

Interview with John J. McCloy for the Jean Monnet Foundation,
Lausanne.
July 15, 1981, New York City.

Leonard Tennyson: Mr. McCloy, I think you knew Monnet longer than almost anyone else in the States. In talking about Monnet, you might want to begin with a comment about him as you knew him in the years after World War I. Or, if you like, start with some sort of anecdote that sets the stage for Monnet.

John McCloy: Well, I did have a long association with Monnet. There were various stages of his career, and each of those stages represented perhaps a different aspect of his character and his relations. Thinking back, I remember very vaguely, I can't be very specific about it, his associations in the postwar period of World War I, when he was in Paris and Versailles, I don't know who he was close to, perhaps André Tardieu at that time.

LT: André Tardieu?

JM: Tardieu was Prime Minister of France at one time. He was certainly a very high official. It's like asking who was Clemenceau to one who had been through World War I. He was one of the big factors in the postwar rehabilitation period and Monnet was one of the young men around Versailles and Paris at that time.

LT: Was he making himself heard as a young man about his opposition to reparations?

JM: Well, I know that he did take a strong position in regard to them. I don't associate my first hearing of him with opposition to reparations. I should be trying to identify him as one of the young men of that time who, in the postwar period,

were becoming thought of as the bright elite, who were coping with the problems of Europe, and, in some degree, with relations to the United States. I wasn't involved in that. I was in the Army of Occupation after the war as a soldier. It was only a matter, I guess, of hearsay, that I first hears of the name of Monnet and what he was up to. I believe he was associated even then, even that early with Pleven.

LT: René Pleven, one of his very earliest associates.

JM: That's right. I think he was one of this group that I'm trying to identify. And this happened all so long ago that your recollections are very unreliable. But that was my first, not physical contact, but my first mental contact with the name of Monnet, my first association with the name of Monnet. Then, I'm not attempting to find the exact sequence because I have to give it more thought. Your memory plays you tricks after so many years, but I suppose my next association with Monnet was when he was in the United States. He had come over here and had associated himself with the Blair & Co. firm, and with Elisha Walker¹ of that firm. And I knew him as a rather close collaborator with Sir William Wiseman² -- you know who he was. Both of them were then bankers here, Wiseman was with Kuhn Loeb and Monnet was with Walker in Blair & Co.

LT: Had André Mayer arrived yet?

JM: André Mayer came later. Then Monnet became involved in that Trans-America affair³. He became very closely associated with my then law firm, which was Cravath. I had a very close

warm friend and colleague in that firm named Donald Swatland.⁴ Donald Swatland had a great deal to do with Monnet. I think that Swatland was in many respects one of the ablest men I've ever known. We were law clerks together.

LT: You were?

JM: Yes.

LT: He was a remarkable man.

JM: We were classmates together in Harvard Law School and he sat alongside of me. I guess it was in Williston's famous class on contracts our first year. We went off to war together after the law school closed at the outbreak of the war in 1917. I went off to a Plattsburg camp and Swatland went off to a similar camp somewhere else. But then he was rejected, I think it was because of flat feet. It certainly was not a flat head. He wasn't eligible for training for a commission. He fixed that up later on and stayed in the service. After the war was over, he went right back to law school. By that time, I'd forgotten everything we'd ever learned in that first year at Harvard. I could no more have taken the final exam and passed it -- given all the things that had happened in between. But Swatland took the examination and set a record at the law school. He stood out amongst all our classmates. He was always at the head of his class. He had a very keen mind and he took a great fancy to Monnet and his efforts. He assisted him and guided him very skillfully in connection with the Trans-America affair.

LT: Swatland tried to extricate Monnet from the debacle following that thing with Giannini?⁵

JM: Yes. That was a period when I was not very close, but saw a bit of Monnet. I went abroad to represent my firm -- the Cravath firm -- as a lawyer giving advice to a number of American investment houses that were investing abroad. It was something of a Marshall Plan period, in a minor way. It was an attempt on the part of American capital to involve itself in the rehabilitation of Europe. It took the form of financing municipalities, public utilities, and big hydroelectric companies ...

LT: These were bond issues?

JM: Yes, bond issues. They were in Italy, France, and in Germany. I was trotting around as a sort of a Daniel Webster accompanying the investors' representatives. One of these was Jean Monnet, who was then with Blair & Co. In Milan, amongst other places, I got to see a good deal of him, in connection with this type of bond financing. It involved the adjustment of American trust debentures with the Italian "atto notarile." It was an extensive program, one in which Monnet was very heavily involved though he really operated out of Paris.

