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Interview with Eugene Rostow
by Leonard Tennyson *washington, D.C.*
on November 12, 1987, at Fort McNair, ~~Virginia~~
for le Foundation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe

Leonard Tennyson: Gene, this may be one of the last interviews I'll do about Monnet. You, I hope, will fill in the parts that are still missing.

Eugene Rostow: You interviewed George¹, of course?

LT: Yes, I had two interviews with George, and two with McCloy². This interview is going to go into the archives of the Foundation in Lausanne.

Now we'll begin at the obvious place: where and under what circumstances did you meet Monnet?

ER: I first met Monnet when I was working in the U.S. Lend-Lease Administration in Washington, D.C. immediately after Pearl Harbor. He was one of the two chairmen of the British Purchasing Commission. We collaborated on a great many items of supply.

LT: What were you doing at the time?

ER: I was an assistant general counsel at the office of the Lend-Lease Administration. And then I added to that shortly thereafter the title of executive assistant to Dean Acheson, who was then Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, so that I had two offices, and two telephones, and traveled back and forth to coordinate these Lend-Lease concerns.

LT: Did Monnet ever initiate any ideas apropos the Lend-Lease program?

ER: There's a Lend-Lease souvenir of Monnet in this room - - if you noticed it when you came in. But he didn't initiate anything. It is a photograph of a Lend-

¹ George A. Ball, U. S. lawyer, close personal friend and advisor of Monnet's, later U.S. Undersecretary of State.

² John J. McCloy, Roosevelt's wartime Assistant Secretary of War, and later U.S. High Commissioner of Germany.

Lease agreement signed toward the end of the war between France and the United States. It constituted the first reconstruction loan.

LT: 1946?

ER: It was earlier than that. It was '45. It grew out of an idea originally developed in response to a Soviet request for postwar reconstruction aid. We insisted on offering it also to the British and the French. So it was the first reconstruction loan at the end of the war. It was based on a provision of the Lend-Lease Act.

LT: That was a nice way of getting at it.

ER: It was, indeed. It was also somewhat controversial.

LT: Monnet is given credit for suggesting the 'arsenal of democracy' expression used by Roosevelt early on in the war. It leads me to ask you, whether he, being the innovative and inventive person he was, had ever said, 'Why don't you do this,' or 'Why don't you do that,' in the Lend-Lease Program?

ER: I can't recall any such initiatives.

LT: Did you meet him through anyone else? Was it Frankfurter (Supreme Court Associate Justice, Felix Frankfurter) who first introduced you to Monnet? Or was it the other way around?

ER: No, it wasn't either. I've forgotten exactly where I first met him - - either at my office, or Acheson's office. But I do remember vividly going out to his house to talk business with Monnet. Anne³, I guess, was still crawling around on the floor. We became friends quickly.

LT: Did you see him, when he came back and forth to the States, as he did frequently after the war, and after he became involved with the Schuman Plan and the Action Committee?

³Monnet's youngest daughter

ER: Oh, yes. I saw him a lot then, and of course we saw each other frequently in Algiers, because I was there in 1943.

LT: Can you talk a bit about that?

ER: Surely. He was there as a minister of something-or-other -- supply, I suppose -- as part of that wonderful team that assembled in Algiers under DeGaulle. I guess he was there before DeGaulle came, serving under General Henri Giraud. It was an extraordinary group, and we were all friends, a close association of men of great ability. Couve de Murville was there, along with Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, René Mayer, and René Massigli. It was a wonderful group. ~~Landon~~ White was there for the British. *Eric Wynsham.*

LT: What were you doing there?

ER: We were running the economic side of the Joint Allied Effort. I was working for Murphy⁴, dealing with all the supplies questions. not only for North Africa, but for Spain as well. There was a special committee on Iberian trade -- on financial questions, prisoners of war, supply for the Free French forces, and so on. It was an active and busy time, during which Monnet and I saw a lot of each other. y

LT: Did he ever express to you, or imply, any differences with DeGaulle.

ER: We discussed DeGaulle a great deal then and later. He always had a lot of respect for DeGaulle, but he kept his distance. I remember once, years later in France (we spent a sabbatical year in Geneva, and came up to Paris frequently) he involved me in the planning of the Schuman Plan -- me and another American, Tommy Tomlinson⁵. I went to many meetings in his Office of Planification, just behind the Ministry of Defense. We talked a lot about DeGaulle in that period, and later on.

⁴Robert Murphy, President Roosevelt's personal representative and General Eisenhower's political advisor in North Africa.

⁵William Tomlinson, U.S. Treasury Dept. Representative in Paris who was a close friend of Monnet's.

