and things like that...We have to show them also that in all these countries where children live, children live who can be happy and may be happy if we help them, if we go to education. With the development, UNICEF (when I say it now like that, when UNICEF had grown from the "milk agency" to a real development agency) in the same way the national committees also started another development. And to get another contact another attachment with our population.

Vittachi: Excuse me, sir. Now you make one consequential on the other, but I have to ask you if it was the evolution of the understanding, the development of the understanding in the committees that reflected itself in the Board's decisions of moving from a "milk agency" to a "development agency", or the other way around.

Conzett: It was much more the other way around. We have followed the development from the Administration. We have followed it. And in following that, we have seen that we get in touch with many more people. Many more people are interested. And, if I may say, the last development that we have now is education, education for development, and we always get more and more parts of our population who are interested in this program. And in this way we have more and more friends all over Switzerland. One is interested in education, the other one is interested in health, the other one in different parts. Its no longer only milk. It's now the whole system, and the education for development and things like. And by this way we came more and more to reality in Switzerland. People are realizing that. I would say the Swiss Committee has been very happy to promote the image of UNICEF as a very good organization. And I would say that is also very necessary vis-a-vis our government than all that credit and conversation that the Swiss Government pays, are always accepted in the parliament because the parliament already knows that UNICEF is a good organization.

Vittachi: Of course you must have been responsible for part of that at least because you would have been a parliamentarian and president of the parliament for a while.

Conzett: Yes, but if you were alone you couldn't do that. You must have the support of the population, and parliamentarians must feel that the population is in favour of UNICEF.

Vittachi: But Dr. Conzett, what you are really saying is - and something that interests me very much - is that from a charitable perception of itself as a charity organization handing out milk to the poor, UNICEF evolved and the committees evolved also to think of themselves as an organization that engages not only in the consequences of poverty, but in poverty itself. In other words, not only to feed hunger, but to deal with the problems that create hunger.

Conzett: That's right.

Vittachi: That is a very interesting development which took place, as you say, in the '60's already.

Conzett: Yes, it took place in the '60s - I would say in '65-'66 that started. This beginning was quite different from what we have now. This development had been going on, as I said. You remember that we had projects proposed by the Administration for health, for nutrition, for education, for clean water...everything. Five, six propositions for one country. And it was only in the second part of the '70s that they put all these programmes together. You cannot have one thing and the other thing.

Vittachi: That's right. So in other words that is very important, I think, because the change from charity to development comes from the experience of field representatives and their perceptions, their sensitivity to the expressed and obvious needs of the countries themselves. They were reflecting that in their own reports and in their own proposals and their own programmes to the Board.

Conzett: Yes, and from the Board we took it for the National Committees. We had to produce that and to give the public information with new ideas. I would say that helped us to develop that very strongly. I once sat in New York at the reunion of the American Committee when I was Chairman, and I once said that UNICEF is the only organization in the world where there are quite a lot of agencies for public relations, where this agency (definition: committee) has to buy the relationship with the public themselves - with their money, not UNICEF's.

Vittachi: Ah, yes. There was a time a long time ago in UNICEF's history in which there was an effort by some members of the Board, from what I've read, to introduce family planning as a policy, a programme function of UNICEF. What do you think? What was your attitude about that and what is your attitude about that and what is your memory of those battles in those days?

Family Planning

Conzett: You bring me here in a quite difficult position. I know that at the Board we discussed it the first time in '66 in Addis Ababa and

UNICEF wrote the project for India for family planning. I think that India was very much interested, for the Minister of Health was very much interested that UNICEF was doing this family planning. They hadn't. For all these things they should have the acceptance also of WHO for this project but they didn't have it. And, in Addis Ababa, I was probably the leader against this project. Then I said that family planning is a work of the national government and not UNICEF. So we fought strongly against this project. The opinion of the Board in '66 was 50% for and 50% against it. I always said I really will accept family planning but only under the responsibility of the national government. UNICEF may help by saying that we keep a possibility with our health centers all over, but not put family planning under the responsibility of UNICEF.

Vittachi: It's not part of our policy.