LT: He operated out of Paris whilst he was working with Blair?

JM: With Blair, that's right. And he worked closely with a man named Sheldon, and a number of others, including of course Elisha Walker. They were all engaged in the investment banking field. And it was then that he met the other Giannini, Francesco Giannini, whose wife Monnet became interested in. Her name was Sylvia. What was her maiden name?

LT: I've forgotten.

JM: She was the daughter of an Italian general, I believe it was di Bondini.

LT: I think it began with a B ...

JM: Yes, it began with a B, you're right about that.

LT: Then she was not married to an Italian diplomat?

JM: No, she was married to Francesco Giannini. He was a member of the Blair organization. I don't know whether he was a partner or not, but he was one of the company's chief representatives abroad and particularly in Italy. I think he may have been in the diplomatic service at one time. Sylvia was one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen before or since.

LT: I remember seeing photographs of her, taken in her 20's.

JM: I thought she was a star. But she was far beyond my reach. I didn't realize then that there was any sort of an affinity going between Sylvia and Jean until later on when they went off together. They got married in some remote place because I think they had some problems with the Catholic church, and the Italian law, and what not. She apparently fell for Monnet immediately. After that I began to see a good deal of Monnet. That carried on until his death. My wife and Sylvia were very close and still are. We all saw a great deal of each other between Washington, and Paris.

LT: Did you ever spend the summers with him on the Ile de Re, that little island off the Brittany coast?

JM: Yes, I did. And I was also down at the seashore, what was that other place, where the big rock promontory that extends out into the ocean stands? It was Etretat.

LT: I don't know.

JM: My wife and Sylvia got to know each other very well during the period when I was abroad, and during the period when he was here -- skipping now to the World War II period, when he was head of the Allied purchasing commission.

LT: He came to the U.S. in 1943?

JM: Somewhere in that period, yes, and he was made head of the purchasing commission for the Allies -- the British and French.

LT: I thought it was just the British purchasing commission, I didn't know he had anything to do with the French. I'm probably wrong.

JM: Maybe you're right about that. He was a Frenchman closely associated with the British (Arthur Purvis,⁶ you may remember his name? The Canadian was a big factor in that commission. He was later killed in an airplane accident.) The Monnets settled in Washington, and typically of Monnet, his antennae were always out, always very sensitive of where power lay. In my experience his instinct was always to play off the field a bit, he didn't like to get into the center of the field, he liked to be on the sidelines. He was always avoiding political office, because he felt he could maneuver better from the sidelines, and he could and did. But he knew where power lay, and he knew who could

exert it. He had a knack for getting associated with people who wielded power and they, in turn, were intrigued with Monnet. So it was a mutual thing.

LT: Please stop right there: what intrigued people about Monnet so much? What did they see in him back then, in 1943 or '44?

JM: I suppose it was, in the first place, that he spoke English. He was often most pungent in discussing a problem. And he was always searching, as you indicated a little while ago, for what he called the kernel of the problem. He wanted to separate that out and attack that, to get his arms around it and to see where it fitted into the broader sphere. He could lead people on, executives, operators -- the power boys -- with the breadth and the method of his thought.

LT: Did it ever strike you as interesting that Monnet was essentially a man who did not read books? and yet he --

JM: Yes, he didn't read books, and nor did he write much.

LT: No, he couldn't write at all.

JM: He was always calling on his friends, he was always [saying], "Now draft this, put that down." He was always using his staff. He had a sort of affinity or respect -- affinity is too strong a word -- respect for the lawyer, and particularly, I think for the American lawyer because he was usually a good draftsman. And the American lawyer undertook so large a part in preparing the financing operations -- in this respect playing a much greater part than the usual advocate did in Europe. Monnet began to depend, for example on a man like Swatland to put down words for him, to

implement his thinking. He was constantly calling on people who could do this. His association with Tommy was typical, what was his name, Tomlinson,⁷ was it?

LT: William Tomlinson.

JM: Tomlinson, that's right.

LT: It just struck me, that people didn't mind being used by Monnet because he used them for a cause and not for personal purposes.

JM: Oh, yes.

LT: But he would impose ...

JM: Oh, he would impose on you. He did not hesitate to call you up at all times, all hours of the night, and [say], "Well, what are you doing that's half as important as what I'm talking about?" And he'd convince you that what you were doing was a little small compared to his grand idea, and he did it with a sense of humor, and wit, and imagination. It just made you follow him up into the clouds a bit. And it was that, I suppose, which appealed to business and government executives seeking to solve difficult problems. Monnet could always contribute something toward a solution. It wouldn't always fit, because Monnet always had a pretty definite pattern in the way he attacked problems. If it didn't fit, if you didn't like his pattern, he could try another.

