Notes and Comments

Edited by Joseph Jeppson

A CONVERSATION WITH ARTHUR V. WATKINS

Arthur V. Watkins, recently retired as Chief Commissioner of the Indian Claims Commission, served two terms as Republican Senator from Utah, 1947 through 1958. His record in that body, as well as in other areas, has prompted friends of the Senator, headed by his classmate at Columbia University Law School, Judge Harold R. Medina of New York, and the Hinckley Institute of the University of Utah, to establish the Arthur V. Watkins Integrity Award, presented to members of Congress making outstanding contributions to public service. The first award recently went to Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. Here DIALOGUE *presents an interview granted in April, 1968, to Mary Bradford, Garth Magnum and Carlos Whiting of the Washington, D.C., L.D.S. community.*

DIALOGUE: *Senator Watkins, you are — if I may say so — a country lawyer who made good. Because of your record in the State of Utah, principally in water development, you were propelled into the United States Senate. There, you became a confidante of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Among other things, having been opposed to the Korean War, you advised President Eisenhower about the threatening Vietnam situation. In addition, you served as Chairman of the Senate Select Committee that recommended the censure of Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin. We think you have a good many things to say of interest to the readers of* DIALOGUE.

WATKINS: Well, I am now in my 82nd year. I have had my hand in a few things. It has now been fourteen years since Joe McCarthy was condemned by the Senate — yes, that is the word, "condemned." The story of the rise and fall of McCarthy and his "ism" is still of interest to millions of Americans. I am writing a book about it. I think that communism as a political issue was rather effectively "defused" in this country.

DIALOGUE: *That is something we should explore. Before we get into McCarthyism, however, could we talk a bit about your background and your election? You have deep roots in Mormonism, do you not?*

WATKINS: Yes, on both sides of my family — the Watkins and the Gerbers. They were Mormon pioneers. I suppose you would like me to give my testimony?

DIALOGUE: *If you would like to.*

WATKINS: I try to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ the determining factor in my life, the touchstone of my activities. I am human and I have weaknesses. When I campaigned for the Senate, I did so on a platform which included the spirit of Christianity as my guide. The Mormon Church, my relationship with General Authorities, with President McKay and others, mean as much to me as my family or any other thing on this earth.

DIALOGUE: *Some think of you as a conservative, and some have called you a socialist. What do you say about yourself?*

WATKINS: Those conflicting views come from my work in water development, without which Utah would never have become a prosperous and modern state. Some Utahns didn't want to see their state expand; they were content with things as they were. But, back in the 1930's some of us could see that Utah could not be secure without the full development of its water resources. For instance, without the Provo River Project, which I helped to organize and to "sell" to the people, we wouldn't have had a sufficient water supply in Central Utah for development of physical and human resources. Neither would we have had the Geneva Steel Plant with the jobs and tax money it brought.

DIALOGUE: *Your principal fame in water development was your accomplishment in leading the fight for the Colorado River Storage Project, and the support you obtained for that reclamation project from President Eisenhower. It has been said that this support from the President was your payoff for presiding over the censure of McCarthy.*

WATKINS: That is an outrageous statement, which I recognize is not yours. It has been thrown at me by people who could not have had any understanding either of Eisenhower or of me, or respect for us or for the Senate of the United States. Ike met with me, invited me to meet with him, when he was in Denver before he was ever elected, and we discussed the needs of Utah. I told him about the Colorado River Storage Project, about water resource development in general. The Federal reclamation program is not a WPA project; it is no gift from the government. The beneficiaries of the project — those who use the water and the power — have to sign bona fide repayment contracts with the government — to pay back within fifty years most of the costs of the project. It is not socialism. General Eisenhower, as a candidate, told me that he would do all he could to provide the Colorado River upper states with the use of their shares of the Colorado River water. After the censure of McCarthy, the President called me to congratulate me on the way I handled the matter, and quite coincidentally — because a State of the Union message was in preparation — I asked him to include a statement in support

of the Colorado River project, and he did. This is how the story got around. But I can say for President Eisenhower that he stood aloof from the McCarthy matter. He said it was entirely Senate business.

DIALOGUE: *Shall we talk about McCarthy now? What kind of a person was Joe McCarthy?*

WATKINS: Well, that is a pretty difficult question to answer. At first, he was a very jovial person.