Conzett: And I said at that time that UNICEF was to help children live and not to stop children from coming to earth. That's the difference.

Vittachi: What was Harry Labouisse's view at that time?

Conzett: That was the first year it was formally under his advice, and I am not sure at this moment if he had not been a little bit overruled. He strongly defended these papers we had presented, but then he saw that opposition was too strong. The next year he brought a new paper with the approval of the WHO and they took care of our criticism that family planning had to be done by the government and not by UNICEF.

Vittachi: In other words, that we respond to governments' own policies in birth control.

Conzett: We can help like this in education. We can help at the Health Center. So they have a center where they can do it.

Vittachi: And also supplies?

Conzett: And also supplies. That's right. For me, the main point was that the great responsibility was that of the National Government and not UNICEF.

Pate, UNICEF's non-political nature

Vittachi: I would like to go back a little to a different area, that is, the human area of UNICEF. For instance, I would like to know your opinion: what did you think of Maurice Pate - as a human being, as an administrator, as an originator?

Conzett: Maurice Pate is probably a unique personality in UNICEF. He worked together with Hoover for the nutrition of European children after the first World War. And he began again after the Second World War. He was a fantastic person who knew how to motivate all people. I remember I met him the first time in 1960 in Paris, I think, at the reunion of the European Community, and he understood how to take you and to fascinate you and to engage you and...

Vittachi: What was it? What was it? Is it the words he used? Is it the spirit he emanated? Or is it that he sounded so genuine that he was credible?

Conzett: That is very difficult to say. It was his words, it was his spirit. He had a fascination, and very, very... You had the feeling that he absolutely believed in what he was saying. He was really fascinating. You also believed in him as an administrator, I would say, not so much. He was a man outside in the country, in a developing country as in an industrialized country. He was a fund-raiser, he was an organizer to find people to work for UNICEF. I would not say that he was really an administrator. It was not necessary for him to be that. Then at home he had Dick Heyward who was really the administrator of UNICEF and organizer of the work. Maurice Pate was outside. I remember, in '63 I think, at a reunion in Cologne...the National Committee also had a quarrel with the Administration and the opinions of Dr. Sicault, and some of the leaders of the National Committee had been absolutely contrary. So we asked the decision that Maurice Pate, who had followed the whole discussion (and he always talked very slowly - each word clearly pronounced), and after a little time of thought he said, "If I had to decide for administration or against administration, if I am not sure, I always decide against administration."

Vittachi: In other words, he was more sensitive to the public, as expressed by the Board members.

Conzett: He would not disappoint all these volunteer workers, as we were, by the regulation by the Administration.

Vittachi: Dr. Conzett, UNICEF has achieved the reputation of being perhaps the most or the only non-political or apolitical institution in the U.N. system. How did this, in your opinion, come about?

Conzett: I cannot exactly say when it was. But it was a very strong feeling of Maurice Pate that we must help children where there is need, and I think that it was at the Board meeting in 1964 in Bangkok when some discussion had started. We always had some little discussion about East/West or certain regimes, and I remember that then Maurice Pate said 'Listen, we have to help children where there is need, when they suffer or are ill. There is no question about which country or in which political regime, we just have to help children, and we do not have to take care of the policy of these countries.

Vittachi: The ideology of the country.

Conzett: Yes. Children are born and they never choose which country they are to be born in. They are in a country, they suffer and we have to help them. Without looking at political situations or not. In all these years we have been very fortunate that we could keep out policy. Sometimes it came up a little bit. I remember that we had, for example, help in the '60s-'70s to Vietnam. It was not very good looking from the point of view of the United States. Or

then later on in the '70s when we had to help children in Chile who suffered in Chile, it was not very well received by the eastern countries, the Communist countries. But each time we could be successful and we could make clear to these people that we don't help the nation, we just help the children, and that is the only situation. I would hope that this fundamental idea of Maurice Pate's will remain always in the future.

Vittachi: My real motive in asking this question is my knowledge...that to be apolitical or non-political is the most political tactic there is. There's an enormous amount of political subtlety that have to be brought in by UNICEF to remain apolitical and, in your opinion, it seems to me that the main source of the motivation to be apolitical came from Maurice Pate, or from Board members.

