



Ray G. Price

Charter Member
President - 1954-56
Distinguished Fellow - 1973

Interview with Ray Price (Norman Silber)
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Prof. Silber: This is an interview with Prof. Ray Price. The interview is taking place at his home in Minneapolis on July 16, 1983. The interviewer is Norman Silber. Also present is Dr. Price's wife, Katherine.

Dr. Price, I know you have given some thought to several questions about your involvement with ACCI and the consumer movement. The first question I wanted to ask you is, how did you actually become involved with the consumer movement?

Prof. Price: As you probably know, the term "consumer movement" is an umbrella term. It covers several kinds of activities—public interest groups as well as organized protests or boycotts. It also covers journalism and media action lines that help consumers with specific kinds of problems. Even the consumer relations departments within business firms might be said to be a part of the consumer movement.

My particular involvement has been mainly in the area of consumer education. If memory serves me correctly, it began in 1931. I had been teaching business subjects, primarily bookkeeping, now called accounting, at Horace Mann High School in Gary, Indiana.

A year earlier, I had met the girl I wanted to marry but decided I should get my master's degree before taking on the responsibility that went with marriage in those days. I applied for and obtained a fellowship in the School of Business at the University of Chicago. The professor with whom I was to work was Dr. Harold Shields. He believed that the foundation of a business education for high school students should be what were then called the socio-business subjects. Today, they are called the basic business subjects. They include such courses as business law, economics, consumer economics. Dr. Shields further believed that all business teachers should be prepared to teach those subjects.

At the time I began my residency at the University of Chicago, he started working on a consumer economics textbook for 11th and 12th grades. As his assistant, I helped with the work in various ways, all of which served to stimulate my interest in economic education, and consumer education in particular.

Looking back, I would have to say that Dr. Shields was a great influence on my life because I quickly adopted his philosophy and stayed with it. Throughout my years of teaching, both at the University of Cincinnati and later at the University of Minnesota, I waged an almost relentless campaign to make economic education part of the general education of all students, not just those majoring in business. The kind of economic education I had in mind focused on the individual's three roles in a free enterprise system; that is, as consumer, producer, and citizen, with heavy emphasis on the consumer.

As a result of activities begun in 1931, I guess it was inevitable that I would eventually be recognized as a consumer educator and be closely allied with the consumer movement. I do recall that by 1936, my reputation was well enough established that I was among those who received complimentary copies of a fledgling publication called *Consumer Reports*.

In the early 1950's, I became a director of Consumers Union and served four terms before resigning in 1967 because of a conflict with my work at the University of Minnesota. Like Topsy, my involvement with the consumer movement just grew and grew.

NS: Did the depression play a part?

RP: Certainly, if for no other reason than the fact that the depression gave impetus to the

consumer movement.

NS: There was a lot of radical consumerism at that time. Were you familiar with that when you got into graduate school?

RP: I was not aware of any radical consumerism unless you are referring to such publications as *One Hundred Million Guinea Pigs*, *Skin Deep*, etc. However, I was aware of some communist activity, and I might even have become involved had I not had something more important to do the one and only time I was invited to a meeting.

NS: Did you know about Schlink's operation?

RP: Oh, yes.

NS: And Stuart Chase?

RP: Yes, Stuart Chase.

NS: Do you remember the kinds of things you read in high school and college?

RP: College maybe, but not high school.

NS: Dr. Price, how did you become involved with what was originally CCI and became ACCI?

RP: Specifically, how did I get involved? This has to do with my becoming friends with Colston Warne. I can't recall exactly when or where we met, but I think that our first encounter took place at a consumer education conference at the University of Chicago, probably in 1932. After that, we met from time to time at various other consumer education meetings—among them the conferences sponsored by the Consumer Education Institute at Stephens College. I'm certain it was at one of those conferences where I got to know Leland Gordon and Henry Harap. Our common interest continued to bring us together and in the process the four of us formed life-long friendships.

In November, 1952, Henry Harap and I received letters from Colston asking whether we would be interested in launching a consumer education organization.

In February, 1953, Henry and I met with Colston in Chicago to discuss how we would proceed. Our decision was to bring a small group of leading consumer educators together for the purpose of giving consideration to the development of an organization. Twenty of the 29 persons invited, attended the first planning session on the University of Minnesota campus in April of that year.

After a great deal of brainstorming, the participants elected an Executive Committee to prepare a plan for a permanent organization. Members of the Executive Committee were: Marguerite Burk, Eugene Beem, G.E. Damon, Henry Harap and myself. The committee chose Henry Harap as its chairman and Eugene Beem as its executive secretary.

The committee met at least twice in the ensuing months to make plans for a permanent organization and to draw up bylaws. In the spring of 1954, the charter members met again at the University of Minnesota. At that meeting, they heard the report of the Executive Committee who had decided to establish a Council on Consumer Information. The name was later changed to American Council on Consumer Interests.

The council's purpose would be to stimulate and exchange ideas among persons interested in the welfare of the consumer. The charter then set policies for the future and I was elected to serve as the organization's first president.

NS: Do you remember the general feelings you had about those early meetings? What were they like?

RP: Do you mean at the University of Minnesota?

NS: The encounters with Colston and Henry Harap.

RP: Yes, they were very stimulating, interesting meetings. Colston and Henry always had something up their sleeves they hoped to get going.

NS: Would you say it was Colston's idea?

KP: You mean to have ACCI?

RP: Yes, it was Colston's idea.

NS: You said you and Henry and Leland were the first people?

KP: No, not Leland, just Henry and Ray.

RP: Then Henry and I, with some suggestions from Colston, decided whom to invite to the first planning session.