LT: I wonder if there's anything instructive about Monnet's presence in Washington during the war years. I gather that, as you mention, he quickly found the sources of power and got to

know all the influential people. Was he talking very much then about what was going to happen in postwar Europe?

JM: No, I don't recall that. He was much more concerned about the U.S. program. It was only as the war closed, and the rehabilitation program commenced that he had thoughts about Europe. He saw what was happening here, during that procurement period and during the war period. He saw the extent of our markets -- the great contrast between the flexibility and breadth of our markets and of European markets -- and it became an obsession with him. When we started dealing with the wartime aircraft production program, there was a period when we tried to figure out how many planes we were really going to need for the war effort. Somebody came out, I recall, with the figure of 50 thousand. I think Monnet had something to do with that figure. He was talking to Harry Hopkins.⁸ Hopkins was one of the people who, he sensed, had power. He talked with Harry about aircraft needs. They arrived at a figure that some saw as grotesque because it was so large. But it turned out later that it was well within our industrial capabilities. Monnet was deeply impressed with that -- with the capability of a country like this. He reasoned how much more important it is for Europe to break its bonds of fragmentation, of talents, of skills, and of separate national interests. He became passionate about the concept of unity for Europe and the benefits that would flow from a single market such as he had seen in the United States.

LT: He became Oliver Franks' deputy in setting up the Council for European Economic Cooperation. Remember, it was after

George Marshall's⁹ speech in June of '47 when he said, 'now it's up to the Europeans.' Then the Sixteen got together and formed the Council. Did Monnet and Marshall ever meet?

JM: Oh, yes, yes. But Marshall and Monnet would not meet on a close, intimate basis. I remember having Monnet and Marshall together at dinner at my little place in Georgetown. I thought it would be interesting for Marshall to know him. Marshall knew him, because everyone in Washington knew this man Monnet. He was already such an influential figure around town and knew so many people.

LT: Was there any particular symbiosis between Monnet and Felix Frankfurter?¹⁰

JM: Both of them enjoyed being close to the sources of power. They had an almost common objective in this respect. They got to the point where they were foregathering with each other all the time. I happened to know Frankfurter very well, I was not one of his elite students when I was at Harvard. He never called on me in class. Later I used to chide him about that, and I always maintained that he discriminated in favor of the front row of the class. But I got to know him very well when I was in Washington. He was close to the White House. And since Monnet got around a good bit and was very discerning, their minds became very well attuned. They had the same sort of approach to things. They were both very imaginative and they took to each other very quickly. It's hard for me now to pick out Monnet's particular associations. I visited him often

there in his home in the Ile de France, talked at great length about what was going to develop in Europe, particularly in Germany after the war.

LT: But when you were in Germany as High Commissioner, you didn't see him very much?

JM: I didn't see him very much, but I saw a great deal of Adenauer and I did see a good bit of Monnet whenever I was in France.

LT: Did you bring the two of them together originally?

JM: I don't want to claim anything more than I did. It's quite possible that I did. I knew Adenauer very well, and I knew Monnet very well. I did have very strong motivations in getting Adenauer and the French together.

LT: Yes.

JM: Indeed, I remember, Adenauer came to me the day he was made Chancellor. In effect he said, "Mr. McCloy, you've been running this country for a long time. Tell me what you think the priorities are here. What would you say is the most important thing for me to do?" He said, "I may not do it, but I'd like to get what your thoughts are." I replied, "I don't have the slightest hesitation in saying what I consider the priority; it's a solid rapprochement with France. It's getting rather tiresome, twice in my lifetime I've had to come over here because of hostilities between the Germans and the French. This is your main objective. Other things will fall in place in proper time. There are all sorts of rehabilitation programs

but they'll be taken care of by the economists and the economic planners. Politically and economically rapprochement with France is the most significant." He immediately picked that up. Adenauer was something of a Holy Roman Emperor ... the Holy Roman Empire had occurred only the day before yesterday, so far as he was concerned. Adenauer had a firm belief in the idea of a united Western Europe (he had less concern over the East). He looked back on the Holy Roman Empire as one of history's best periods. I remember after World War I, he started a little political cabal, to work out a certain political association between France and the Rhineland.

LT: It was similar to the Briand-Stresemann effort in the early '30's?

JM: This was right after WWI, Adenauer almost got into some trouble over it with the Weimar Republic.

LT: Oh?