DIALOGUE: *Let me put it another way. What were the things — after you had studied the matter — that disturbed you about McCarthy?*

WATKINS: In the Senate we all have our assignments and responsibilities and ordinarily are not too much concerned with what our colleagues are doing. At the time I was actively at work on what is generally called the McCarran Internal Security Committee, a subcommittee of the Senate created to expose communist infiltration into the Federal Government. It was a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee. So, you see I was an anti-communist before McCarthy. From 1951, when the McCarran Committee was established, I devoted a great deal of energy to investigating communists. Communism, or anti-communism, was not really the issue as far as the censure of McCarthy was concerned. McCarthy had been severely criticized by some of his colleagues for his methods, and he responded with what the Senate finally called "abuse and contempt" for his fellow Senators and one of its Committees, and for the procedures and integrity of the Senate. That is why he was condemned. It was not because of his fight against communism.

DIALOGUE: *You are writing a book about this censure episode?*

WATKINS: Millions of Americans, and millions of foreigners too, for that matter, were concerned about McCarthyism. Some were for him and some against. I believe this interest is still alive. During and after the censure proceedings I received thousands upon thousands of letters, many of them outside the bounds of decent and courteous correspondence. Deep emotions were stirred. I will explore this to some extent. However, the book will be primarily a factual exposition. Apart from matters of Senate procedure and tradition, and respect for fellow senators, the great issue in McCarthyism was the way he ran wild. The people brought before him were not given a chance to defend themselves. They were pawns in his efforts to obtain publicity.

DIALOGUE: *So there were constitutional and judicial issues in the censure of McCarthy?*

WATKINS: Yes, fairness to people. McCarthy called a man who might claim the privilege granted by the Constitution not to testify against himself, a "Fifth Amendment Communist." He condemned people as communists perhaps without submitting a shred of evidence and, more significantly, without charging them with any overt act or crime. It was just that they took the Fifth Amendment. The courts today would throw out a case where a prosecutor took that line.

DIALOGUE: *What other issues were there in McCarthyism? What about politics?*

WATKINS: Well, we all know today that McCarthyism took up anti-communism as a political issue. He rode the wave of hysteria that followed the discovery that the Soviet Union had the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb, and this a fruit of espionage (or so it seemed likely at the time). Anti-communism offered the easy answer to all the Nation's troubles. There were strong anti-Semitic overtones to anti-communism. There was the basic appeal to prejudice of all kinds.

DIALOGUE: *You say anti-communism has been defused as a political issue? How is that?*

WATKINS: Of course, there are still people who still frighten us with talk of a Communist conspiracy, and there *is* such a conspiracy, but as part of foreign imperialism. There are even communists in some internal movements, perhaps as instigators of some of the riots, and that sort of thing. But today our people are sophisticated and can consider facts and issues, and can debate them intelligently, can avoid hysterical and emotional appeals, the kind that characterized McCarthyism when people "informed" on their friends and coworkers and neighbors — when fear motivated political reactions.

DIALOGUE: *But you lost your seat in the Senate in 1958, partly because there was still a great deal of emotion over the McCarthy matter. Isn't that right?*

WATKINS: Yes, there were three candidates for Senator in that election. J. Bracken Lee as an independent pulled enough of what you might call the conservative vote to make me lose by 11,000 votes, out of 400,000. He had sent a telegram to the mass meeting of McCarthy supporters in New York saying that McCarthy deserved a medal rather than censure. This sort of thing can happen in Utah. There seems to be an element that can be swung for purely personal purposes, and I need not say what that element is.

Another factor in my defeat was the intervention of the man who was then a Senator and the Majority leader of the Senate, Lyndon B. Johnson. Incidentally, he had personally assured me that I needn't worry about my chances because I had stayed too long in Washington to help maintain a Quorum so the business of the Senate could be taken care of. Senator Johnson, at the last minute, appeared in Utah to campaign for the opposition — Frank E. Moss. But that is a long story, and I will have to save it for another time.

DIALOGUE: *What about the Church? Did church members support you on the McCarthy matter?*

WATKINS: Some did, some didn't. There was the same thing in the Catholic Church (remember that McCarthy was a Catholic). Some Catholics supported me and some didn't. A number of prominent men in our Church wrote me during the censure proceedings and complimented me on what they called the fair and orderly way I was handling the investigation. Of more than

passing significance, however, is the fact that President David O. McKay wrote me immediately after the censure and said some very fine things. Recently I saw President McKay and told him I was writing a book on the McCarthy censure. I asked him if I could have permission to use his letter. He very graciously gave that permission.