NS: Why did he talk to you, as opposed to some of the other people? Do you know?

RP: No, I don't know why.

NS: Dr. Price, what do you remember of the early years in ACCI?

RP: Perhaps what I remember best is the dedication of its founders and their singleness of purpose. They worked hard, but once the serious business at hand was taken care of, they took time off for fun. Henry Harap called it jollification. These lighter moments were every bit as memorable as those devoted to high level decision making. Because of them, a real feeling of brotherhood developed among us. For a time, this after-hours socializing carried over to the annual conference where attendance was relatively small in the beginning.

Another thing I remember about the early years, especially when I pay \$12-\$15 for a luncheon, or \$50 to \$60 a night for a hotel room at one of today's conferences, is how thriftily we staged our conferences. Most of those in attendance came at their own expense. We met in such places as YMCA's or on college campuses, where we stayed in dormitories and where the banquets were extremely modest and served at low cost. As consumers, we aimed to get our money's worth. In later years, I recall Henry Harap lamenting the rising cost of attending the annual conference and I would guess that this was partly the reason he stopped attending even while still in good health.

NS: Were any of the members from well-to-do backgrounds?

RP: Not that I know of.

KP: By members, do you mean those who attended?

NS: Yes, the people who came to those early meetings.

KP: I would doubt that very many were well-to-do, unless it was someone from the business community. And business interests were not represented much in the very early years.

NS: Would you say that you were all middle-income consumers?

RP: Yes, But more specifically, we were all consumer educators.

NS: Most of you were university people?

RP: Yes, practically all of us were at the start.

NS: Did you get the universities to pay for your trips?

RP: I can't speak for anyone but myself, and I did not.

NS: Did the money that Consumers Union provided help pay for your travel?

RP: Only for the organizational meetings. Consumers Union paid all of those expenses.

NS: Including the travel?

RP: Including the travel. Nobody had to put out any pocket money for that.

NS: In those early years, how old would you have been?

RP: 50.

NS: When would that have been?

RP: 1953. Henry, Leland, and Colston were older.

NS: At that point, you were all in your fifties, so it wasn't started in the '50s by a group of young Turks.

RP: No.

KP: Old Turks. [laughter]

NS: Were there any young people?

RP: Yes, a few. I think Warren Nelson was probably younger. I would have to look over the list of charter members. Marguerite Burk was probably among the younger ones.

NS: Were you tenured at that time?

RP: Yes. I came to the University of Minnesota with tenure.

NS: Was it kind of a radical thing to get involved with?

RP: ACCI radical? With Hazel Kyrk and Margaret Reid! Hardly.

NS: I was just wondering how the universities would have looked upon a bunch of persons who said, "I'm going to get involved in this consumer movement" in the 1950's.

RP: Most of those involved with developing the organization had established reputations as consumer educators. Helen Canoyer and I both taught consumer courses at the University of Minnesota. So we were already pretty much involved in the consumer movement. Further involvement would have been considered the norm rather than a departure.

NS: So your school was receptive?

RP: To my knowledge, no one ever raised any questions. They knew, when they hired me in 1948, of my interest in consumer education.

NS: So, you got your Ph.D. at Chicago, and then you came here?

RP: I got my master's degree at the University of Chicago; my Ph.D. at the University of Cincinnati. I also taught there before coming to Minnesota.

NS: How long did you teach at Cincinnati?

RP: Twelve years.

NS: At Cincinnati, you wrote your first textbook?

RP: Yes, with two co-authors.

NS: In Cincinnati, had you been an outspoken consumer activist?

RP: If by activist, you mean someone who kept things stirred up, the answer is "No." But once someone did raise a question as to why I had Murray Lincoln on a program there.

NS: Who was Murray Lincoln?

RP: I'm no longer sure. He held a position of some importance with the Cooperative League of the United States. I think he may have been president. Anyway, he was a friend of Leland Gordon's, and if I'm not mistaken, Leland had suggested that I get him to appear on the program in question.

NS: So, Minnesota was quite favorable towards consumer education?

RP: Yes, that's right.

NS: And you came to Minnesota with the understanding that they were receptive to your kind of teaching?

RP: Minnesota is a much more liberal state. After all, this is the home of Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale.

NS: When they decided to hold that first meeting in Minnesota, do you think that had something to do with it?

RP: No, I don't think so.

NS: Did you say to Colston, "Let's hold it in Minnesota"?

RP: No, I didn't. I don't remember how it was decided to hold it here. It could have been the availability of facilities, or it could have been the geographic location that determined where we would meet.

NS: At that early meeting in Minnesota, do you remember the kinds of problems that you thought you had to deal with to start an organization? What were the problems that you faced? What kinds of difficulties did you have when you first set up CCI?

RP: We had some problems, but nothing serious.

NS: Did you think about whether you should restrict your membership to teachers or to restrict your membership in any way?

RP: No.

NS: Did you think about excluding people who were spokesmen for business interests?

RP: Yes, we decided that if representatives of business wanted to join, they would be permitted to do so, but not be allowed to vote or hold office.

NS: Then you did see that you might have this kind of difficulty in the future?

RP: Yes.

NS: What were you doing in those early years? What did you do for ACCI?

RP: Just about everything. I handled most of the correspondence, worked on the constitution, planned programs.

KP: You also sent out all of the original letters to people inviting them to come. I remember, specifically, you told them their expenses would be paid, but you didn't explain where the money was coming from. Leland Gordon wrote back and asked, "Who's the angel?" [laughter]

NS: Did you draft the original bylaws?