Conzett: Naturally, but I would say that the initiative came from Maurice Pate. I have in my memory that there were quite a lot of Board members who defended every time a situation like that. I mention some names like Robert Debre - Professor Debre, Nils Thedin and Professor Mande, and Countess Walderse(?), and so on. They are all people who have really seen that it is necessary that we help children and not the regimes.

Vittachi: Remember that it was a very difficult time...for the cold war in the '50s and early '60s when the world was divided into blocs - especially in the perceptions of the great powers.

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: And still UNICEF managed to remain apolitical.

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: ...Not to get caught between the two camps of the cold war.

Conzett: No, no never. We could stay the whole time. I must say that when I came in '64, the cold war was over. It was no more a question. Germany had been settled in some kind. But this was no more the cold war - but the fight had always existed. I remember when I was chairman of the Programme Committee (that was perhaps '73 or '74). I had to elect a Vice-Chairman and I had taken Dr. Yurecic(?) who worked many, many long years.

Vittachi: He was a Chilean.

Conzett: Yes, a Chilean. Fantastic man, really, of great opinion. And then the Soviet delegate was Professor Sakaroff(?) came to me and said, 'Listen, you make me angry if you take a Chilean'. And I said, 'Yes, but Professor...

Vittachi: Was that after Allende?

Conzett: Yes, it was after Allende. And I said, 'Listen, you know Dr. Yurecic as long as I do and you know that he is a very fine man'. He said 'Yes, I agree. But he is a Chilean'. And I said, 'Listen,

if I accept Dr. Yurecic, I accept him as a personality like I accept you as a personality, but that does not say that through Dr. Yurecic I like the Chilean government - as I don't like your government through Professor Sakaroff. I like the personalities and nothing else. I also remember that, I think in the mid-'60s, we also had Arab countries who were members of the Board. Egypt and so on. We had for two years Miss Harman, an Israeli, as chairman of the Board. We could do that. And I think in no other U.N. organization can you elect an Israeli as a chairman to the highest post in the organization. UNICEF is able to do that.

Vittachi: Because they are not in politics but in children. Let me go back to some personalities. We have spoken about Maurice Pate. I would like also to have your appraisal in the same way about Harry Labouisse.

Conzett: Yes. Harry Labouisse took over after the death of Maurice Pate. He was decided to become successor to Maurice Pate but he had to come earlier than was intended. Harry Labouisse in some kind resembled Maurice Pate. He was a warm, cultivated father figure, if I may say that, a very noble man who understood the differences, to clean up differences. He did not like differences and you understood that.

Vittachi: He didn't like disputes?

Conzett: No, he didn't like that and, perhaps, in some kind he was not as dynamic as Maurice Pate, but naturally the situation was quite the other. Maurice Pate had built UNICEF; Harry Labouisse had to make the continuation. But I would say that he gave some spirit, or some ideas had been first developed by him. I remember when he started, he said that until '70 if you have an income of \$100 million (we were at this time about \$70 million), we thought that it was impossible to increase to \$100 million dollars. Now this time is all over. But he set certain goals and he engaged in certain goals and he pushed for certain goals. And we have to follow. We have to do that. But he maintained it all in a very nice, very friendly way. If you thought it was impossible to do, he put it so friendly and so charming that you had the feeling that, 'I'm obliged to do that'. He had a different kind of charm from Maurice Pate.

Vittachi: Did he make a particular point to regularly meet with the Board members to brief them throughout the year to keep them in touch with his own thinking?

Conzett: Yes, but I think he could have done more with all the draft contacts with government and things like that. You had to force him to come...And I forced him to come here, to make the visit to the Swiss Government because I said, 'Now it is necessary.' Maurice Pate was at the time (in the six years when I was there) twice in Bern. I had to force Harry Labouisse to come here, but he came. And when he was here, he put his whole personality into it and made very good success. But, you have to ask him, Maurice came for himself.

Vittachi: Was he, as a personality, more presidential than administrative?