I recall no talk
of a breakdown, or
other evidence of one -

LT: He once suggested (I don't know how the subject came up) that he had a kind of incipient breakdown when he was in Algiers. It's extent was not made clear. At any rate, he only stayed there for about six months, did he not?

ER: I didn't stay there long either, but we saw a lot of each other.

LT: And so Couve, Monnet, and René Mayer, were all working together in Algiers? An extraordinary trio. Do you have any anecdotes about Monnet during that period?

ER: Well, we drove around to various restaurants. He kept a revolver in the glove compartment of his car. That startled me a little. He never used it, but he did wave it around.

LT: That was when he still liked to eat well?

ER: Oh, yes.

LT: And he still smoked large cigars?

ER: That's right. And we would come into these country restaurants in the various parts of the neighborhood of Algiers, and he would start off in the kitchen and greet the patron, and we would inspect what was cooking on the stove.

LT: By the time I knew Monnet, he'd adopted a strict eating regimen. He no longer liked to eat in a gustatory way. You were never really aware of why he left Algiers, then? Reasons didn't surface. The plain facts seemed to have been that he didn't get along well enough with DeGaulle.

ER: I would think that was so. As we talk now, I'm trying to figure out when I came home. I went out there in April, and came home in August of the next year. Was it as long as that? Maybe it was only for four or five months in Algiers, August or September. This was '43, when did he return?

LT: I don't know. I have his calendar, but not with me.

ER: I know what precipitated my return. My draft call came up. but I was turned down, for a bad back. That all happened in '43. When did he leave Algiers?

De Gaulle would be the prisoner of his myth - the General who restored the Republic - and therefore could be trusted -

LT: I thought he left in '42, but I'm not sure.

ER: In any event, it's not there in my conscious recollection about a break.

He talked a lot about DeGaulle, his relationship with him. Of course they'd had an earlier relationship, in London. They had a solid connection. It lasted a long time. In Paris, years later, I read the draft of a letter to Le Monde announcing his support of DeGaulle. we discussed it at some length; as I recall it, he felt that

LT: I remember that. He said that the General was a respecter of institutions, and that was the key factor in his decision to support DeGaulle.

Let's get back to Monnet in Washington. Do you have any recollections, any impressions, of what he said and how he conducted himself in meetings and gatherings, in trying to present his point of view? Some people thought that he had a unique knack of quietly seizing the high ground, and saying, 'Here's what we ought to do.'

ER: Yes, when I first met him, I'd already heard a lot about him. Many people were critical of him, and hostile. They warned me about him, saying, 'You're going to be seeing a lot of this fellow, be careful, he's tricky, and slippery.' I always ~~know~~ ^{do} make up my own mind about these things, in terms of the context. I found him to be a very honorable man to deal with indeed; a person of great ability and imagination. That was the essence of it. Now at meetings, I can't remember him participating in any large meetings.

In small meetings, it was conversational and easy. He preferred ~~those~~. And of course the company was pretty remarkable, too. Acheson was the focal point, naturally, because I was working for him. And the corresponding people around town who were at his level, and of his group were McCloy, ~~and~~ Stevenson for the Navy, and

Law Douglas, the head of War Shipping

LT: Was Swatland⁶ down in Washington at any time?

⁶Donald Swatland, Wall Street lawyer and long-time personal friend of Monnet's.

ER: No, Swatland was off in Wright Field.

LT: Why?

ER: He became a colonel or general out in Wright Field, the Air Force establishment in Ohio. I knew Swatland, I've worked with him, *in New York*.

LT: Oh, you have. Monnet and Swatland were very close.

ER: Oh, very close friends. Yes, Swatland was a wonderful fellow, too. Adlai Stevenson⁷ was part of that group, Lew Douglas⁸ was part of that group, dealing with various aspects of the economic affairs. No, I can't summon up any particular recollections of him in group meetings beyond Acheson, and there, I would say, he was dealing with people who did a lot of talking too.

LT: Did Acheson find him impressive?

ER: Oh, yes. Acheson was a little reserved but he thought well of him.

LT: I remember in one of Acheson's memoirs he pays very, very warm tribute to Robert Schuman. But I don't recall in his memoirs anything more than passing about Monnet. When Monnet came to Washington after the war, he came first to seek a loan for the Coal and Steel Community. He did get a hundred-million dollar loan from the Export-Import Bank with Dulles's help. He kept coming more frequently after he left Luxembourg and went to Paris to start the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, an international lobbying group for European integration. Did he stop and talk to you about some of his ideas, about whom he wanted to see, and what he wanted to do?