RP: Yes, but with the cooperation of other members of the Executive Board.

NS: Did anybody try to slur you because you had been president of a group funded by CU?

RP: Not to my knowledge. I do recall that one of the people invited to the original planning session was reluctant to become involved when she found out that Consumers Union was providing the seed money. It was right around the time, or not too long after the time, that CU had been under fire for communist affiliation. For a time, Consumers Union was on the Attorney General's un-American Activities List. And once on, it was difficult to get off. However, CU did succeed in clearing its name.

NS: I see. You are talking about CU and not CCI?

RP: Yes.

NS: This leads me to the next question I was going to ask, which is about those early driving forces. Who were the early driving forces in CCI?

RP: This is a tough question to answer because there were a number of them. To name names is to risk leaving someone out. Although every member of the charter group was a driving force in one way or another, it goes without saying that Colston was the original driving force since the idea for an organization started with him. Henry Harap, as chairman of the original Executive Committee, was certainly a driving force. He kept us on target until our mission was accomplished. Eugene Beem worked diligently soliciting funds for the new organization. Marguerite Burk quickly followed through with plans for publication of a quarterly newsletter and a series of pamphlets. She selected topics, searched for qualified authors and coordinated the editorial supervision of manuscripts.

It's interesting to note that the first newsletter, with Gladys Bahr as editor, was published even

before the second meeting of the organization's founders. The first pamphlet was released in May, 1954, almost a year before the first conference.

Some members of the founding group authored pamphlets; Leland Gordon, Marguerite Burk, Persia Campbell and Jessie Coles. Leland Gordon also masterminded the Colston E. Warne Lecture which has been a highlight of the ACCI conferences since 1972.

Sometimes, however, it is easier to start an organization of this type than to keep it going. For the most part, ACCI's charter members were grey beards. Even in the organization's infancy, it needed to attract a new generation of enthusiastic members to keep it vital and growing.

The need was met by people like Stewart Lee, Gordon Bivens and Richard Morse. Others, just as dedicated, have followed them, but you specifically asked for the early driving forces. Which reminds me, I must salute one charter member for his conference attendance record. Arch Troelstrup has not missed a single meeting. I wish I could say the same, but some years the ACCI conferences have conflicted with meetings of the other professional organizations in which I am involved.

NS: What did you hope ACCI would be?

RP: Do you mean me personally or the charter group in general? I can't speak for the others, but my feeling was that this would be an organization of consumer educators whose objective was to improve the quality of consumer education. Although there may be differences of opinion regarding how to achieve it, I think that's still pretty much the organization's objective.

NS: Why was there a need for something like ACCI?

RP: There wasn't another organization like it doing the same thing.

NS: You were in business education. Why weren't the business economists doing it?

RP: I think that the business economists back then pooh-poohed consumer education. I remember attending one of the Joint Council's workshops back in 1956.

There was much discussion about economic education and I kept reminding them that consumer education was a part of economic education or at least a kind of economic education. They were a little haughty about it. Although I was a director of the Joint Council for 10 or 12 years, the Council didn't get really enthusiastic about consumer education until the last few years. I'd say within the last decade.

The consumer education program of the Joint Council is now important and they have been participating in the ACCI conferences; but for a long time the business economists didn't want any part of consumer education.

NS: Before 1953, do you remember thinking, "If only I could meet with other people in the field and have an association?"

RP: I had always had that idea, but Colston Warne came along with the money and that started it off.

KP: Could it be that, at some point, you discussed this with Colston and that was why he came to you?

RP: It could be that, yes.

NS: What was the consumer movement like in the early '50s? Was there such a thing as a

consumer movement?

RP: Yes, there was a consumer movement but nothing like now. There are a lot of different kinds of organizations today—some activist, some educational, and so on. But there was no group made up solely of consumer educators in the early '50s that was national in scope.

The consumer educators then were part of other groups. For example, there were consumer educators within the business education area. At their conventions, they might have one program devoted to consumer education through business subjects. I'm certain that the home economists at their conventions also had a session or sessions devoted to consumer education, which they may have called Family Life Education or something of that sort. Even the economists probably had, among them, those who were promoting consumer education. Leland Gordon was one such economist. Stewart Lee is another. In every group of educators, there were probably some who were consumer educators. In ACCI, they have all come together. There are economists, home economists, business education teachers, social studies teachers and so on.

NS: How did you know whom to invite originally?

RP: Together, Henry, Colston and I knew the leaders in the field pretty well. We compiled a list of 29. One thing we did was try to get people from different fields. For example, Willard Cochrane was an agricultural economist, Marguerite Burk was with the government.

Hazel Kyrk, Margaret Reid, and Persia Campbell had all authored well-known consumer books. So had Leland Gordon.

Jessie Coles had already established her reputation in labels. Eugene Beem had written an article about Consumers Union that was widely circulated. Arch Troelstrup and Gladys Bahr were both at Stephens College, which was noted for its department of consumer education then. So it was a pretty good cross-section of people.

NS: You said that 20 out of the 29 that you invited came. Who didn't come? Do you remember?

RP: I only remember one who didn't come, and that was Fred Wilhelms. He was invited again the following year and then was listed as a charter member.

NS: Who was he?

RP: Back then he was connected with the Secondary School Principals Association in Washington, D.C. I'm not sure what his position was. However, I do know that he was responsible for a series of consumer pamphlets put out by that association in the mid to late '40s. I think I may have authored or co-authored one. I know that Gladys Bahr did.

NS: It sounds as though it was an effort to really bring people together who hadn't been together before. Do you remember how many of these people knew each other at the first meeting? Did everybody know each other already or were they pretty much strangers?