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: He was more of a president than a prime minister?

Heyward

Conzett: That's right. That's right. He had big ideas...but I must say once more that it was not necessary to be Prime Minister because the Prime Minister was Dick Heyward, really. So these Executive Directors had really an executive who had been working.

Vittachi: So their real executive was Dick Heyward.

Conzett: The real executive was Dick Heyward. I would say it like that, yes.

Vittachi: Tell me about Dick Heyward. What you have thought of him over the years?

Conzett: Oh, Dick Heyward was a man who always had been looking on. I know no other who had been working so hard, so long, who knew everything. He was naturally the memory of UNICEF and everything. Naturally he had his problems. He had his fixed ideas and if I (that's not against him), but if I take account of UNICEF, it's very difficult to read. This figures. He had a fantastic point of view. If you put to the Administration and Finance Commission certain questions to the budget or to the accounts, he gave an explanation and at the end you knew exactly as much as when you had started to ask. But he was a master. Things he wouldn't say in the clear, but he said nothing. He was also, perhaps, as Prime Minister, a conservative. It was very difficult to bring something new to him, to change an idea, to make something else. So you had quite a lot of a possibility to fight with him but I would say in most cases he was stronger than you.

Vittachi: Other Board members also found this?

Conzett: I believe. I have the same feeling.

Vittachi: Everybody respected him?

Conzett: Everybody respected him and he really was the man who knew everything. But to change certain questions, when Heyward said no, it was no.

Vittachi: How did he come through as a person, his relationship with the staff? How did he come through to the Board?...His relations with the staff?

Conzett: With staff? In treating his staff...you mean that?

Vittachi: Yes.

Conzett: About my experience, I have seen he had his favorites on the staff and he had people he didn't like. And if Dick Heyward had once made the decision, 'I like this man,' or 'I like him not,' that was all the difference. When he took a decision it was finished.

Vittachi: But he also...not only the question of staff...he had certain...his own prejudices, or his own judgements about the value of certain activities of UNICEF. For instance, on publications - and you as a publisher must have had several conversations with him about the publications of UNICEF.

Conzett: Yes, but also varied. On these questions he was very strong. You had great difficulty to change his mind. He had this fixed idea, but I would say he was not much interested in public information, or information, in any case. Information from the field, and so on...that just hit the ditch and stopped. And he decided what he would inform.

Vittachi: What was his attitude about National Committees? Was he interested, or did he regard them as a source of funds, or did he accept them as partners, necessary partners?

Conzett: That's very difficult to say. Naturally, when he contacted national committees he was very friendly, but on the other hand that was an organization which should work and not make trouble. I don't think that he had very strong contacts with National Committees. That's a question he didn't realize in this problem. I must also say, naturally, quite frankly, we have the most National Committees in Europe. Two thirds, I think, are in Europe.

Vittachi: Yes.

Conzett: And here the relationship was with the European Office. So Dick Heyward said, 'That situation of the European Office - that's not my problem.' He put it away.

Vittachi: Tell me about the other Executive Director, Charles Egger.

Conzett: Charles Egger. I've known him more than twenty years.

Vittachi: He succeeded Sicault?

Conzett: No, no. He was before Sicault. Sicault came after Egger. Egger, when we started, was the Director of the European Office. And here he was very very helpful. Then, when Sicault became Director of Europe, he was in India. Then he was...

Vittachi: Charles Egger was in India?

Conzett: He was in India, yes, as Regional Director of India. So we had seen him generally at the Board. Now you know him as very impulsive, motivated, declarative, really fantastic, and then he came back to New York as deputy director for Programme. He was a man full of ideas, and full of...He could motivate you, he could accept your ideas, and so on.

Vittachi: Was he a good programmer?

Conzett: I would say that in the fetus of the programme he was an excellent programmer - perhaps not always in reality. I think he didn't always like to work too much in the Bureau. He liked much more to be out in the field. When you had some problems and he enthusiastically accepted, then perhaps you would wait several months to get an answer. But he was a man of contact.

Vittachi: Human contact?