I should add that many Catholics in Utah supported me through the Catholic-owned *Salt Lake Tribune*. Incidentally, *all* Utah dailies supported me in the McCarthy affair.

DIALOGUE: *Senator, after your defeat for re-election to the Senate you were named to the Indian Claims Commission. One of your continuing interests — since you lived in the center of the Indian country, so to speak — has been the welfare of the American Indians. What do you have to tell about them?*

WATKINS: I lived my early life on the west side of the Ute reservation in Midway, Wasatch County, Utah. Later my family moved to Vernal, Utah, on the east border of the reservation. Partly for this reason I have always been interested in Indians. Because of this interest I have had some opportunities to be helpful. For example, there was the military hospital complex at Brigham City, Utah (built during World War II) which was abandoned when the war ended. I introduced a bill to transfer this facility to the Indian Bureau, and got appropriations approved for an Indian school for the Navajos.

The Indian children in the early days had at first resisted the idea of going to school. We were warned that we would meet this same resistance at the new school in Brigham City. But when it opened, so many parents brought their children that hundreds could not be accommodated. "Well," said the parents, "we thought there might be some who wouldn't want to go, so there would be room for one or two of ours." The school was well-received and helpful. The whole thing has worked out so well that it is my pride and joy. I am glad I had a leading part in making it what it is today.

DIALOGUE: *With your experience in the Indian Claims Commission and with all the funds that are being held in trust for the Indians by the government, what would you recommend as an Indian policy for the United States?*

WATKINS: Education is now a much more practical thing for the Indians than it once was. There was a time when you could hardly get an Indian youngster to school; now most of them want to go. I believe that much of the money awarded to the Indians by the Indian Claims Commission should go for schools, or to individuals for scholarships so that they will be better prepared to earn a living and to participate in American life.

DIALOGUE: *You feel, then, that with education the problems of poverty that exist among Indians will take care of themselves? As will the question of whether Indians should remain charges of the government or be pushed off into their own reservations?*

WATKINS: Of course there are other things. There are many Indians, many scattered through the state of California, who do not have tribal organizations

which could administer money in their interest. For those I believe we will just have to give them their money, distribute it pro rata, and let them spend it as they want to. Bills will have to be introduced and enacted for this purpose. In addition the Indians have land — some of it good land — but they often lease it to whites rather than farm it themselves. Naturally, I would like to see more Indians farming their own land. Other Indian lands could be developed for their resources and for public recreation if the Indians' money could be used for these purposes. I would like to see the Indians educated and organized to accomplish this and given the funds which the Government holds in trust for them.

DIALOGUE: *We would now like your opinion on the current war situation. As I recall it, you were one of two Senators who opposed our intervention in the Korean War. Would you tell us why you did that and how you would apply your views to the Vietnam situation?*

WATKINS: I could talk all day on this one. The Constitution says, in effect, that only Congress can initiate wars, except when we are under attack from an enemy nation. Up until perhaps fifty years ago no one ever questioned this. Beginning with Franklin Roosevelt there has been a definite break in this interpretation of war-making powers. Roosevelt practically had us in war with Germany, marking off one-third of the Atlantic Ocean and patrolling it, before we ever had a declaration of war. He also sent forces to Iceland.

DIALOGUE: *And in Korea?*

WATKINS: We had the situation where the United States had forces in Korea when World War II ended. Our experts didn't see what was coming, so these troops were mustered out of service. Having helped to create North and South Korea, we failed to see the possibility of the communists from North Korea — aided by the Chinese communists — taking over South Korea. Our Secretary of State gave the impression that Korea was out of our zone of vital interest, and the next thing we knew — after we had sent home our forces — the North Koreans were coming down the peninsula. In any event, President Truman didn't wait. He simply ordered our troops into the war — between the forces of the two nations, without any authority whatsoever from the Congress. Our untrained occupation troops in Japan were thrown into the war to stop the invasion.

DIALOGUE: *Surely there are situations where there isn't time to consult the Congress?*

WATKINS: Yes, when our forces are attacked, when our country is invaded, the President must respond immediately. But, he should then take the matter to the Congress as quickly as possible.

DIALOGUE: *What about Vietnam and the Tonkin Incident?*

WATKINS: We were already deeply involved in Vietnam on an increasing scale by President Kennedy — and without consent of Congress. As to the

Tonkin Incident, there is a great deal of doubt as to what really happened. In any event, I do not believe that the so-called Tonkin Resolution of Congress contemplated our carrying on a full-scale war. The resolution was adapted to provide for repulsion of specific attacks against our naval forces. It wasn't a declaration of war, yet the President acts as if it were. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee — Republicans and Democrats alike — have issued a report detailing what the Committee had in mind.