RP: Between Colston, Henry, Leland and me, we knew them all. If any were strangers to others, they certainly weren't strangers for long.

NS: From that nucleus of the early group of people, you tried to expand the membership with people who weren't necessarily well-known in the field. Is that right?

RP: I suppose you could say that, but there were also those who were well-known to others of the original 20.

NS: Did you start sending out mailing lists?

RP: I don't remember using mailing lists. What we probably did was to contact people we knew in the area where the conference was to be held. Everyone supplied a few names. It might be interesting to ask Stewart Lee how he first learned of the organization.

NS: Did you try to get other people in your department to join?

RP: Yes, and others in business education elsewhere whom I knew. For example, Fred Archer was teaching in the Business Education Department at St. Cloud, Minnesota. He became our executive secretary. He was followed by Ray Heimerl who did his doctorate with me, and was then teaching at Greeley, Colorado.

NS: Dr. Price, do you remember the conferences that you were program chair of, and what your duties were?

RP: Yes, I remember some. I suppose they were the same as for the program chairman of any organization—to develop a program around topics of interest and in keeping with the goals of the organization.

During the years I served as program chairman, or helped with program planning, the challenge was to find speakers willing to share their knowledge for little or nothing. In fact, early programs often featured the charter members.

One program in particular, I'm not likely to forget. It was for our third conference to be held in St. Louis in 1957. After the details had been finalized, I took a copy of the program to a Minneapolis print shop, a one-man operation, chosen for its reasonable prices. He, the printer, assured me he would have the program ready in plenty of time for me to take to St. Louis.

When the promised time came; however, I could not find the printer. He didn't answer the phone and when I went to the shop, it was closed. I inquired at a neighboring business, where I learned that he had not been around for several days...a somewhat common occurrence because he was an alcoholic and frequently disappeared for days at a time. Working into the night with the help of my wife and a graduate assistant, I managed to get programs typed and mimeographed before my departure for St. Louis the next morning. I believe Stewart Lee still has a copy of that program. The moral of this story could probably be summed up in three words, "cheap is cheap!" [laughter]

NS: That '57 conference was one that you really played a large role in putting together, is that right?

RP: It is difficult to recall the details of what took place over 25 years ago. But my guess is that those early programs represented a cooperative effort by the members of the Executive Board.

KP: I see something else on this first conference program—a note in Ray's handwriting. It says, "Henry, can you meet with your nominating committee in order to make your report at the business meeting at 2:00 p.m. Nominations for offices, president, vice president, treasurer." Ray, did you know that was on there?

NS: I didn't know that was your handwriting. [laughter]

KP: I wonder how you got hold of that.

NS: I think it is Henry Harap's. It was in the Harap papers given to Consumers Union.

KP: I don't see the name of a program chairman here, but obviously part of the program is missing.

NS: So, it wasn't until several years later that you had this routine that, one year a person would be program chairman and the next year succeed to another position, and finally become president?

RP: That was not the way it happened in the beginning.

NS: A number of the pamphlets which were put out in those early years, and a number of the topics, used the word "consumer" as though it were one person. I mean, they would say, "the consumer looks at food prices, the consumer looks at...." Who was THE consumer?

RP: The public, I guess—everyone.

NS: It sort of has the tone like that given to the worker in the '30s; "the worker looks at..." without realizing that there were hundreds of different workers and hundreds of workers' interests. I'm just wondering, going back to those days, if it seemed like "the consumer interest" was one interest.

RP: In many respects, it is. It is in their values that consumers differ.

KP: I think that the term, "consumer interest" was typical jargon of the old grey beards. If I'm not mistaken, that was the title of Persia Campbell's book. Anyway, that's how they talked. Even to me, they seemed a little old fashioned. [laughter]

RP: I suppose we were. [laughter]

KP: But I just loved them. I loved Henry Harap and I loved Colston and I loved Leland Gordon and we became very good friends apart from their professional activities. We visited the Gordons in their home and they visited in ours. The same was true with Frances and Colston Warne.

NS: I gather that for you, this was more than just an academic discipline, it was more than just a typical conference.

RP: For about four or five years it was.

KP: Are you talking about the socializing aspect of it?

NS: I just mean that ACCI was more than just another professional organization. It wasn't like being a member of the American Economics Association or the National Business Education Association or something of that sort?

RP: No, I suppose not.

KP: What was the question?

NS: You were talking about socializing and getting to know these people. I was just thinking that, for example, at most of these big professional meetings, one doesn't form those kinds of friendships.

KP: I would disagree with you. We've formed some very strong friendships with people who are in business education and attend the National Business Education Association meetings. We have visited in their homes, and they in ours and we exchange letters and Christmas cards.

RP: Nevertheless, at a lot of the meetings I went to, I didn't know many of those in attendance.

KP: That's true. Our friendships in ACCI, for example, still go back to the early days—people like the Troelstrups.

NS: How many people came to those early meetings?

KP: Do you have Henry's history? I think he tells how many attended.

RP: Fewer than one hundred—75 at that first meeting in Dayton.

NS: They were small meetings.

RP: Yes, that's right.

NS: Did that mean everybody must have known everybody at that first meeting?

RP: Just about.

NS: Did you all go your separate ways when the sessions were over or did you go out to dinner afterwards?

RP: One night of the conference, we had a banquet and speaker. It was usually after the banquet that we partied. Otherwise, if we went out together, it was probably in small groups. Also, evenings were when the board as well as various committees—nominating, publications, etc., —met.

NS: Dr. Price, what would you say is the most serious problem that ACCI has faced?