ER: Yes. He was always on the phone. You see I was in Washington at that time. He tried to get me to give up my university work and take over the representation of the enterprise in Washington. And I persuaded him that I couldn't do that, but that he should take on George (George ^{W.} A. Ball). And he did.

⁷Democratic Presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956.

⁸Lewis W. Douglas, later U.S. Ambassador in the Court of St. James in London.

LT: You mean that you brought George together with Monnet?

ER: That's right.

LT: What year was that?

ER: It was 1945. The reason I remember it was 1945, I had my first back operation then. He telephoned to me every day at the hospital in Chicago.

LT: Weren't you and George together in Washington as members of the strategic bombing mission?

ER: No, it was my brother. George and I were together on Lend-Lease.

LT: Oh.

ER: And we won the war together.

LT: You know Robert Nathan asserts that Monnet played a role in helping the U.S. win World War II. He waxes eloquently about Monnet's insisting upon vastly greater war production than had been envisaged by the military experts -- for planes, and ships, guns and so on.

ER: That's very likely. I'm sure that if Bob Nathan said it, it's true. That story is dealt with in a remarkable new book I've been reading, by Eric Larrabee, called Commander in Chief. Now I lent it to one of my sons after I got about half way through it, but there's a great deal about Bob Nathan and Lovett and General McNair for whom this ~~statement is made~~, on the early supply side development. You might enjoy the book, anyway.

LT: Larrabee? I seem to recall that he worked for Harper's magazine. I'm not sure.

ER: Maybe it was his father.

LT: Perhaps.

Army base is
named

ER: This ^{book} is about FDR, FDR and his ^{military} chiefs. The first chapter is about Marshall⁹, of course, and Ernie King¹⁰, and so on. Just a fabulous book. Take a look at the index.

LT: Did you ever get a feeling about how Monnet utilized people?

ER: Yes, oh yes I did.

LT: Please tell me something about it.

ER: Well, he was an artist at using people, not in a disagreeable or manipulative way, but when he made up his mind to get someone to work for him, he was very attentive and warm. If for any reason that relationship failed, or failed to produce what he wanted, or disagreed with him, then he turned away, and the relationship ended. I've known cases such as these. It was then that the flow of Monnet brandy for Christmas ended, lunches stopped, and the telephone calls no longer came.

of the person

LT: Do you think there was any unconscious or even conscious methodology that Monnet used in dealing with people and also in the orchestration of events and of projects he wanted to see carried out? If this were ever delineated it could be an important lesson for history.

ER: I suppose the key -- he always said this about himself -- the key to his method, at least at the conscious level, was to concentrate on one thing. If you concentrated upon only one enterprise, only one goal, and subordinated everything to that goal, then automatically things fitted together.

LT: That may be one definition of genius.

ER: It was true, of course, that he focused on the issue of the unification of ^{an act} Europe. But he wasn't a crank, dealing only with that, because after all it was part of the larger political context, ~~and so on~~. I remember once a conversation about the

⁹General George Catlett Marshall, Chief of U. S. Army Forces, World War II.

¹⁰Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of U.S. Naval Forces, World War II.

conduct of our relationship with the Soviet Union. He said, 'After the war, you the Americans are going to have an enormous part to play in world politics for the first time. There's only one thing I'm afraid of -- the American temperament. The British have dealt with international frictions such as the Dardanelles, and they know some differences can never be resolved. They don't keep trying to reach a solution. They try to temper the wind, avoiding dangerous solutions. But the American temperament after a while will get impatient. And I can just see an American Secretary of State banging the table and saying, "God damn it, you must do this!" That's what you must avoid.' So it was an insight into his own notion of conducting business too, very patient, waiting, not pressing things for an adverse decision. But he was actively interested in all sorts of issues.

LT: That singlemindedness, the ability to go straight to the essence of a problem, was characteristic. He could examine a melange of things, define the specific problem, and then seize upon the one thing that was going to help bring it into focus. He did that very well.

ER: Oh, yes. And he saw the whole notion of starting the European process with the Coal and Steel Community. I remember a big argument in his office in Paris on the voting arrangements for the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community. There were in the group Pierre, Uri, Max Kohnstamm, and Tommy Tomlinson. They were talking about different formulae. Each one had a 'better' notion of it. Finally Monnet intervened. He said, 'Look, I don't care if we take population or Gross National Product or steel capacity or coal capacity, or whatever. All I want is an outcome, so that Italy and Germany voting together will not constitute a majority.'

LT: That's the kind of anecdote I wanted to hear.

ER: It may not be very nice, but it's very realistic.