Conzett: Human contact. He was contrary to Dick Heyward who, in the bureau, managed all the details. He was a man who thought along big lines.

Sicault

Vittachi: That's interesting. What about Sicault? Was he a great intellectual? Was he a great theoretician?...Was he a motivator?

Conzett: Yes, Sicault was a man of high intellect. A man who realized things, a man you could discuss things with. I had the greatest esteem for him. Naturally, you could also have different points of view, but problems never stayed problems. You could discuss them, finish them, and it was all over for him - if you were right or not right. He could make opposition, but the minute it was over it was over with him. I have never seen Dr. Sicault keep something to himself, or be angry. I have never seen that.

Vittachi: There was no residual anger.

Conzett: No, no. He could fight with you and then you finished the problem and then you were friends. He never thought that you had problems. Be nice to him, yourself. Then the problem was over.

Vittachi: In other words, he was a civilized man.

Conzett: Oh sure.

Sinclair

Vittachi: Tell me about Adelaide Sinclair.

Conzett: Adelaide Sinclair...that was a fantastic woman. I first saw her at the Board in Bangkok. Her clear expression about problems, with a big bit on poverty. She decided and, fantastic, she was not only the head and spirit of the Programme Committee, she also had the heart. I didn't know exactly...I think I saw her as a Director of Programmes for two or three years, and then Charles Egger. So it was a short time. But I always had the feeling that Mrs. Sinclair was the mother for us all.

Vittachi: Was the...?

Conzett: The mother for us all.

Vittachi: Yes, yes. So her contribution to the evolution of UNICEF was vital because she brought in this humane quality, the mother of all the children...

Conzett: Yes. And it was under her reign that they had stepped away from the milk agency to a developing agency. But she introduced this concept from the beginning, that was the first step she introduced.

Vittachi: She tackled the roots of hunger.

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: Who were the other staff members that you have in your memory as outstanding people - either positive or negative?

Conzett: One very, very positive, naturally, is Jack Charnow.

Vittachi: Yes.

Conzett: I have always had and still keep very great admiration for Jack Charnow. He really did a fantastic job and I know that he was the Secretary of the Board.

Vittachi: And that is a unique position in the U.N. system.

Conzett: And I could see when I was Chairman how many times he intervened against the Director and said, 'No you cannot do that, that is a question for the Board.' Really everybody liked him and, I think, also in the Administration everybody liked him. All the same he had a clear point of view how policy has to be run and he kept straight on with his position and he could always say to Harry Labouisse, 'That's not right...that's a question for the Board.' But nobody could be angry with him. All the same he would keep a clear line. And I would say he formed UNICEF like Dick Heyward had formed UNICEF...in quite different ways.

Vittachi: Was he regarded as the Board's man in UNICEF, or UNICEF's man on the Board?

Conzett: As the Board's man on UNICEF. Yes. He always defended the interest of the Board.

Vittachi: That's my feeling. At the same time being a good colleague.

Conzett: Good colleague in the organization - yet having no difficulty with the Administration. But he defended absolutely his position as Secretary of the Board.

Vittachi: That is, as I say, a unique institution to the U.N. system. There is no other institution that has a Secretary of the Board and he made that job into what it is now.

Conzett: That's right. And I hope it will stay like that. That the Board always has someone who will defend the interests of the Board against the Administration.

Vittachi: And as Maurice Pate said, he will take the position against the Administration if necessary.

Conzett: Always, yes.

Appointment of Executive Director

Vittachi: UNICEF is again unique in the system as having only had two changes of head in 36 years of existence.

Conzett: Yes.

Vittachi: Now, it is my impression that when a head changes so rarely, change is bound to be traumatic, and the election of a new Executive Director is bound to create problems. You entered UNICEF after the election of Harry Labouisse...

Conzett: No, before. Just before.

Vittachi: Yes, before.

Conzett: Just before. But I was a new member in the first year, and so I had no influence about the election of Harry Labouisse.

Vittachi: Now what is the system? What happens? What really happened and what is your function? What was your memory of the Board's function in the reelection or the election of a new Executive Director?