RP: And some of its accomplishments, too?

NS: No, that will wait.

RP: Early on, there was an incident that caused much consternation among our charter group. I doubt that it would be classified as serious, although it seemed serious at the time.

One of our charter members submitted a first draft for a pamphlet on trading stamps which were widely used at that time. Just prior to completing work on the manuscript, he accepted a position with Sperry & Hutchinson, the national distributor of S&H Green Stamps. After much discussion with the Executive Board, the publications committee decided not to use the manuscript.

However, there was a rather serious problem that arose in the early days and smoldered for a long time, which threatened to divide the membership. One faction wanted ACCI to become an activist organization. On the opposing side were those who preferred to maintain the organization's original purpose, which was to contribute to more effective fact finding and the dissemination of consumer information. In the end, the second group won out. At the 1964 conference, a resolution proposing that the council continue as a strictly professional group without taking a stand on political issues, was presented and adopted.

Another problem that surfaced from time to time was the question of the relationship between the council and business interests. Although as mentioned earlier, representatives of business have always been permitted membership in ACCI, they have not been allowed voting privileges or to hold office.

Some years ago, there was a controversy over whether business-sponsored educational materials should be given exhibit space at ACCI conferences. A decision was made that they should not be, and for a time, this policy was maintained. Whether or not it still is, I can't say. I would

be the last to deny business firms the right to prepare and distribute so-called consumer education materials, but we need to keep in mind that business firms are still motivated by the desire for profit. Providing consumer education materials to school systems and often free of charge is not an act of altruism. It is a way of instilling product recognition in impressionable young minds.

Granted, some business-sponsored materials are well done. Some aren't worth the paper they are printed on. Some contain gross errors of fact and some mislead, not always by what they say, but sometimes by what they fail to say. Some materials are outright propaganda. To exhibit any kind, means to allow all kinds. It is not possible to deny exhibit space to some firms while providing it for others.

Nearly 2/3 of Fortune's top 500 companies and 90% of all utilities and trade associations contribute free educational material of some sort or another. Half the teachers in this country use such materials. Perhaps the influence of the private sector on consumer education cannot be avoided, but it certainly doesn't need help from ACCI.

It is my belief that business firms should stick to doing what they do best and leave the responsibility of educating the nation's youth to those trained for and qualified to do the job. The problem of business interests and ACCI rose again when ACCI co-sponsored a teachers' workshop with J.C. Penney Co. in New York a few years ago. To my knowledge, this error in judgment has not been repeated.

During most of the years it has been in existence, ACCI has had a reputation for independence and integrity. It safeguarded this reputation by maintaining a cordial but arms-length relationship with business. To collaborate with business, whether to promote consumer materials or by sponsoring seminars or workshops and research projects, would raise doubts about ACCI's credibility, if not its purpose.

Most damaging of all, in my opinion, would be for ACCI to accept directly or indirectly, financial assistance from business for whatever reason. Money channeled through a foundation is still financial assistance from the business that created the foundation. I was disappointed to learn that ACCI had accepted a \$10,000 grant from the Shell Oil Corporation. To my way of thinking, that amounts to a foot in the door.

Immediately, the J.C. Penney Co. wanted to know why it was o.k. to accept the grant from Shell Oil, but not o.k. to co-sponsor a workshop with J.C. Penney. That's a very good question, and one that may have to be answered many times. ACCI must, at all costs, avoid getting on a slippery slope where one exception justifies another and another and another until there is nothing left of its credibility.

You have to understand, of course, that I am a grey beard. I'm old enough to remember that, when consumer education was in its infancy, business firms did their best to keep it out of the schools. Ironically, some of these same firms are supplying the instructional materials used for educating young consumers today. This, I suppose, is in keeping with the old maxim, "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em."

I'm also old enough to remember the attempted take-over by business of John Cassel's Consumer Education Institute at Stephens College back in 1940. Initially, their approach was one of affability. When that didn't work, they tried a different tactic and succeeded in destroying the institute. Unfortunately, history often does repeat itself.

NS: This theme of business and ACCI seems to be one that runs from the very beginning to the present.

RP: That's right.

NS: Let me begin by going back to that Stephens College episode. Somebody from business attended a conference and did not like what they heard?

RP: That's right.

NS: What happened to the Consumer Institute as a result?

RP: It folded up. The onset of World War II may also have had something to do with it. At least that was the reason given.

NS: Was it the Sloan Foundation who funded it? Was it GM? Do you remember?

KP: You mean, that funded the Institute?

NS: Yes.

RP: Well, GM certainly didn't fund it. I think the Sloan Foundation did have something to do with it.

NS: At that first meeting of ACCI, when you were thinking about business and this relationship with business groups, what did you try to do with the bylaws or guidelines to make sure this group remained pure?

RP: You mean, as far as the bylaws were concerned? I thought there was something in there, but now I am not so sure.

KP: Do you have a copy of the bylaws?

NS: I don't have a copy of the bylaws, but let's consider this question a little further in a few moments.

RP: All right.

NS: This problem of the right relationship between CCI and business is important. After all, in order to be an effective consumer group, you had to have some kind of relationship with consumer councils and chambers of commerce, and so forth. What did you feel that role should be?

RP: I believe this question has already been answered—representatives of business could belong to ACCI but not hold office. We have also had representation of business on our programs.

NS: Do you remember anyone trying to get on the program and you said, "No we don't want you on the program?"

RP: I don't recall any instances of that kind. We did try to limit the number of business people on the program to maintain a balance.

NS: How often did you meet with the other people on the board of directors?

RP: At least once a year—at the time of the annual meeting. There may have been meetings in between when it seemed necessary.