JM: Trying to set a little, new country, which would be the Rhineland, primarily. There would certainly be a close geographic relationship, as there had been in Charlemagne's time, between Germany, or what then constituted Germany, and France.

LT: I suppose what must have struck you, that it was a very special time in history, when you had at one time such broad-gauge politicians as Adenauer in Germany, Schuman in France, and deGasperi in Italy.

JM: And deGasperi, yes. This was the period when there were really statesmen in the land. We seem to lack these at the moment. But there were people of enlightenment over here in the

postwar period. Dean Acheson, it must be remembered, was a factor in this development.

LT: Marshall too.

JM: George Marshall was, in spite of the fact that he was a soldier, a statesman of very high order. He may not have alone conceived of the idea of the Marshall Plan, but in combination with Dean Acheson he did and he was capable of carrying the movement on and giving it the force and dynamism that it later developed. I recall now a number of occasions when Marshall, and Monnet, and I were together in Washington during the War period and the immediate postwar period. Marshall, as I was about to say, comes as close as any man of that period to touching the mantle of greatness.

LT: He, with Stimson,¹¹ was one of my hero statesmen. He was the epitome of what a really great public servant should be.

JM: Marshall had what the Romans used to identify as the single quality of their greatest statesmen. They called it gravitas. He had weight and he had authority. I never saw a conference which Marshall attended, I don't care who else was attending it, that he could not dominate. It was just this gravitas. Another element of his greatness was that he very rarely exercised his power. Stimson and Marshall got along very well, they respected each other. Each had behind him a great deal of history on which they could rely for their thinking and their precedents, and they were both men of great integrity.

LT: That was the key, really. Marshall, a man of such great integrity that he said he would never write his autobiography.

JM: Yes, that's right.

LT: I thought that was extraordinary.

JM: Well, I can see how he felt, I've been asked many times to write my memoirs, and I've seen a lot of memoirs of my colleagues. They're apt to be quite subjective, and frequently defensive. You rarely make yourself appear weak or indecisive in your own memoirs. I think that was distasteful to Marshall because he was a man of, well, I won't say humility, because he was a man of confidence, strength, but he was a man of very great dignity, consideration, and depth.

LT: You were, as Monnet said of you, indeed a lucky man.

JM: Yes, that's right. However, we're talking too much about me, we want to talk about Monnet.

He had a technique, there is no question about it, which prompted and stimulated momentum. There was a reciprocity between Monnet, and people whose power he enlisted. Because those executives felt that they were drawing real values from Monnet as he spoke to them.

LT: He was not threatening them in any way.

JM: No, no, he never was that type of a negotiator. He was never hard-nosed, he was always as persistent as he could be, persistent and optimistic to the point of chagrin. He spared himself no indignity, and I was thinking of times when people would be rude to him, but he never never responded in the slightest

degree to that. He didn't suffer fools gladly but he was tolerant.

LT: No, he certainly didn't.

JM: But he was a man of noble stature. I was fortunate to be on such close terms with him.

LT: Well, I think we'd better stop now. Perhaps we can continue another time.

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Footnotes

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¹Elisha Walker, a U.S. investment banker and leading partner in the investment firm of Blair & Co.

²Sir William Wiseman, 1885-1962, was an investment banker and the British Foreign Office chief of British Intelligence in the U.S. from 1917.

³This refers to an unsuccessful U.S. West Coast investment venture in which Monnet was involved. An interview with Stanley Cleveland (12/6/81) deals with this episode in Monnet's life in some detail.

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⁴Donald Swatland, one of Monnet's closest friends in the U.S., died in 1962.

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⁵Amadeo Peter Giannini, the man behind the so-called "Trans-America affair," founded the Bank of America in 1904.

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⁶Arthur B. Purvis, the first Director General of the British Purchasing Commission and the first Chairman of the British Supply Council, died in 1941.

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⁷William Tomlinson, a U.S. Treasury official stationed in Paris in the late 1940's, had a very close personal relationship with Monnet. He was then Monnet's most effective conduit to U.S. government circles, particularly at the time of the Schuman Plan proposal and negotiations.

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⁸Harry L. Hopkins, 1890-1946, was an adviser and assistant to President Roosevelt from 1941 to 1945.

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⁹George Marshall, speaking as the U.S. Secretary of State on June 5, 1947, proposed, in a commencement address at Harvard University, the U.S. aid plan for Western Europe which became known as the "Marshall Plan."

¹⁰Felix Frankfurter was then an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

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¹¹Henry Lewis Stimson, 1867-1950, was the U.S. Secretary of War from 1940 to 1945.

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