Conzett: That's also principally a funny thing. The executive director of UNICEF is elected only by the Secretary-General of the U.N.

Vittachi: Yes. Nominated by him?

Conzett: No, chosen absolutely. Naturally he made contact with Board members, let's say with the Chairman, and asked the opinion who could be the right man and so on. But he is not obliged to follow..

Vittachi: It's only consultative...

Conzett: Only consultative. And I remember I was just in the Chair of the Board in '75 and '76, when the question came up about the successor of Harry Labouisse. And we had been...

Vittachi: This is in '75 - '76?

Conzett: Yes, '75 -'76. I had several discussions with Secretary-General Waldheim and we couldn't bring it to an end because Waldheim had very great difficulty deciding. And in 1976...

Vittachi: What do you mean. I want to press on that. Why did Secretary-General Waldheim have difficulty to decide?. Was it his personality or was it his...were there any political considerations?

Conzett: I would say, in one part, his personality. He doesn't like very much to make clear decisions. And then in these years we had the fight between Sweden and United States.

Vittachi: About candidates?

Conzett: About candidates, and I would say this fight was very successful financially for UNICEF because each country goes up with the contribution, and each one hopes...

Vittachi: Like an auction? (laughter)

Conzett: ...each one will be there high up...Yes...but it was also a political question and in 1976 when I tried to force the decision from Waldheim, at the last meeting I had with him he told me quite frankly, he said, 'Listen now, in December I have to go in the election for myself and I don't want to make a decision now because otherwise I have at least one or two countries against me.'

Vittachi: Was he concerned about his own re-election?

Conzett: His own reelection, and so that was absolutely, for himself, a political decision to take no decision. And then you know, it has run until 1979, until they made a decision on James Grant.

Vittachi: Waldheim made a decision for James Grant?

Conzett: Yes, at the end. But we had decided in 1975-76 for James Grant. And then we had this decision and in some way I found it not very good for UNICEF and this takes more and more years...

Vittachi: Not to have a decision?

Conzett: Not to have a decision and, in the meantime it was Heyward, Egger and Charnow who came at the end of their working time in UNICEF. They went to private life, and so James Grant had to start practically...

Vittachi: With a new slate.

Conzett: With absolutely new people. That was not good. Had he had time, three or four years, that would be better. But the situation is like that.

Vittachi: What was your own role in the decision between the Swedish candidate and the American candidate?

Conzett: We had the whole proposition, quite a lot of members. It was not only the Swedish and United States.

Vittachi: Were there a lot of candidates?

Conzett: There were also other candidates, there were also candidates of developing countries, who now said, 'It's our turn, excuse me, now we will come.' And the role of the Chairman is to make contact

with different members of the Board, and to ask their opinion and to try to find out for whom they have more delegates, save for James Grant or another. And then with this information I had been twice or three times in contact with the Board Members, and then to talk to the the Secretary-General to find out well how is the position on the Board. I didn't finish that, but at the end it became alright.

Vittachi: You would rather not speak about your own preference for the candidates that were suggested?

Conzett: Oh, I can do that quite easily. I was absolutely, from the beginning, for James Grant. Absolutely.

Vittachi: Why?

Conzett: I knew also Mr. Michanek. And I had the picture before me - a man like Maurice Pate, a man like Harry Labouisse, who really had a message, a message they brought out, and things like that. And I have seen in the Swedish candidate more of an administrator. I would say he would be, at this moment perhaps, a good man to replace Dick Heyward, who is really the organizer, the manager who takes all things in his own hands. And I had the feeling in discussions with him that he is more of a technocrat. He has no rays of warmth, he has no rays to send out.

Vittachi: He was cold?

Conzett: He was cold and I think that on the top of UNICEF we need really somebody who can go on and...

Vittachi: ...A warm personality...

Conzett: Warm personality. There you can even identify with him. When I had seen these two, I said, 'From these, it is clear which one I want.'