NS: Do you remember any heated discussions that you had?

RP: I guess not, do you?

RP: I have a feeling that this group was pretty much of one accord.

NS: You mentioned, when you were talking about defining the organization, that it was going to be a professional organization from the very beginning.

RP: That's right.

NS: Did you ever think about a national organization, not of professionals, but consumers from all over, a consumer organization that had a large mass membership?

RP: No.

NS: You just wanted CCI to be professionals?

RP: That's right.

NS: Did you think of another organization that might be, not professionals, but a grass roots consumer organization?

RP: No, we didn't think of that for ACCI. It seems to me that a grass roots organization would have to be somewhat activist. Ours was to be educational, which necessitated its being professional.

NS: From what I gather, the Consumer Federation of America, started in 1966 or 1967, was born out of the realization that there was no organization that lobbied on behalf of political activities and on behalf of legislation affecting consumers.

RP: That's right. And ACCI is one of the organizations that make up the membership of the Consumer Federation of America.

NS: Early on, there was a group. I think Helen Hall was one of the leaders of it, and Henry Harap was also one of the people in it. Their goal was to be a mass membership organization, and they did not succeed.

RP: Probably for the reason that there were too many different opinions concerning what their objectives should be.

NS: Were the pamphlets designed primarily for other professionals to read? Some of them struck me as designed for students and the masses.

RP: They were intended for both kinds of readers. Remember, they were educational.

NS: There seems to be some sort of tension of being an organization of professionals and an organization that is trying to attract leadership among everyday consumers and so forth. I wonder whether or not that ever became a matter of concern or identity, if ACCI ever faced an identity crisis if you will?

RP: To say that the early pamphlets might be read by non-professionals does not mean that their purpose was to attract everyday consumers to positions of leadership within ACCI. After all, who are consumer educators supposed to educate, if not everyday consumers? The pamphlets were intended to be educational.

NS: What I'm getting at, is that later on, when the *Journal of Consumer Affairs* was published, clearly the things the organization published were directed to other leaders in the consumer field and other consumer professionals. Early on, the pamphlets seemed not so much directed

toward leaders in the consumer field, but directed to people who had problems with inflation or with mortgages or problems with cars. They weren't academic.

RP: Those early pamphlets dealt with what were thought to be consumer problem areas at that time. The *Journal* has always been more of a research-oriented publication.

NS: Do you think the *Newsletter* fills a lot of the function that the old pamphlets did in terms of information for temporary consumer problems?

RP: Not really. My own feeling about the *Newsletter* is that it helps the consumer educator keep up to date—informed about what's going on and about materials that are available. I doubt that a lay consumer would derive much benefit from it.

NS: What do you feel the greatest accomplishments of ACCI have been?

RP: One obvious accomplishment is its growth. From a membership of 275 in 1955, the year of the first conference, we have now reached a membership of over 2,000. In one year alone, 1967-68, the membership grew 61%. Much of the credit belongs to Thomas Brooks, who was chairman of the Membership Committee at that time.

Another great accomplishment has been ACCI's publication program from the standpoint of both quality and quantity. From the original three newsletters a year, it now sends out nine.

The pamphlet series, which ended with No. 18, was succeeded by the *Journal of Consumer Affairs*. The *Journal's* purpose was to disseminate research findings which contribute to an understanding of consumer behavior.

One of the original objectives of ACCI was to contribute to more effective research. The same year publication of the *Journal* was approved, a committee was appointed for the purpose of stimulating consumer research and recognizing worthy research by the giving of an annual award. I consider establishment of the research award as another accomplishment.

ACCI's involvement with other organizations is also an accomplishment. In 1964, ACCI joined the International Organization of Consumers Unions. Thus, it became part of the international consumer movement. As already mentioned, ACCI is one of the organizations that make up the membership of the Consumer Federation of America.

Not only is the continued quality of ACCI's conference program an accomplishment, but it is also a big factor in the organization's growth and vitality.

In the final analysis, of course, organizations are people. To succeed, they must work together toward a common goal. One of ACCI's greatest accomplishments has to be the kind of people it has attracted. As an example, five of the twelve members appointed to the President's Consumer Advisory Council in 1962 were members of ACCI: Helen Canoyer, Persia Campbell, Richard Morse, Helen Nelson and Colston Warne. Another member, Robert McEwen, served as the first president of the Consumer Federation of America. Other persons equally distinguished have been mentioned previously. At the risk of seeming immodest, I confess to having served as a Consumer Advisor to the President's Price Commission in 1972.

I can only hope that years from now if someone is asked to cite ACCI's accomplishments, he or she can point with pride to its reputation for independence, integrity, and the avoidance of any affiliation with business interests.

NS: How important do you think ACCI was to the growth of the whole consumer movement?

RP: I think there is no doubt that it has resulted in improving both the quality and quantity of

consumer education. I think it has also given a measure of prestige to the consumer movement.

NS: Did you ever ask Ralph Nader to join ACCI?

RP: For all I know, he may be a member.

NS: I don't think he is.

RP: But he could be, if he wanted to. There is nothing to keep him out.

NS: The people who, in the '60s, had a big concern with auto safety and environmentalism didn't seem to join ACCI.

RP: Because they were activists rather than educators.

NS: I know this is an "if" question, but what would have given ACCI more influence and more power and more strength than it had? Can you think of anything that would have made ACCI a stronger organization?

RP: Stronger in what way?

NS: In membership growth, for example, or in promoting the departmental status of consumer education in the country.