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power.

LT: No, it's very good. What did you contribute to the Coal and Steel Community Treaty?

ER: Nothing in particular, I suppose. I participated in some of those discussions, and I think I might have done over one or two drafts. But I was an episodic participant. (g)

LT: You weren't particularly an advisor on antitrust aspects?

ER: I guess we talked about those, sure. And then sometimes some of his people would stop in Geneva to see me, that was in '49 and '50, when I was working for Myrdal¹¹.

LT: Well, that's another chapter in your life. Well, in this sort of desultory interview, is there anything else which comes to mind that you would like to offer, an observation on Monnet, a charming anecdote hitherto untold?

ER: Well, over a period of, how long is it? When did he die?

LT: '79.

ER: Something like that. So we knew each other, and of course my wife participated in it for a very long time, too, since '42. Over 30 years. And it was a continuous relationship. Of course there were periods when we saw each other more often than not, but there were always letters, or speeches, or whatever going back and forth. And he came over to see us when we were spending a year in Cambridge. And he was very impressed for the first time with academic life. He said, 'This is really something.' And he sent Marianne¹² over to visit there, he wanted them to take a look at her and so on. So it was a long friendship, and from time to time a very active one, when we were working together, or he wanted to tap in. The thing I would remark about him in retrospect, apart from his obvious

¹¹Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal.

¹²Monnet's eldest daughter.

ability and power as a human personality and as a leader, was his combination of warmth and integrity.

LT: There are enough anecdotes around about Monnet. You don't have to throw another one into the basket. I just thought perhaps that you would have something particularly near and dear to your heart and memory that you wanted to include. For instance, one of the things that the people who worked with Monnet remarked on was how quickly and unerringly he went to the right seat of power when he was trying to get something done. He didn't waste time. He wanted to find out who really handled matters important to him. Do you have any observations on that?

ER: Yes, I think that's just. He would appraise the people in a situation. He dealt of course very strongly with young people, people who did not themselves have power, but who I suppose he thought could reach it. His relationship with me began when I was under thirty. So he must have decided that I was a fellow who could or would be a mover or a shaker, and had access to Acheson and others for him. Yes, I think that's right. He was very appraising, as I said before. Then I think there were a lot of relationships that were simply human. I think he appraised the utility of people to him and to his cause in different terms. It was not only power, it was also intelligence, and training, and the ability to write memos.

LT: Ah yes, the ability to write memos -- particularly since he couldn't write very well himself. It wasn't something he admitted to. But he knew it when he saw a good draft. That was something else.

ER: Oh, yes. Well, he wrote some. That article about DeGaulle, for example.

LT: You think that was his?

ER: Oh, yes, I think so.

LT: The writing of his memoirs, as you know, was undertaken a few years too late when the infirmities of age had set in. He narrated and went over them

slowly with a former French colleague of mine, Francois Fontaine. It was a labor of love on the part of Francois. It took two years. He did a superb job.

ER: I know him very well.

LT: He wrote it in the same manner as Monnet spoke. He spent almost two years with Monnet working on it as a great labor of love. A remarkable job, I thought.

ER: Well, of course he knew him so well, the style and intonation and so on. But of course François writes novels!

LT: Yes, I've heard he just won an award for one of his historical novels.

ER: Yes, I got a note here on my desk about it. I'm going to write him.

LT: I will do it too. Now, unless you have more to say, Gene, I think we'll put a cap on this little conversation about a man we both so much admired. Thank you.

CORRECTIONS TO THE EUGENE ROSTOW INTERVIEW

- Page 1, line three: Washington, D.C.
- Page 3, line nine: Eric Wyndham
line twelve: supply
- Page 4, line four: I recall no talk of a breakdown or other evidence of one.
- Page 5, line six: We discussed it at some length. As I recall it, he felt that deGaulle could be the prisoner of his myth --the General who restored the Republic and therefore could be trusted.
line 15: suspicious.
line 17: It was my rule always to (Eliminate "I" at the end of line 16.)
line 21: small meetings
line 24: Stevenson for the Navy, and Lew Douglas, the head of war shipping.
- Page 6, line four: in New York.
last line: George W. Ball. (Also make similar correction at bottom of page one.)
- Page 7, line 19: army base is named
- Page 8, line 1: book military
line 10: if the person
line 24: an active
- Page 9, line 19: eliminate the period after "Pierre" and the "and" after Kohnstamm.
line 20: put a comma after "Tomlinson" and add and Etienne Hirsch, too, I think.
line 22: as the measure of voting power.
- Page 10, line 3: make it read gone instead of "done."

This ends the corrections.