DIALOGUE: *Do you think that Senator Fulbright and his committee are playing a valuable role?*

WATKINS: Yes, they are. I hope their report[1] can get to the public and the public can have an opportunity to consider the issues. What we are doing in Vietnam threatens to bring down the whole world communist horde on our backs. We are in this alone, for all practical purposes. The major non-communist nations — France, Great Britain, and the rest of them — all stayed out.

DIALOGUE: *What was your role on Vietnam under Eisenhower?*

WATKINS: I had heard, from various sources, that President Eisenhower was thinking about intervention in French Indo-China. He did say publicly: "There is going to be no involvement of America in war unless it is the result of the Constitutional process." I wrote him a letter complimenting him on this, and telling him of my own position on the Korean incident. It's in the hearings of the Fulbright Committee.[2] Here, let me read how I wound up the letter: ". . . Congress, except in direct attack upon the United States must give the President the authority before war can be waged in the defense of our allies or other nations." Sherman Adams, the President's assistant, called me in to talk about the letter, saying that the President wanted my views. A few days later, Ike himself sent for me. We talked further, and you know, we stayed out of Indo-China. Later he followed my suggestion almost exactly when he came to the Formosa situation and requested Congress to authorize him to defend Formosa.

DIALOGUE: *The Administration claims that had it not intervened in Vietnam as it did that South Vietnam would have fallen to the communists, as would Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, all the dominoes. Have we really been saving the whole of Southeast Asia?*

WATKINS: I don't think all that would happen. It's human nature: all the communists would get together for awhile, but they are human like the rest of us. They couldn't stay united very long, especially without outside opposition to give direction to that unity. All these countries have resisted China for centuries; they have always been at each other's throats. Massive move-

---

[1]"National Commitments," Report N. 797, to accompany S. Res. 187 90th Congress, First Session, dated November 20, 1967. Available from Sen. J. William Fulbright, Chairman Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., p. 260.

[2]"U.S. Commitments to Foreign Powers," Hearings on S. Res. 151, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 90th Congress, First Session, United States Senate, Washington, D.C.

ments have a tendency to break up. We haven't saved anybody out there yet. The question is, can we save ourselves and our armies right now.

DIALOGUE: *If you had the power, if you were President, or were back in the Senate, what would you do?*

WATKINS: I would try to get us out of Asia as honorably and as quickly as possible. While we are in there, I believe that we have to back up our men with appropriations and with material, but our responsibility now is to get them out with as much honor and with as many lives as possible. We have a responsibility to all those people on both sides who are in there fighting. If the majority want peace, they should have it.

DIALOGUE: *What lessons can we learn from Vietnam? What lesson is there in it for Mormons?*

WATKINS: As Mormons, we should always be honorable. We know what it is like to be oppressed. We should respect the rights of others and should seek peaceful solutions. President David O. McKay is a man of peace. I have talked with him. He would agree, I am sure, that we must support and adhere to the Constitution, that one man, the President of the United States, should not have the power to put us into war and to wreak untold suffering upon millions of people. Ours is a Government of laws, not of men. Finally, we should realize that one nation cannot police the whole world.

I thought Governor Romney, in his aborted primary campaign, would take up this issue. I attempted to counsel with him, told him that this was the great issue of our time, that only Congress could initiate war unless we were under attack. As Senator Eugene McCarthy demonstrated, this issue could earn the support of many. I really couldn't get through to Governor Romney. There were too many advisors around him, and everything got watered down. He did make some statements on this — not very clear-cut — out in Oregon in his last speech before his withdrawal. But the press didn't play it up, and he hadn't made the issue very clear.

The people never did discover the real George Romney. He would have made a great President.

DIALOGUE: *There is a common element in everything you have said today. You always seem to return to the subject of the Constitution.*

WATKINS: It is the foundation of our Nation, the protector of all our liberties, and the "Rock of our Salvation." We must maintain the balance of powers provided there. Our great danger at the moment is the tremendous power of the President, as it is being used, to initiate war when we are not under attack. The President is not a king, nor is he Caesar. The people must insist on the right, through their Senators and Representatives, to balance the power of the Executive and to protect the Constitution.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Senator Watkins' book will be published in June 1969 by Prentice-Hall.