RP: I think it has had a favorable impact on the status of consumer education in the country. The thing that may be overlooked here, is that a great many people belong to ACCI and receive its materials who don't attend the conferences. Its influence is more widely spread than is apparent by the conferences.

NS: Do you think the existence of ACCI has changed the way the commercial world feels about consumer education and the consumer movement?

RP: I think the business world is influenced right now because of the political viewpoint of the President of the United States. The cutback on educational programs has affected somewhat the extent to which consumer education is taught, and I would guess some businesses are happy about that.

KP: I could ask you a question, too. I know you were opposed to the Vocational Funds Act specifying that consumer education be taught in home economics departments.

RP: Yes.

NS: Was that federal?

RP: Yes. But occasionally another department got into the act. Some home economics departments were broad-minded enough to acknowledge that there was consumer education being taught in social studies and in business education and they got together. Where this was not the case, it was sometimes damaging to the other departments. On the other hand, it resulted in a lot of home economics teachers becoming more knowledgeable about things they didn't know before: insurance, investment, etc. There's always a gain whenever there is a loss.

NS: Can I switch topics and ask you to return to discuss your personal career as opposed to ACCI? First of all, for the record, when were you born?

RP: I was born in Catlin, Indiana, July 7, 1903.

NS: You grew up in a rural background?

RP: Oh yes, entirely rural until I got to Gary, Indiana.

NS: You went to school in Gary, Indiana?

RP: No, I taught in the high school there. I went to Indiana State University for my undergraduate degree, the University of Chicago for my master's degree, and the University of Cincinnati for my doctorate.

NS: What was your dissertation about?

RP: My dissertation at the University of Chicago was, "Business Knowledge and Concepts of Senior High School Students." My doctoral thesis was, "Curriculum Practices in Consumer Education."

NS: Were you influenced by Henry Harap in that?

RP: No.

NS: Were you the student of another consumer advocate?

RP: No, I was teaching consumer courses at that time.

NS: Your advisors were not particularly consumer-conscious?

RP: No.

KP: The people who answered his questionnaire were. One was Leland Gordon, I remember that. Probably Henry Harap was one.

NS: What year did you get your Ph.D.?

RP: 1944.

NS: You started teaching in '45 or '46?

RP: I started teaching after graduating from Indiana State in 1928. My first year out I taught business subjects in the high school at Sullivan, Indiana. Then I moved to Gary where I taught in the high school. After completing my master's degree at the University of Chicago, I accepted a position at Indiana State, my undergraduate alma mater. In 1936, I accepted a position to develop and head a Department of Business Education at the University of Cincinnati. While there, I worked on my doctorate.

NS: You were teaching standard business courses as well as consumer ed?

RP: That's right. I taught two consumer courses—"Consumer Education in the Schools" and "Materials and Methods in Consumer Education."

NS: How did your textbook come about? How did you decide to write a textbook?

RP: I was asked by McGraw Hill.

NS: Before then, what text would you use in consumer education classes—Henry Harap's?

RP: Are you talking about when I was at Cincinnati?

NS: Yes. I'm wondering what the field of consumer education was like before ACCI came along.

RP: To avoid confusion, let me clear up the matter of my text first. Actually, I co-authored three texts—two for high school and one an Introduction to Business text for college freshmen and sophomores. The only one that met with any degree of success was a business text intended primarily for ninth and tenth grades.

To answer your question concerning what consumer education was like before ACCI came along, it had to have been an expanding field else ACCI would not have developed as it did. In other words, the growth of consumer education gave rise to ACCI—not the other way around.

NS: What books did you ask your students to read?

RP: In my consumer education classes back in the late '30s and early '40s, students were not required to buy any specific text. Instead, several texts were used as references. Henry Harap's text was certainly among those students used. Hazel Kyrk's and Persia Campbell's probably were, too. Also Leland Gordon's when it became available. In addition, there were other kinds of materials published and I made an effort to keep an up-to-date bibliography of these for student use. I checked the professional journals regularly for articles on consumer education.

NS: Were you a Democrat?

RP: Yes!

NS: Back then?

RP: Yes, back then, too.

NS: Would you have considered yourself, when a student, a liberal on left or right of center, or center?

RP: I would say center, a little to the left.

NS: Did you ever help candidates with their consumer planks?

RP: Only Walter Mondale.

NS: That was very recently, that you helped Walter Mondale?

RP: The last time he ran for the Senate.

NS: When was that?

RP: I would guess it was in 1972.

NS: You mentioned that you also were part of the Consumer Advisory Council.

RP: No. I served as consumer consultant to the President's Price Commission during the Nixon administration when he was trying to stabilize prices.

NS: But you always kept the political side of your endeavors separate?

RP: Yes. When I went to Washington, I was questioned about certain aspects of the Price Stabilization Program and I simply gave them my opinion. Partisan politics were never discussed.

NS: Did you ever try to get CCI to take a position on a political issue or endorse resolutions of any sort?

RP: Heavens, no!

NS: Were you happy when ACCI started to ask political speakers to come to these programs, i.e., Phillip Hart spoke in 1963, and after that there were some?

RP: Oh, we had them back even farther than that. At our first meeting in Washington, sometime in the '50s, the program was almost entirely government people. John Blatnick, who was representative from Minnesota then, was the banquet speaker, I believe. At least he was one of the main speakers.

NS: You didn't have trouble with politicians speaking at your banquets?

RP: No. But we were careful to select those whose sympathies were with the consumer.

NS: But what about endorsements? You wouldn't endorse someone?

RP: Do you mean for office? Maybe personally, but not as an organization.