Vittachi: I want to ask you about the question of procedure. Now UNICEF again is unique in that on the Board there are not only official government representatives, there are private citizens who are not from the government as you have been. For instance, another good instance is Nils Thedin of Sweden. And even if they are not leaders of the delegation, some members of the delegation are non-official people. Now how does, I would like to know, how it is that the government allows that to happen because in many countries the government restricts very much to itself the official policies it brings to the Board. How does it happen in the Swiss context?

Conzett: That was also always an idea of Maurice Pate. And he pronounced it to all governments. In 1963 when he was in Switzerland to visit the Government, he told our Foreign Minister, said, 'Listen, naturally we need this diplomatic people too, but the great danger is this diplomatic change where power is held only three, four or five years.'

Vittachi: They keep changing?

Conzett: Yes. Nobody stays more than four years, maximum five or something like that. And he said always, we need, in UNICEF, people who guarantee the continuity. And for that you have to put somebody of the National Committee or somebody who is really interested in all these problems and let him stay. On the other hand, a diplomat changes, but then you have security. Now our Government accepted that.

Vittachi: Continuity?

Conzett: Continuity. Our Government accepted that and probably, while I was a parliamentarian and shortly afterwards, they changed the Chairman of the Swiss Parliament. They also decided that I should be the leader of the delegation. So, since '64 I was head of the Swiss Delegation.

Vittachi: Now let me ask you a question in the same line. Now when you go to the Board, as Chairman of the Delegation, the policies that you take to the Board, you have received the papers from the Administration and there are financial questions, political questions; programme questions. Do you make it a point to discuss with the government these policies? Do you brief the government about these matters? Because the government doesn't see these papers?

Conzett: Yes. And I've always spent a half day in Bern and I discuss with the Foreign Ministry about the policies.

Vittachi: The Foreign Ministry?

Conzett: It's the Foreign Ministry, yes. And I discuss what I'm thinking about. I must say, I'm very, very free. My instruction I get from Bern.

Vittachi: Very loose, generally.

Conzett: Just on paper. They say you know better than we do. You'll have to decide. I would say as the head of the delegation, I've probably been one of the freest in UNICEF. But now we have increased the Board Members from 30 to 41 and I'm a little bit anxious about the future. That we get again, more and more...

Vittachi: ...Diplomats.

Conzett: Diplomats. We have seen in the last two Board sessions these diplomats take the floor too often, and diplomats think much more in the political way than other people. And so, I think it would be a pity if this, let's say, private person, is being more and more(?) from delegations.

Vittachi: What is your role in briefing, educating, the governments and leading personalities in the evolution of UNICEF...What you will take to the Board?

Conzett: I must say that naturally we have also a development department in Switzerland. This development department has now, in the last 20 years or so, gotten some experience and they know exactly what can be done and things like that. So they accept discussion and, but I would say, I have never had any difficulty to go through with different ideas.

Vittachi: Let me come to a specific thing. For instance, the Swiss Government was one of the 118 countries which voted for the WHO/UNICEF code on the marketing of infant formulas, the breast code - popularly known as the breast-feeding code, did the Government consult you on this matter?

Conzett: Oh yes.

Vittachi: As delegates of the Board?

Conzett: Yes. We have to discuss quite a lot these problems and formerly I always said I agreed with that, with the best way, but I agree not completely because, in my experience, when I have been travelling, and I have seen children, I always said, 'First you have to start to feed the mother so that the mother has enough milk.' You cannot say she has to breast-feed the child if she does not have enough milk. But that is a question of the nutrition of the mother. I know that is very difficult to do that, but I have seen in this country nice babies just born, and 2 or 3 months later they are much smaller than a normal baby. But that was a question of whether the mother has enough milk or not.

Vittachi: Although mother's milk is the best...the best nutritional state.

Conzett: Yes. But if the mother is feeding poorly and hasn't enough nutrition, she will not have enough milk and not, perhaps, not very good milk.

Vittachi: But there was no controversy between you and the Government?

Conzett: No, not at all. I was much more willing to take a step further.

Vittachi: One more step - to feed the mother?

Conzett: To feed the mother. Yes. But that is very difficult.

Vittachi: Of course, as you said, that's not the means...feed all mothers.

Conzett: But to save the babies, that would be the best way.

Vittachi: Yes.