NS: There was a plank you mentioned in your earlier discussion about CCI taking a non-partisan apolitical position. Do you remember that big debate? Was there a lot of tension about that?

RP: I think what you are referring to is the debate concerning activism vs. non-activism. That was a tense situation. It would have changed the whole character and purpose of the organization.

NS: Do you remember if there was a specific issue that came up that led to this resolution, or was it just a decision that we ought to take a stand now?

RP: It used to come up every now and then. I don't believe it is any longer an issue.

NS: We have gone through most of the questions I wanted to ask about, but there are some follow-ups about some of the things you said that I was a little bit concerned about.

You mentioned the business relationship. The relationship with business groups was always of some concern. I'm wondering how you see the consumer interest, the sophistication of the people in ACCI as having developed about consumer problems. Do you think that consumer professionals, consumer leaders have become much more sophisticated today than you were back in 1953 about the nature of how consumers can be helped and consumer reform?

RP: That's a pretty big question. I'm sure there are some today who are much more sophisticated than my contemporaries were. As for being more knowledgeable about products, I have my doubts. I don't know what you mean by consumer reform.

KP: I remember some years ago you had a letter from Stewart Lee in which he wanted to know if business interests had ever tried to intrude on what you were teaching or to give you a bad time.

RP: I think he had run into this problem. I know Leland Gordon did, back in the early years. I had only one or two small incidents since coming to Minnesota and I believe I shared these with Stewart. One had to do with my undergraduate course in the Arts College and it was a minor thing.

In those days, dairies were still making home deliveries daily. I had suggested to the students who lived at home that they ask for every other day delivery and a reduction in price—something like that.

I got a call from one of the local dairies wanting to know what I was up to and letting me know that they did not like it. The caller refused to identify himself although he did tell me which dairy he was with. I told him that I would not discuss the matter as long as I did not know with whom I was talking, and that ended our conversation. It seems to me that it was not very long after, that every other day milk delivery became common practice. Today, of course, home milk delivery is pretty rare.

There was another small incident when I discovered that, at one of the supermarket chains, two one-pound packages of their own brand of coffee were cheaper than a two-pound package. I passed this information along and in no time received a call from one of the supermarket executives.

NS: Where did you pass it along to?

RP: I don't know. It was probably something I mentioned in class to illustrate that the small size is not always more expensive than the large economical size. I think companies have become more sophisticated and they wouldn't get uptight about something like that now as they did 25 years ago.

NS: One thing that happened was that, instead of being called the Council on Consumer Information, it became known as the American Council on Consumer Interests. Were you in favor of that image?

RP: It didn't make any difference to me.

NS: One thing that interested me about the name change was the word, "Information" was dropped and the word "Interests" replaced it. I wonder, in line with my question about the sophistication of people in ACCI, if it came to be widely felt that really more than information alone was needed to advance the cause of consumers. Do you remember at all?

RP: No, I don't remember discussions leading up to the name change. I was not involved in the decision. But I think adding the word "American" made it more national in scope.

NS: Related to that, is the question about the *Journal*. Would you remember being in favor of the *Journal's* creation, or was that later?

RP: I don't recall being consulted, but I was certainly in favor of it.

NS: I think that covers those topics I wanted to ask you about.

KP: There is a question here. "Why was the vote taken away from business-affiliated members?" I didn't know they ever had it. Did they ever have the vote?

NS: There was no distinction between business and non-business members until a certain point.

KP: That's why I don't think that was in the bylaws.

NS: I don't believe it was in the bylaws. I have heard from others that there was a question that did come up; that there were issues of this sort discussed and there was concern about how to avoid being influenced unduly by commercial interests, so I am interested in knowing what kinds of measures you had used. Maybe we could learn more about that so I could find out.

RP: I was wondering about your asking a little while ago about the need for contact with chambers of commerce and so on. Why did you feel that was a necessary thing for ACCI?

NS: I had gathered, i.e., there were certain consumer councils in St. Louis, Marian Weir, which in fact, did do both. In other words, CCI contained people within CCI who, in fact, were members of consumer groups that were accepting money from commercial interests.

RP: But those other groups were activist groups, and if they accepted money, that was their doing, not ACCI's.

NS: Can you tell me the difference between an activist and an educator?

RP: I think the activist is more politically oriented, that he tends to take a stand on political issues and he will take an adversary role where he feels that's to the advantage of the consumer. An educator may personally have views and fight for or against legislation affecting consumers, but keeps his activist role outside the classroom.

In other words, one could be an activist and still be an educator as long as he/she teaches students *how* to think rather than *what* to think. Activists who impose their own personal views on those they teach are not educating them. They are indoctrinating them. Have I made myself clear?

NS: Yes. I think the line becomes fuzzy. If you advocate the creation of the department of consumer affairs, are you an activist, or are you an educator? Or, if you want more funds for consumer education, does that in itself become activism?

RP: I think most of the people involved in ACCI have taken stands on these things. They have written to their senators and congressmen. They have sent telegrams and done all those things that they believe in, but not on behalf of ACCI. You see the difference? You don't involve the organization because then you would be assuming that everyone believes the same way you do and there could be some people in the organization who don't. If you are going to be a politically activist group, you are going to divide your membership because everybody isn't going to think the same way.

KP: There is a little activism in everybody connected with ACCI, I'm sure. I know Stewart Lee has activist tendencies. Robert McEwen has lots of activist tendencies and Richard Morse—all of them—but I don't believe they trade on their ACCI connection to score points.

RP: Well said.

NS: Well, thank you very much.

RP: Thank you very much.

KP: I just hope we've been able to give you what you wanted. I am sorry I had to intrude.

RP: That's o.k.